

Degree awarding powers (DAPs) assessment report for Warwickshire College

**Assessment for variation of
degree awarding powers**

Provider legal name: Warwickshire College

Provider trading name: Warwickshire College Group (WCG)

UKPRN: 10007859

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive summary | 3 |
| Introduction and background | 7 |
| Assessment process | 9 |
| Information gathering | 9 |
| Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance | 10 |
| Criterion A1: Academic governance | 10 |
| Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance | 21 |
| Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks | 21 |
| Criterion B2: Academic standards | 26 |
| Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience | 38 |
| Assessment of DAPs criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff | 63 |
| Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff | 63 |
| Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students | 75 |
| Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement | 75 |
| Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance | 86 |
| Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance | 86 |
| Assessment of overarching criterion for the authorisation of DAPs | 91 |
| Advice to the OfS | 91 |
| Reasoning | 91 |
| Conclusions | 91 |
| Annex A: Abbreviations | 92 |

Executive summary

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| Type of assessment: | Quality and standards assessment for variation of degree awarding powers |
| For: | Warwickshire College |

1. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for a variation of degree awarding powers (DAPs) for Warwickshire College. The college is seeking a variation of its Bachelors' DAPs authorisation from time-limited to indefinite.
2. To carry out the assessment, the Office for Students (OfS) appointed an assessment team, which included three academic experts and one member of OfS staff. The assessment was a desk-based assessment and did not include a visit to the provider. This report contains the advice and judgement of the team following its assessment.
3. The team concluded that the college met all criteria for a variation of its Bachelors' DAPs authorisation from definite to indefinite. This report does not, however, represent any decision of the OfS to authorise these powers.

Table 1: summary of findings against the DAPs criteria

| Underpinning DAPs criteria | Summary |
|--|---------|
| Criterion A: Academic governance | Met |
| Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks | Met |
| Criterion B2: Academic standards | Met |
| Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience | Met |
| Criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff | Met |
| Criterion D: Environment for supporting students | Met |
| Criterion E: Evaluation of performance | Met |
| Overarching Full DAPs criterion | Summary |
| The provider is a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective quality systems | Met |

Variation of degree awarding powers

The OfS may authorise a registered higher education provider to grant taught awards or research awards, or both, under section 42 of HERA.

A provider that already holds degree awarding powers may apply to the OfS to amend its powers through a variation to this authorisation. The OfS can decide to vary powers irrespective of how they were initially awarded (for example, by the OfS or the Privy Council).

Types of variation

There are a number of ways in which powers may be amended.

1. From New DAPs to Full DAPS (assessed via a New DAPs End Assessment)

Providers that have been granted New DAPs are assessed for suitability for Full DAPs after three years.

2. From Full DAPs to indefinite DAPS

Full DAPs are initially granted on a time-limited basis. A provider that has held Full DAPs for three years or more is normally eligible to apply to have 'indefinite' DAPs, with no time limit.

3. To extend the scope of degree awarding powers

Degree awarding powers may be granted for a particular level of award, for example foundation degrees, or in specific subjects. In these cases, a provider that holds Full DAPs on a time-limited or indefinite basis can apply to extend its powers, for example to other taught awards or additional subjects.

Assessment and decision-making process

Before deciding whether to vary a provider's powers, the OfS will assess the provider. The assessment is designed to gather evidence to inform a judgement about whether the provider continues to meet the criteria for awarding degrees and has the ability to:

- provide and maintain higher education of an appropriate quality
- apply and maintain the application of appropriate standards to that higher education.

The full requirements of the criteria are detailed in Annex C of the OfS regulatory framework.¹

OfS officers first undertake an eligibility and suitability assessment of the provider. This initial assessment determines the scope and level of detail of the variation assessment, and an

¹ See [Annex C – Guidance on the criteria for the authorisation for DAPs - Office for Students](#).

initial position on whether the variation assessment should be desk-based or include a visit to the provider.

Assessments for degree awarding powers are conducted by teams which include academic experts that the OfS has appointed. The outcome of the assessment is typically a report, produced by the assessment team, summarising its findings.

The report is then considered by the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC). The QAC is responsible for providing advice to the OfS under section 46 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) on the quality of and standards applied to the higher education being delivered by providers for which the OfS is considering granting, varying, or (in certain circumstances) revoking authorisation for DAPs.²

After considering the assessment report, the QAC provides advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards.

In making its decision about whether to vary a provider's powers, the OfS will have regard to any assessment report and the QAC's advice. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment of the provider and will have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought. It will also take into account other relevant considerations, such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.³

Further information

We have published further information about varying degree awarding powers in Regulatory advice 17.⁴

4. Warwickshire College (the college) is a further education corporation created by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The college provides a range of undergraduate courses, including in fields such as animal and canine studies, business and management, computing, counselling, early years practice, engineering, equine studies, games art, graphic design, horticulture, film and media, performing arts and veterinary nursing and physiotherapy.
5. The college was awarded time-limited Bachelors' DAPs by the OfS on 1 September 2021 for a period of three years and three months. The time-limited Bachelors' DAPs order is due to expire on 31 December 2024.
6. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and Regulatory advice 17, the college is eligible to be considered for indefinite Bachelors' DAPs because it has held time-limited DAPs for a period of three years.⁵
7. The OfS appointed an external assessment team on 26 January 2024 to undertake a desk-based DAPs variation assessment. The OfS asked the assessment team to give its advice

² See [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 46](#).

³ See [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 2](#).

⁴ See [Regulatory advice 17: Variation and revocation of degree awarding powers](#).

⁵ See [Regulatory advice 17: Variation and revocation of degree awarding powers](#).

about the quality of and standards applied to higher education courses at the college and whether the college continues to meet the DAPs criteria.

8. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the college in support of its application to vary its DAPs authorisation.
9. This report will be considered by the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC). The QAC will formulate its advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards at Warwickshire College, having considered this report.
10. The OfS will have regard to this assessment report and the QAC's advice when making a decision about whether to vary the university's DAPs authorisation on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment for the university and will have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought. It will also take into account other relevant considerations, such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.⁶

⁶ See Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 2.

Introduction and background

11. Warwickshire College ('the college') was established as a further education corporation in 1992 under the name of 'Mid-Warwickshire College, Royal Leamington Spa' by virtue of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The college became known as Warwickshire College in 2007 following a series of mergers with other local colleges since the mid-1990s. The college adopted its trading name of Warwickshire College Group (or WCG) in 2014, and currently comprises six colleges operating across Warwickshire and Worcestershire.
12. The college offers a range of undergraduate higher education qualifications, whether awarded through its own DAPs or in partnership with others, including in the following broad areas:
 - animal and canine studies
 - business and management
 - computing
 - counselling
 - early years practice
 - engineering
 - equine studies
 - games art
 - graphic design
 - horticulture
 - film and media
 - performing arts
 - veterinary nursing and physiotherapy.
13. Overall, based on the latest available data in the OfS's 'Size and shape of provision data dashboard', the college had a higher education student population in 2022-23 of around 1,000 students.⁷ Of these, around half were studying full-time, a third were doing an apprenticeship, and the remainder were studying part-time. Of those students on full-time higher education programmes, most were on first degree programmes (55 per cent) or studying at Level 5 (38 per cent).
14. According to information submitted by the college, the college currently employs 135 full-time academic staff, 265 part-time academic staff and 884 professional staff across its further and higher education provision.

⁷ Available at [Size and shape of provision data dashboard: Data dashboard - Office for Students](#).

15. In September 2023, the college requested to be considered for indefinite powers to grant awards up to and including bachelors' degrees (Bachelors' DAPs) ahead of it having held time-limited Bachelors' DAPs for three years.
16. In accordance with the OfS regulatory framework⁸ and Regulatory advice 17⁹, the OfS undertook an initial eligibility and suitability assessment of the college. The OfS decided that a desk-based DAPs assessment should be undertaken to gather and test evidence. This is to inform a judgement about whether the college's powers have been exercised securely during the preceding three years, and whether the college continues to meet the DAPs criteria and has the ability to:
 - provide, and maintain the provision of, higher education of an appropriate quality; and
 - apply, and maintain the application of, appropriate standards to that higher education.
17. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 26 January 2024 which consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff in the following roles:
 - Sarah Mullins – committee chair and lead assessor
 - Dr Pauline Phelan – deputy committee chair and assessor
 - Michael Cottam – deputy committee chair and assessor
 - Katherine Davis – committee member and assessment coordinator (up to 18 July 2024)
 - Lee Shotton – committee member and assessment coordinator (from 18 July 2024).
18. The OfS asked the assessment team to give its advice and judgements about the quality of and standards applied to higher education courses at the college and whether the college continues to meet the DAPs criteria.
19. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by the college in support of its application to vary its DAPs authorisation.

⁸ See [The regulatory framework for higher education in England - Office for Students.](#)

⁹ See [Regulatory advice 17: Variation and revocation of degree awarding powers.](#)

Assessment process

Information gathering

20. In accordance with the process outlined in Annex D of Regulatory advice 17, the college submitted a self-assessment document on 5 April 2024. The document set out how the college considers it meets the DAPs criteria for the Bachelors' DAPs authorisation it already holds.
21. To support the statements made in the self-assessment document, the college submitted a range of documentary evidence including course documentation, information related to academic policies and processes and governance information.
22. Following its review of the college's initial evidence submission, the assessment team requested further information from the college. The college submitted a response to this request on 11 June 2024. The assessment team subsequently sought further information from the college, which was provided on 26 July 2024 and 13 September 2024.
23. The assessment team undertook its desk-based assessment of the college's evidence submission between 5 April 2024 and 24 October 2024.

Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance

Criterion A1: Academic governance

Advice to the OfS

24. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion A1: Academic governance because it meets sub-criteria A1.1, A1.2, and A1.3.
25. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows in summary that the college has sound academic governance and management structures that demonstrate clear and appropriate lines of accountability. The college engages students as partners in the academic governance and management of academic standards and quality. The college's governance structure has appropriate oversight to ensure that if it decides to work with other organisations, these arrangements will be led by a strategic approach and the management of such opportunities is robust and effective.
26. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion A1.1

A1.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.

Advice to the OfS

27. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion A1.1 because it has effective academic governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.
28. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for A1.1.

Reasoning

29. To inform its consideration of the college's academic governance arrangements, the assessment team reviewed evidence including the college's instrument and articles of government, governance model and committee structure, and organisational chart.
30. In summary, the college's governing body is the Corporation Board, known within the college as the Board of Governors, with responsibility for the overall strategic direction and higher education mission of the college, including corporate and academic affairs, and the maintenance of quality and standards. The Board of Governors is comprised of independent external members, staff and student representatives (from both further and higher education levels) and the Group Chief Executive Officer and Principal.

31. The Board of Governors has authorised the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQA) to monitor and review the educational character and the quality of education provided by the college. This includes reviewing targets, overseeing the achievement of success rates, and working with the senior leadership team to maintain and improve high performance and challenge underperformance. ASQA reports to the Board of Governors and also advises it on progress made towards the aims and outcomes of curriculum strategies, responding to the college's strategic priorities.
32. Underneath and reporting into ASQA is the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), chaired by the Group Principal. HEAB is the senior higher education academic authority and monitors the academic experience provided for higher education students, and the standards of awards and credits. HEAB is supported in its academic activities by four higher education subcommittees sitting under and reporting into it:
 1. The Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee (HEQAS), which monitors and reviews the college's higher education provision.
 2. The Higher Education Student Experience Committee (HESEC), which considers the quality of the student experience.
 3. The Higher Education Teaching, Research and Enterprise Committee (HETREC), which considers matters relating to teaching, learning, scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness.
 4. The Higher Education Access and Participation Committee (HEAPC), which is aimed at improving equality of opportunity for students.
33. As part of its consideration of the effectiveness of academic governance and to determine whether the college's higher education mission, strategic direction and associated policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, the assessment team considered the college's:
 - 'Corporate plan 2023-2028'
 - 2023-24 accountability statement and key success indicators
 - 'Higher education strategy 2024-2028'
 - reporting against the aforementioned success indicators.
34. The college's corporate plan sets out the college's mission statement of 'Raising aspiration and realising potential through excellence in learning and development', alongside the college's values and six corporate priorities of student, economic, financial, people, quality and social success. The plan then sets out the college's strategic priorities, aims and objectives that align with these corporate priorities, which are also included in the college's accountability statement and key success indicators. The assessment team found the college's higher education strategy is built around the same corporate priorities, showing cohesion across its publications, and outlines aims that are contextualised to higher education and consistent with the college's mission and priorities. The college's key success indicators are college-wide and, while the primary success indicators relate to further education for both

student and quality success, these indicators do include some elements that are specific to higher education, such as the development of higher technical qualifications in relation to the corporate priority of economic success. Reporting against the key success indicators is undertaken using the 'ASQA key success indicators report template'. The completed example provided to the assessment team showed robust reporting, including in relation to higher education. For example, there is evidence of reporting against retention, continuation and completion, and it includes an update on the development of higher technical qualifications. Reporting against higher education-specific data was also apparent to the assessment team in the college's June 2024 report to ASQA on higher education quality monitoring.

35. Reporting to ASQA includes reference to the corporate priorities, ensuring these are a key element of academic governance, and there is evidence of the college sharing its higher education strategy through its governance structure. For example, the strategy was shared at ASQA in February 2024 as part of its consideration of the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report'. Supporting policies are available to staff and students on the college's intranet pages, which are maintained by its Higher Education Quality Team. The college's corporate priorities were discussed at its 2024 higher education staff conference, as noted in the agenda. The college also informed the assessment team that staff are made aware when new policies are available via an intranet notification, as well as through communication by email or in relevant committee meetings. This was evidenced to the team through examples of email communication and committee meeting minutes recording policies being shared through HEAB. Some policies are also available on the college's website.
36. This evidence supports the assessment team's view that the mission, strategic direction and associated policies of the college are coherent, published and accessible to staff and students.
37. To test if the college's higher education mission, strategic direction and associated policies are understood and consistently applied in practice and therefore demonstrate sound academic governance, the assessment team reviewed minutes from the Board of Governors, ASQA and HEAB.
38. The assessment team was of the view that minutes of the Board of Governors evidenced robust discussion and a level of appropriate challenge. For example, the minutes record governors offering challenge around declining part-time student numbers, and provided evidence that reports from committees were understood and discussed prior to approval, resulting in some suggestions for additions. One Board of Governors meeting also discussed suggestions for further improvements around governance at the college.
39. Similarly, the assessment team found that the ASQA minutes indicated that governors engage actively in robust discussion, challenging information and requesting further information or assurance where required. For example, the governors requested further student feedback in relation to a change in use of space for higher education students. The assessment team also concluded that the HEAB minutes it reviewed included robust discussion. For example, new course developments and major modifications for three higher education courses were discussed at length with amendments suggested before approval.
40. The assessment team considered that the robust discussion and appropriate challenge evidenced at the Board of Governors, ASQA and HEAB meetings indicated that the college

operated its academic governance arrangements effectively, with good control and clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college's strategic aims are understood and consistently applied in practice, and demonstrate effective academic governance at the college.

41. To understand how the college operates its academic governance arrangements, such that its academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives, the assessment team reviewed a range of academic policies and frameworks, including the:
 - 'Higher education course suspension or closure procedure'
 - 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'
 - 'Higher education learning and teaching policy'
 - 'Higher education tutorial policy'
 - 'Higher education admissions policy'.
42. The assessment team concluded that academic policies support the provider's mission, aims and objectives. This is because the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', for example, note the requirement to obtain strategic planning approval to ensure the proposed programme supports the college's strategic aims. The 'Higher education course suspension or closure procedure' also supports the college's strategic priority around, for example, student success by ensuring students and applicants are appropriately supported in the event of disruption to their studies. The assessment team considered that the 'Higher education learning and teaching policy' supports the college's mission, aims and objectives, because it outlines aims to ensure student success through a strategic approach to learning and teaching which aligns with the college's corporate priority in this area. The 'Higher education tutorial policy' outlines the college's aims for supporting students and ensuring all students have opportunities to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, which the assessment team also found to align effectively with the college's corporate priority around student success, and particularly the priority's underpinning aim 'to improve student outcomes and destinations'. The 'Higher education admissions policy' sets out key standards that include the intention to recruit with integrity and provide opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to join courses and engage in learning. The assessment team's view was that this supports the college's corporate priority in relation to social success, and in particular an underpinning aim of that priority which outlines the intention to promote social mobility in each district and borough through educational opportunities.
43. The assessment team therefore concluded that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that the college's academic policies supported the college's higher education mission, aims and objectives.
44. In order to consider clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structure and arrangements for managing

its higher education provision, the assessment team again reviewed the college's governance model and higher education committee structure, as well as the following documents:

- 'Higher education schedule of business 2023-24', which outlines the place, frequency and content of meetings for HEAB and its subcommittees
- terms of reference for ASQA and for HEAB and its subcommittees (HEQAS, HETREC, HESEC and HEAPC)
- meeting minutes of the Board of Governors, ASQA, Audit Committee, HEAB and its subcommittees (HEQAS, HETREC, HESEC and HEAPC)
- reports from various committees to ASQA.

45. The assessment team found the college's governance model to clearly outline the governance structure with appropriate membership, articulating the function and responsibilities of each governance body effectively. The model sets out that ASQA has overall responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the educational character and quality of education at the college, is made up of Board of Governors members and invites senior management and advisers to meetings where appropriate. The governance model and ASQA's terms of reference also set out that it is responsible for challenging achievement and success rate targets, advising on educational character, exploring the learner voice, and monitoring progress on the aims and outcomes of curriculum strategies. This is further evidenced by the college's instrument and articles of government and standing orders. In minutes of the Board of Governors, Audit Committee and ASQA, the assessment team found evidence of meetings taking place effectively in practice, further supported by examples of reports to ASQA such as the 'Equality and diversity report to ASQA' and a report on success indicators, both provided by the Deputy Principal. The assessment team concluded that the committees had a distinct purpose and remit which are evidenced in practice, and have appropriate membership for the decisions being taken.
46. The college's senior academic authority for higher education is HEAB. Membership of HEAB includes senior post holders and its terms of reference state that key decisions are reported at the college's senior leadership team meeting and ASQA. The assessment team judged that the functions and responsibilities of HEAB are articulated effectively in clear terms of reference, setting out HEAB's purpose and outlining its four subcommittees. The college's higher education schedule of business is, in the assessment team's view, robust and consistent with the relevant terms of reference. The assessment team also found that the HEAB minutes it reviewed evidence effective oversight in practice of matters in its remit, as noted in paragraph 39, and align with the higher education schedule of business provided by the college.
47. The assessment team also considered the remits of HEAB's four subcommittees, and found these to be outlined clearly in their respective terms of reference. They also found the respective minutes provided for each of these subcommittee meetings to align with the respective terms of reference, and follow the expected schedule of business. The assessment team considered that the format of meetings and minutes allow for actions to be noted and followed up in subsequent meetings. Membership of these subcommittees include senior post

holders, alongside academic and professional support services staff, and the assessment team concluded that membership was appropriate for the decisions being made.

48. The assessment team concluded that there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels of the college in relation to its academic governance structures and its arrangements for managing its higher education provision, as the college's terms of reference for each committee are appropriately defined and clearly articulated, and each committee has a distinct purpose and remit. Furthermore, the assessment team was satisfied that committee business schedules confirmed that committees have appropriate membership for their remit and undertake business in line with their terms of reference. This provided assurance to the assessment team that the college has effective academic governance, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.
49. The assessment team reviewed the college's governance model, higher education committee structure, schedule of business and terms of reference for ASQA, HEAB and its subcommittees, as well as minutes of meetings of HEAB and its subcommittees. This enabled the team to also test whether the function and responsibility of HEAB, as the college's senior academic authority for higher education, is clearly articulated and consistently applied.
50. The assessment team noted that HEAB's terms of reference give it responsibility for establishing and maintaining 'a regulatory framework appropriate for the delivery of higher education and the college's Bachelors' DAPs. As mentioned previously when considering clarity and differentiation of function within the college's academic governance structures, the assessment team saw evidence that HEAB operates within its terms of reference and consistently adheres to the higher education schedule of business. Furthermore, the assessment team noted that HEAB provides assurance to the Board of Governors, through ASQA, on a range of academic matters, as shown in the ASQA minutes provided by the college. For example, the assessment team found evidence that reports, such as the 'Higher education academic annual academic quality and standards report' and the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report', were presented to and discussed at ASQA.
51. The assessment team reviewed HEAB minutes showing receipt of papers from each of its subcommittees and saw evidence that items from each of these subcommittees were discussed at HEAB meetings. While one meeting does only note receipt of minutes from a subcommittee without further discussion of them, the other HEAB minutes reviewed by the assessment team do evidence discussion of key points. The assessment team therefore agreed that on balance it was clear how relevant information fed through academic governance structures to the college's senior academic authority for higher education.
52. The assessment team therefore concluded that HEAB's functions and responsibilities are clearly articulated and consistently applied, and that it maintains appropriate accountability for and oversight of its academic responsibilities.
53. To determine if there is appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership at the college, the assessment team reviewed the college's organisational structure and its higher education organisational chart. The assessment team also considered governor and senior leadership profiles available on the college's website, and CVs and job descriptions for key senior college staff.

54. In reviewing the governor profiles alongside the CV for the college's higher education link governor, the assessment team found that collectively the Board of Governors has a range of significant senior leadership experience from across a variety of both private and public sector industries including education and business. In addition, the team found the higher education link governor's CV demonstrated appropriate higher education knowledge and experience through leadership roles in the sector.
55. The college's organisational structure and higher education organisational chart identify senior leadership through the CEO and Principal, as well as key higher education-specific roles such as the Dean of Higher Education and the Head of Higher Education Quality. The assessment team judged the CEO and Principal to have extensive experience within the college sector, as evidenced in the online profile. The team also reviewed the job descriptions and CVs for key senior staff who engage in the college's committee structures and participate in reporting, including the Dean of Higher Education, the Director of Apprenticeships, the Head of Higher Education Quality, the Head of Student Welfare and the Head of Careers and Information. It concluded that there is appropriate depth and strength in academic leadership. For example, the team noted that the Dean of Higher Education has relevant experience in the higher education sector, and the Head of Higher Education Quality has both academic teaching and quality experience relevant to the role. In addition, the assessment team also found subject leaders to have high levels of professional practice experience, alongside teaching experience and subject expertise. The team was therefore satisfied that the college's academic leadership demonstrated appropriate depth and strength, which contribute to the overall effectiveness of the college's academic governance.
56. To determine if the college develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff and students and external stakeholders, the assessment team reviewed the college's 'Policy approval process', 'Procedure approval process' and HEAB's terms of reference and meeting minutes.
57. The process for policy development is outlined in the 'Policy approval process' and 'Procedure approval process', and the management of this is overseen by the college's senior leadership team. Policies and procedures that have a direct impact on students are shared with the college's students' union for comment, and members from relevant college committees are included in the relevant working group where appropriate for the development of a particular policy or procedure. The approval process also includes a requirement to share final policies and procedures on the college intranet, with an intranet notification sent to staff bringing the new policy or procedure to their attention. For higher education, the Dean of Higher Education is responsible for ensuring guidance on policy development is followed. The college provided evidence of this in practice for the 'Suicide Safer Strategy' as an example, including evidence of the action taken by the working group during development and the sharing of this through the committee structure and the college higher education staff conference. This provided assurance to the panel of this policy working in practice.
58. The HEAB's terms of reference include a responsibility to inform the college's higher education policy and strategy developments. The assessment team saw HEAB minutes that show approval of higher education policies (such as those relating to complaints and refunds and compensation) and discussion of policies under development (such as the college's draft code of practice on freedom of speech). This provided the assessment team with further

assurance that policies are developed collaboratively, thus further ensuring that the college operates effective academic governance.

Criterion A1.2

A1.2: Academic governance, including all aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, is conducted in partnership with its students.

Advice to the OfS

59. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion A1.2 because all aspects of its control and oversight of its higher education provision is conducted in partnership with its students.
60. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the provider has met the evidence requirements for A1.2.

Reasoning

61. To test whether students are collectively engaged in the governance and management of the college and its higher education provision, the assessment team reviewed the college's:
 - governance model
 - terms of reference and meeting minutes for HEAB and its subcommittee HESEC
 - 'Quality assurance and enhancement partnership statement'
 - 'Procedures for course consultative committees' and minutes of such committees
 - relevant job or role descriptions
 - reports to ASQA.
62. The college's governance model outlines the membership of the Board of Governors, which includes two student governors. While the Board of Governors meeting minutes provided by the college do not state the roles of those in attendance, the assessment team was able to confirm from the names provided that at least one student governor was present for each meeting. The minutes evidence the student governor actively engaging in these meetings by presenting the 'Student governor report' and contributing to other discussions. The college's 'Students' union officer roles' document identifies that the Sabbatical President and Vice President of the Students' Union are the two student governors on the Board of Governors. The assessment team found the document also outlined the President and Vice President roles clearly, including the expectation to attend boards and committees and to prepare relevant reports. While the assessment team noted the document does not stipulate that one of these roles must be held by a higher education student, the team understand this is currently the case. Alongside engagement in Board of Governors meetings, the role of student governor also requires reports to be presented to relevant committees where necessary. For example, the assessment team saw evidence of student governors having prepared reports for ASQA outlining student engagement and students' union activities, including a dedicated section on higher education which outlines higher education activities. The assessment team

also noted that the higher education student governor mentions in the report feeling a genuine sense of inclusion at HESEC, which suggests student governors are being meaningfully engaged in the college's academic governance. Student governors have one-to-one training with the clerk to the Board of Governors and have an external governor mentor to ensure they are effectively supported to complete their role.

63. The 'Quality assurance and enhancement partnership statement' sets out a commitment to student engagement and partnership working for higher education students. The statement outlines various mechanisms for collective student engagement including student representatives, Course Consultative Committees (CCCs), student advisers on course approval and review, student envoys, and notes the college's Higher Education Student Council. The partnership statement also refers to student envoys attending HEAB and HESEC, and the student envoy job description sets out the role, noting the expectation to attend relevant committees to represent the college from a student perspective. While committee terms of reference only show explicit membership of the student envoy for HESEC – evidenced in practice through relevant meeting minutes – the assessment team noted that meeting minutes make it clear that the student envoy does attend HEAB, consistent with the expectations set out in the partnership statement. The assessment team felt it would be beneficial to update the HEAB terms of reference to explicitly show expected student membership in future.
64. The assessment team considered that student representatives enable representation of the student perspective at a programme level. The team reviewed the college's 'Higher education student representative handbook' and found it to be an informative and robust document, which outlined the role and its responsibilities, and the key mechanisms for engagement. These mechanisms include CCCs, which meet three times a year and provide an opportunity for regular, formal discussion with course teams. Other mechanisms include the Higher Education Student Council, which is a forum chaired by the Student Experience Officer where students in the same faculty can share views, experiences and opinions; and the Student Parliament, which takes place annually with all course representatives from across the college's provision and provides the opportunity to influence students' union activity for the year.
65. The college's procedures for CCCs outline the aims of the meetings, note that CCCs inform the annual course report process, and outline the expectation that CCC minutes and action points should be circulated. Membership includes student course representatives, and an agenda provided to the assessment team shows standing items including induction, course management, learning resources, work-based and placement learning and employability, recruitment and marketing, module evaluation, and general comments. CCC minutes demonstrate these meetings in action and provide the opportunity to see responses to actions noted in previous meetings. For example, a comment in November 2023 around lighting is shown to be resolved in the March 2024 minutes. 'You said, we did' information provided to the team indicated that feedback from CCCs had led to positive action, such as the purchase of additional resources. The assessment team also reviewed examples of annual course reports and saw clear evidence of CCC feedback informing course evaluation; for example, discussion at a CCC is seen to have supported suggestions for changes to assessment and led to enhanced resources. An example of minutes for the Higher Education Student Council also evidences discussion of student comments and feedback. The assessment team concluded that there are sufficient opportunities for students to engage in the quality of their

educational experience, and that it is generally clear where actions are taken as a result of student feedback.

66. The assessment team also reviewed the 'Higher education student representative handbook' alongside examples of the training materials that have been delivered to student representatives, to explore how students are supported to engage effectively as course representatives. The assessment team found the handbook contained clear information, as outlined in paragraph 64. In addition, evidence of relevant training provided to representatives was seen by the assessment team. This included information and support on 'What makes a great course rep', the 'Importance of feedback' and 'Communication between reps and students'. The assessment team considered the training materials to be clearly set out, outlining the aims of each session, and that the content helps ensure students are supported to be able to undertake their role effectively.
67. The assessment team also found that the college engages higher education students individually through surveys, including:
- the National Student Survey (NSS)
 - the 'Higher education first impressions survey', which measures satisfaction related to a student's induction, course and the support provided
 - the 'Higher education course survey', which collects student satisfaction relating to teaching, learning opportunities, marking and assessment, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources, student voice, and academic and pastoral tutorials.

The team noted that an overview of the 'Higher education course survey' and NSS results is provided in the 'Higher education quality monitoring report' presented to ASQA, demonstrating engagement with student feedback in the management and governance of the college.

68. The assessment team noted that the NSS results for 2023 and 2024 show student satisfaction is below benchmark in relation to questions around student feedback being acted on and how well the students' union represents students' academic interests. The college's internal 'Higher education course survey summary' for 2023-24 also indicates low satisfaction in relation to the students' union, though positive responses are noted for other questions within the section on student voice. For example, a 91 per cent positive response in relation to having the right opportunities to provide feedback, an 87 per cent positive response in relation to students' opinions being valued by staff, and an 80 per cent positive response in relation to how clear it is that student feedback is acted on. This is an increase for each of these questions in comparison to the previous year, and gave the assessment team increased assurance that student engagement opportunities are effective and that feedback is acted on.
69. The assessment team concluded that there are opportunities for students to engage collectively and individually in the governance and management of the organisation and its higher education provision and that higher education students do engage with these, resulting in positive action. The team also concluded that student satisfaction in relation to student voice suggests students do have opportunities to provide feedback and feel that their opinion is valued, and shows improvement on previous years.

Criterion A1.3

A1.3: Where an organisation granted degree awarding powers works with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, it ensures that its governance and management of such opportunities is robust and effective and that decisions to work with other organisations are the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.

Advice to the OfS

70. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion A1.3 because where the college works with other organisations to deliver learning opportunities, it ensures that its governance and management of such opportunities are robust and effective and that decisions to work with other organisations are the result of a strategic approach rather than opportunism.
71. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for A1.3.

Reasoning

72. The provider does not currently work in partnership to deliver learning opportunities other than in relation to formal work placements. (Work-based learning is discussed in more detail in relation to criterion D (environment for supporting students) further below.) The college informed the assessment team that there are no plans to work with other organisations to deliver the college's own programmes in the future.
73. To explore whether the management of formal work placements is robust and effective, the assessment team reviewed the college's 'Work-based and placement learning procedure' and the role of the Higher Education Placement Coordinator.
74. The 'Work-based and placement learning procedure' outlines the responsibilities for the college, in particular those of the placement coordinator, the student and the work-based or clinical supervisor. Students are also provided with a placement handbook. The role of the Higher Education Placement Coordinator, as outlined in the job description, includes organising appropriate work placements, and carrying out health and safety checks and risk assessments. These are evidenced in practice through the use of an 'Employer compliance check form'. This provided assurance to the assessment team that opportunities to work with others in the delivery of higher education are managed effectively.

Conclusions

75. The assessment team concluded that the college has effective academic governance and management structures that demonstrate clear and appropriate lines of accountability, as evidenced through its governance model and higher education committee structure.

Furthermore, the team concluded that students are effectively engaged through the higher education student governor, student envoy and course representatives, in line with the college's 'Quality assurance and enhancement partnership statement', ensuring that academic governance and management is conducted in partnership with students.

Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance

Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks

Advice to the OfS

76. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks because it meets sub-criteria B1.1 and B1.2.
77. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows in summary that the college has transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. It also shows that the college maintains a definitive record of each programme or qualification it approves (and of subsequent changes to it), which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.
78. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion B1.1

B1.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.

Advice to the OfS

79. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B1.1 because there are transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.
80. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the provider has met the evidence requirements for B1.1.

Reasoning

81. The assessment team considered the college's 2023-24 academic regulations to test whether the college has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications, and whether these frameworks and regulations are appropriate to its current status. The assessment team also considered the 'Higher education assessment board procedures' and evidence of these procedures in practice through relevant minutes of the Board of Governors to ensure they are implemented fully and consistently.
82. The assessment team concluded that the college's academic regulations are robust and comprehensive. The assessment team noted that the regulations outlined are appropriate for granting higher education qualifications as they clearly outline the credit framework, concise

information around programme design and approval, regulations for admissions (including recognised prior learning) and assessment, as well as signposting to information for complaints, appeals and conferment of awards. The team found there was transparent and accessible information in relation to progression through levels, reassessment and condonement opportunities. The assessment team concluded that this supports staff to implement the regulations appropriately and consistently through the 'Higher education assessment guide for staff', which provides detailed information on putting the academic regulations into practice by outlining marking expectations, assessment loading, feedback, internal verification processes, referencing expectations and academic misconduct.

83. The 'Higher education assessment board procedures' set out the role and structure of the Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards, including terms of reference, membership and agenda. The assessment team noted a clearly articulated requirement in the procedures to apply the academic regulations fairly and consistently. The college holds Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards focusing on achievement at module level and progression and awards respectively. The assessment team reviewed the minutes from Subject Assessment Boards and saw evidence of the college considering accuracy and average grades. The assessment team also reviewed Course Assessment Board minutes showing consideration of outcomes by student number alongside external examiner comments. Minutes from the college's Subject/Course (Re)assessment Board also show both sets of procedures taking place. HEQAS's 2023 'Higher education academic board report', presented to HEAB, reports on assessment boards taking place, with a summary of the awards conferred. This supports the assessment team's judgement that academic frameworks and regulations are implemented and applied consistently.
84. In addition to the academic regulations, the assessment team considered regulations, frameworks and policies around the following areas:
- student admissions, including recognition of prior learning
 - academic misconduct
 - extenuating circumstances
 - student appeals and complaints.
85. The team found these policies to be appropriate to the college's current status, implemented fully, and the team concluded that they support the academic regulations in place to govern how the college awards academic credit and qualifications, as detailed below.
86. The assessment team found the college's 'Higher education admissions policy' to be appropriate to the college's current status, as the team considered it clearly sets out the scope of the policy, key standards, reasons for not accepting a student and how to appeal an admissions decision, alongside the college's approach to providing information to applicants at each stage of the recruitment and enrolment process. The assessment team noted this policy was supported by the 'Higher education prospectus', which sets out clear entry requirements, and the college's higher education recognition of prior learning policy and procedures. The assessment team judged these to be clearly set out and were satisfied these were implemented fully in practice, as evidenced through the sample admissions records provided and the examples of recognition of prior learning decisions reviewed.

87. The assessment team reviewed the college's 'Academic misconduct procedure' and found it to be appropriate to the college's current status. It clearly defines what the college means by academic misconduct and the types of activity that would fall within its scope, including information on the misuse of artificial intelligence. The stages, timeframes and potential outcomes were considered to be clear and appropriate. While the assessment team did not see evidence of the full process in practice, it did see evidence that information is shared with staff and students through induction, on the intranet and as part of the college's 'Academic study skills, employability and T-shaped' module. In addition, letters from the college to students after academic misconduct meetings provided further evidence to the team that processes have taken place and appropriate outcomes have been recorded. In addition, the team found there is a clear student disciplinary policy for non-academic matters that sets out the process and potential penalties for non-academic misconduct.
88. The assessment team also reviewed the 'Higher education extenuating circumstances procedure', concluding that it was appropriate to the college's current status as it sets out appropriate measures such as deadline extensions or mitigation of assessment to support students with exceptional extenuating circumstances that might otherwise affect their ability to submit assessments. The assessment team reviewed examples of extenuating circumstances requests, responses to those requests and the college's 'Extenuating circumstances log', and found that the requests were approved in line with the policy expectations. The assessment team also noted that HEQAS maintains an overview of the outcomes of academic misconduct and extenuating circumstances cases as a standing item at its meetings, as seen in the college's higher education schedule of business and HEQAS minutes.
89. Finally, the assessment team reviewed the college's policies and procedures for academic appeals and complaints and concluded that these are appropriate for the college's current status. The team found that reporting of student complaints is evidenced in minutes of ASQA and the annual report to ASQA on complaints and compliments for 2022-23, which includes a section dedicated to higher education complaints. The assessment team was satisfied from the evidence it had seen that these regulations are appropriate to the college's current status. Further analysis in relation to academic appeals and student complaints as they relate to criterion B3 is set out in paragraphs 279 to 292.
90. On the basis of the evidence reviewed, the assessment team judged that the college's academic frameworks and regulations governing its higher education provision are appropriate to its current status and implemented fully and consistently.

Criterion B1.2

B1.2: A degree awarding organisation maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Advice to the OfS

91. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B1.2 because it maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification it approves (and subsequent changes to

it) in the form of programme specifications, and these constitute a reference point for delivery, assessment, monitoring and review and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

92. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the provider has met the evidence requirements for B1.2.

Reasoning

93. To determine whether the college maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification it approves, the assessment team reviewed the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', example programme specifications and course modification forms. To explore whether the programme specifications constitute a reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni, the assessment team compared the programme specifications with the programme documentation, including course handbooks, module descriptors and module guides, and examined an example transcript.
94. The college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' outline the requirement for each programme to have a programme specification, developed from a standard template, as a definitive record of the programme. This specification subsequently becomes the reference point for programme delivery. The assessment team found the process for course modifications to be clearly articulated, defining both minor and major modifications and noting the use of a 'Course modifications form'. The assessment team reviewed a sample of definitive programme specifications, which it considered clearly articulated the course's title, level, credits and entry requirements, as well as its learning outcomes, modules and assessments. The date of approval of the programme specification and next review point are clearly noted on the document. The assessment team also reviewed completed examples of the 'Course modification form', finding these to indicate changes to relevant programme and module specifications and giving effective rationales for such changes.
95. Programme specifications are supported by course handbooks, which provide an overview of the programme, including a breakdown of modules, credits, general assessment information, and signposting to relevant policies and procedures. The module descriptors seen by the assessment team also set out the module specifications. Module guides are also provided which outline the learning outcomes, module content, assessment and scheme of work, and were found to generally include detailed assessment briefs with marking criteria. It was clear to the assessment team through consideration of the programme specifications alongside the module guides and descriptors that the learning outcomes are used as a means of delivery and assessment. While the team noted one very minor inconsistency where a module guide and a module descriptor had slightly different wording for one learning outcome, this discrepancy was not considered material and did not impact on the team's overall positive judgement against this criterion.
96. The college's Higher Education Quality Team maintain the definitive records of all qualifications, and the Higher Education Registry team issue records of study in the form of transcripts. The example transcript reviewed by the team outlines the modules studied and the credits and grades achieved, and was considered consistent with what would generally be expected from a transcript, based on the team's wider higher education experience.

97. From its analysis, the assessment team reached the view that the college maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and of subsequent changes to it), which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Conclusions

98. The assessment team concluded that the college has transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks because it has clear and robust academic regulations and supporting policies and procedures to govern its higher education provision that are appropriate to its current status. These have been evidenced in practice to indicate that they are implemented fully and consistently.
99. The assessment team also concluded that definitive and up to date records of each programme and qualification are maintained through the college's course approval and review procedures, and that these records are used as a basis for delivery and assessment, as evidenced through the supporting programme documentation seen by the team.

Criterion B2: Academic standards

Advice to the OfS

100. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B2: Academic standards because it meets sub-criteria B2.1 and B2.2.
101. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows, in summary, that the college has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of higher education qualifications approved under its own Bachelors' DAPs. Furthermore, the college has demonstrated that it is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications up to and including Level 6 that meet the threshold academic standards described in the sector-recognised standards and the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). It has also demonstrated that the standards it sets and maintains above the threshold are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
102. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion B2.1

B2.1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.

Advice to the OfS

103. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B2.1 because it has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of the higher education qualifications approved under its own Bachelors' DAPs.
104. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for B2.1.

Reasoning

105. To determine how the college ensures that its higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ, as set out in the sector-recognised standards, the assessment team reviewed the college's:
- current academic regulations for 2023-24
 - 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'
 - template documents for programme specifications
 - template documents for module descriptors.
106. The assessment team found that the college's 2023-24 academic regulations were written with clear reference to the FHEQ and clearly set out the arrangements for the award of credit

for its higher education qualifications, up to and including at Level 6. They include, for example, provisions in relation to the titles and levels of awards offered and the number of credits required for each qualification. It was clear to the assessment team that the college's academic regulations were aligned to the FHEQ and sector-recognised standards. Additionally, the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' confirmed that course designers need to take account of national reference points, including the FHEQ. The assessment team also found that both documents referred to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies requirements, and the course approval and review procedures also reference the Quality Assurance Agency.

107. The assessment team found that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' outlined appropriate operational arrangements to implement mechanisms for setting and maintaining threshold academic standards at the appropriate level. For example, the team notes that course approval panel members are required to consider whether the intended learning outcomes are appropriate for the level of the course.
108. Furthermore, the assessment team found that the college's templates for programme specifications and module descriptors both included guidance notes for course designers to ensure that they are written using terminology that reflects the requirements of both the FHEQ and the sector-recognised standards.
109. To test whether the college's mechanisms for ensuring higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ and are consistently applied, the assessment team reviewed a sample of three programme specifications at Level 6 covering academic years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, and six (20- and 40-credit) module descriptors at Levels 4, 5 and 6. The assessment team also reviewed course approval panel meeting minutes and confirmation of outcomes for two Level 6 new programme approval events from 2023, and a sample of two external examiner reports covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for the academic year 2022-23.
110. The assessment team found, from the sample of programme specifications and module descriptors for the college's own approved Level 6 programmes, that the course and module learning outcomes aligned appropriately with the relevant qualification descriptors at Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the FHEQ. This included the appropriate use of credit sizes, learning hours, and the use of terminology for learning outcomes that are appropriate to the level of the programme and modules. The assessment team also noted that each approved programme specification included a statement confirming that the aims and outcomes of the award are clearly in alignment with the FHEQ.
111. The assessment team also found that the programme specifications and module descriptors clearly set out the skills and learning that students will have achieved on completion of each module and on completion of their programme of study. It also found that the curriculum map included in each programme specification clearly identified where the intended learning outcomes of the programme are covered within each module.
112. The assessment team was satisfied that the minutes from course approval panel meetings, and the course approval documents for new Level 6 programmes approved by the college, demonstrated that appropriate consideration had been given to the requirements of the FHEQ and the college's requirements in relation to academic regulations for the award of credit. For

example, course approval panel discussions included changes to module descriptors and programme specifications following the reading group, changes to module learning outcomes, the mapping and linking of modules to each level and discussion around the level of modules, and discussions around assessment requirements. The assessment team noted that the minutes from course approval panel meetings did not include an explicit reference to the FHEQ or sector-recognised standards. However, as the course approval documents demonstrated that appropriate consideration had been given to the requirements of the FHEQ and the college's academic regulations, the assessment team was satisfied that the lack of explicit reference to the FHEQ in the meeting minutes did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B2.1, though the team felt that this was something that the college could consider addressing in the future.

113. The assessment team also found that external examiner reports for the college's own Level 6 programmes confirmed that the threshold academic standards set for the awards were in accordance with the FHEQ, and applicable subject benchmark statements which the college has opted to reference.
114. The assessment team concluded that the college's higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ.
115. To determine whether the setting and maintaining of academic standards takes appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and independent points of expertise, including students, the assessment team reviewed the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' and its guidance for external examiners and external advisers.
116. The assessment team found that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' set out appropriate arrangements for taking external points of reference and independent expertise into account in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. For example, the procedures include the overarching aim to ensure that, in the design or review of courses, the college should be satisfied that courses are consistent with published guidelines relating to academic standards and quality, and that there has been appropriate employer consultation. The procedures clearly identify external reference points for course design, which include the OfS's regulatory requirements in relation to quality and standards, the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements. They also confirm that employer engagement is required as a critical aspect of all degree programme developments and that appropriate student engagement is also required for all new course developments.
117. Furthermore, the assessment team noted that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' clearly set out the membership for new course approval panels, which includes an external academic for each broad subject area being considered, an employer or industry representative, and a student from a different course group. According to these procedures, further panel members or observers may also be included at the discretion of the panel chair, such as members of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
118. The college uses external examiners to provide external oversight for the setting and maintaining of academic standards of its higher education programmes. The assessment team found that the college's guidance for external examiners sets out appropriate principles which external examiners are expected to report on. These include whether the academic

standards for the programme are appropriate, and the comparability of the standards and student achievements with those in other institutions delivering higher education.

119. The assessment team also noted that the college uses industry advisers to review their higher education courses and comment constructively on whether their courses are adequately preparing students for employment. The college's 'Guide for industry advisers' sets out the responsibilities of the role, which include to provide a reference point for informing the course team on workplace needs in designing and reviewing courses and modules.
120. To test whether external reference points and independent points of expertise had in practice been considered in the setting and maintaining of academic standards, the assessment team reviewed course approval panel meeting minutes and confirmation of outcomes for two Level 6 new programme approval events from 2023, a sample of two external examiner reports covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for academic year 2022-23, and two industry adviser reports covering academic year 2022-23.
121. The assessment team found that the minutes from new course approval meetings confirmed that appropriate consultation had taken place with students and employers in developing the new programme, and that the approval panels included both an external academic adviser and an external employer representative, and a student member of the panel, which was in line with the requirements of the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'. The assessment team also found that each new course approval event included a meeting between the course approval panel and a group of students from the subject discipline to discuss the proposal.
122. External examiner reports reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that the threshold academic standards set for the awards are in accordance with the FHEQ and applicable subject benchmark statements. They also confirmed that the programme and its component parts continue to be coherent, and their outcomes aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor set out in the FHEQ, supplemented where applicable by one or more subject benchmark statements.
123. The assessment team also noted that external industry adviser reports – for example, for the college's early years and digital media foundation degree programmes – confirmed that the content of the courses was current, relevant and met the needs of industry and the sector, and that students were being well prepared for employment in the industry.
124. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college has clear arrangements for taking appropriate account of relevant external reference points and independent points of expertise, including students, and these were consistently applied in the setting and maintaining of academic standards for its higher education qualifications.

Criterion B2.2

B2.2: Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework[s] for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that the standards that they set and maintain above the threshold are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.

Advice to the OfS

125. The assessment team's judgement is that the college meets DAPs criterion B2.2: Academic standards because it designs and delivers higher education courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ. Furthermore, the college has demonstrated to the satisfaction of the assessment team that the standards it sets and maintains above the threshold are reliable over time and reasonably comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
126. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows that the college meets the evidence requirements for B2.2.

Reasoning

127. To test whether the college's programme approval arrangements are robust, applied consistently, and ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets UK threshold standards for the qualification, as well as the college's own academic framework and regulations, the assessment team considered the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'. These also include details of arrangements for minor and major modifications to programmes and periodic review. The assessment team also reviewed programme development and approval documentation for two Level 6 new programme approval events, along with terms of reference and minutes from three meetings of HEAB from academic year 2023-24.
128. The assessment team found that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' set out a clear and robust course approval process, which comprises an initial strategic planning approval from HEAB, an internal reading group to provide a document check on programme specifications and module descriptors, and a formal course approval panel, including external representation. The assessment team also found that outcomes from new programme approval events are also received, discussed and approved at HEAB, which has overall responsibility for academic standards.
129. The assessment team found in the college's approval and review procedures that the membership for new programme approval panels should include a chair, a member of the Higher Education Quality Team, one additional member of academic staff, an external academic, an employer or industry representative, and a student member. The course approval meeting minutes for both new programmes that were reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that the membership for each approval panel was in line with the college's procedures.

130. The minutes from course approval meetings demonstrated to the assessment team that robust and effective discussions had taken place in the approval of the new programmes. For example, the course approval meetings included an initial presentation of the programme from the course team, which included updates to course documentation and changes made by the reading group, a tour of resources, meetings with students and the course team and an opportunity for appropriate discussions around different aspects of the programme being considered. The assessment team saw evidence that the panel meetings included discussion of academic standards, such as the course content, the level of some modules, and assessment. However, the assessment team felt that the agenda for the course approval panels could have included a more explicit section on academic standards to provide a more formalised approach to the panel's discussions around academic standards. The assessment team was satisfied that this did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B2.2, though the team felt this is something the college could consider introducing in the future.
131. The assessment team noted that outcomes from each panel identified areas of strength and set out any conditions and recommendations with clear deadlines for completion. The assessment team was satisfied that any conditions or recommendations from course approval panels were low-level; for example, they were in relation to considerations for course content and revisions to documentation, and did not identify any significant concerns about the academic standards set for the course.
132. The assessment team also noted that the minutes from HEAB, which has overall responsibility for academic standards, included standard agenda items on proposals for new course developments and major modifications and confirmation of new course approvals. The samples of meeting minutes that were reviewed by the team included examples of changes that were signed off by chair's action, examples of programme proposals, and examples of documents for new course approval events that were discussed at length by HEAB with clear actions for taking them forward.
133. The assessment team concluded that the college's programme approval arrangements are robust and were applied consistently for the new Level 6 programmes approved under its own Bachelors' DAPs. Furthermore, the team considered the college's programme approval arrangements ensure academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standards for the qualification and are in accordance with the college's own academic framework and regulations.
134. To determine how the college ensures that credit and qualifications will only be awarded where the achievement of learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and both UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant awarding body have been satisfied, the assessment team reviewed the college's 2023-24 academic regulations, along with associated policies and procedures for the 2023-24 academic year, including the:
- 'Higher education assessment policy' and 'Higher education assessment guide', which include arrangements for setting assessments, providing feedback, verification and moderation
 - 'Higher education assessment board procedures'

- 'Secure certification procedure'.

135. The assessment team found that the college's academic regulations, along with the associated higher education assessment policy and assessment guide, clearly set out the college's arrangements for the assessment and award of credit and qualifications. The documents provide detailed and robust guidance on arrangements for assessment, marking and moderation, which promotes consistency and ensures that credit and qualifications will only be awarded where the achievement of learning outcomes has been demonstrated.
136. The assessment team also noted that the college's procedures for pre-issue verification and post-marking verification (moderation) of assessments provide further assurance on the maintenance of standards. For example, the team considered that the process of verification of assessment briefs prior to issue provides an internal check that the form and content of assessment tasks and briefs are appropriate, fair and valid in terms of standards, and will effectively assess the achievement of the specified learning outcomes.
137. Additionally, the team found that the college's post-marking assessment verification process ensures that a sample of assessed student work is reviewed to ensure academic standards are appropriate and consistent across courses and subject teams. In the view of the team, the verification process ensures that feedback reflects agreed assessment policies and assessment criteria, ensuring the assessment outcomes for students are fair and reliable.
138. The assessment team found that the 'Higher education assessment board procedures' clearly set out appropriate arrangements for assessment boards to ensure that decisions on student progression and awards are made accurately and appropriately. This is achieved through a two-stage process: the first stage is for the Subject Assessment Board to check that all marks on the college system are recorded accurately; the second stage is for the Course Assessment Board to make progression and award decisions for students based on this accurate information. Following assessment board meetings, a summary report of outcomes is presented to HEAB.
139. The assessment team also found that the college's 'Secure certification procedure' confirms that certificates are only produced when the ratified assessment decisions presented at HEAB have been forwarded to the college's centralised examinations team.
140. To test whether credit and qualifications are only awarded by the college where the achievement of learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and both UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant awarding body have been satisfied, the assessment team reviewed student assessment documentation for a sample of 11 student assessments at Levels 4, 5 and 6 (including two Level 6 dissertation assessments) from the 2023-24 academic year. These included assessment briefs, grading criteria rubrics, records of pre-issue verification of assessment briefs, feedback to students and post-marking verification (moderation) records.
141. The team also reviewed a sample of minutes from one Subject Assessment Board, one Course Assessment Board and one Subject/Course (Re)assessment Board covering the academic year 2022-23, a report on assessment boards to HEQAS from September 2023, and a report to a meeting of ASQA on 17 October 2023 on awards conferred by the college.

142. The assessment team found that assessment briefs identified the relevant module learning outcomes being assessed, which are aligned to the FHEQ, and included detailed grading criteria identifying the threshold standards to be used by the assessor and included in feedback to the student. This demonstrated to the assessment team a clear link between how the student is expected to achieve the intended module learning outcomes and the grading of student work, ensuring that students only gain credit in line with the achievement of relevant learning outcomes.
143. The assessment team found that in the sample of assessed student work, students had been marked in line with the expectations of the assignment brief and relevant learning outcomes, which are aligned to the FHEQ and threshold academic standards. The assessment team also found that the marks awarded by assessors were appropriate and linked directly with the marking criteria. The marks awarded were also consistent with the comments provided in feedback and the annotations of student work. This demonstrated to the assessment team that appropriate standards for assessments were being set by the college. As such, the team was satisfied that the college only awards credit and qualifications to students who have achieved the required academic standard.
144. The assessment team also found that feedback to students provided appropriate detailed and constructive comments that reflected the grading criteria and included feed-forward comments on how to improve for future assessments. Furthermore, the assessment team noted that samples of verification forms for assessed student work confirmed the standard of marking and quality of feedback to students, and included constructive comments on how the assessments could be improved in the future. This confirmed to the assessment team that the college's procedures for assessment were consistently followed in practice.
145. The assessment team found that the minutes from the college's Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards provided a comprehensive and detailed record of the results information presented and outcomes for students. Membership of the college's Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards includes the Dean of Higher Education – or their nominee – as chair, a member of the Higher Education Quality Team, external examiners and members of the programme team. The chair and the external examiners sign an electronic version of the master sheets to confirm that they are happy with the board process and agree the marks as presented. The assessment team considered that the minutes from the Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards provided appropriate confirmation of the college's commitment to ensuring credit and qualifications are only awarded where relevant learning outcomes have been achieved, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body have been satisfied.
146. The minutes of the Subject Assessment Board and Course Assessment Board reviewed by the team also included comments from external examiners regarding the assessment of students and the maintenance of academic standards. The assessment team noted that there were no negative comments from external examiners regarding academic standards, with one external examiner confirming that the academic standards, quality process and boards are in line with other institutions.
147. Furthermore, the assessment team noted that the report to ASQA included a list of the awards and classifications that were confirmed at the relevant assessment boards, and provided

assurance that only students who have been approved by the college's higher education assessment boards receive awards.

148. The assessment team concluded that the college only awards higher education credit and qualifications where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and that both the UK threshold standards and its own academic standards as the degree awarding body have been satisfied.
149. To test whether the college's programme monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently and explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and maintained, the assessment team considered the following pieces of evidence submitted by the college:
- 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'
 - programme monitoring and review documentation from academic year 2023-24, including the college's 'Higher education quality framework', the 'Higher education quality improvement cycle' document, the 'Higher education quality and enhancement manual', and the 'Higher education annual quality and standards report 2022-23' presented to ASQA's meeting in February 2024
 - three annual course reports and the college's annual course report summary covering academic year 2022-23
 - three sets of minutes from subject quality review and monitoring meetings held in academic year 2024
 - three subject area quality improvement plans for 2023-24.
150. The college's 'Higher education quality framework and quality improvement cycle' document describes a cyclical annual monitoring and review process, which includes the production of an annual higher education course report and rolling quality improvement plan for each subject area with ongoing monitoring through a series of subject quality review meetings. Course reports are summarised in an annual 'Higher education quality and standards report' from which an overarching action plan for higher education is produced.
151. The assessment team found that the monitoring and review documents, as described above, provided appropriate opportunity for academic teams to comment on the maintenance and achievement of academic standards such as assessment practices, student outcomes and external examiner feedback. For example, annual course reports that were reviewed by the team included commentary on student outcomes, which included consideration of high grades and risks of grade inflation. Additionally, subject-level quality improvement plans reviewed by the team included actions to improve the consistency of assessment practices, such as through the use of standardised grading criteria. Furthermore, the assessment team noted that the subject review and monitoring meetings provided further opportunity for curriculum teams to discuss performance against internal and external quality and standards indicators, such as student outcomes.
152. The documentation reviewed by the assessment team showed that the college's monitoring and review arrangements include appropriate consideration of programme delivery to ensure

that the quality and standards of the college's programmes are maintained. Furthermore, external examiner comments included in the course reports confirmed that academic standards are maintained and achieved, and any issues raised by external examiners were considered and responded to by course teams.

153. The assessment team noted that a 'Higher education annual quality and standards report' is produced by the college, which summarises outcomes from course reports, external examiner reports and student outcomes data, and is submitted to ASQA for discussion and comment. The assessment team found that the report included appropriate consideration of academic standards; for example, the report included commentary on whether the student outcomes data met the thresholds standard. The assessment team also noted that the report included an overarching high-level action plan, comprising actions to ensure the ongoing maintenance of standards.
154. The college's arrangements for internal periodic review of the Level 6 qualifications that have been awarded through its own Bachelors' DAPs are set out in the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'. The assessment team noted that, as the college's own Level 6 awards were only first approved in 2022-23, the college is not yet at a stage where it needs to undertake periodic review of these programmes.
155. The assessment team concluded that the college's programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements for its Level 6 programmes are robust, applied consistently and explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved, and that the college's own academic standards, as the awarding body, are being maintained.
156. To determine how the college makes use of external and independent expertise in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the assessment team again reviewed the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', as well as the college's guidance and report template for external examiners and external advisers.
157. The assessment team found that the college's procedures set out clear arrangements for the use of appropriate external and independent expertise in the setting of threshold academic standards and comparability with other providers of equivalent level qualifications for its new programme approvals, as detailed in the assessment team's discussion in paragraphs 115 to 124 above.
158. The assessment team found that the college's guidance sets out appropriate arrangements for the role of external examiners, which includes reporting on whether the academic standards for the programme are appropriate and the comparability of standards and student achievements with those in some other institutions delivering higher education. This is facilitated by a range of activities, including visits to the college, meetings with staff and students, review of programme documentation, exam papers, assessment briefs and assessed student work, and membership of assessment boards.
159. External examiners produce an annual report on the programmes for which they are responsible, to include discussion of any issues or recommendations to improve the provision, as well as highlighting areas of good practice. The assessment team found that the college's report template explicitly requires external examiners to confirm, and include explicit comment

on, whether the threshold academic standards set for the awards are in accordance with the FHEQ and applicable subject benchmark statements. The template also requires external examiners to confirm whether the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions.

160. The assessment team further found that external examiner reports also contain a section for the college to provide a response to any areas of good practice or issues identified by the external examiner. The college's procedures set out that external examiner reports are reviewed by course teams and key themes and recommendations from external examiner reports feed into the evidence base for annual course reports. The assessment team also noted that external examiner reports are shared with students through the college's virtual learning environment.
161. The assessment team also found that the college's guidance for external advisers outlined the role as primarily providing industry feedback on whether courses are adequately preparing students for employment. As such, the role and reports produced by external advisers do not explicitly address whether threshold academic standards are being maintained and their comparability with other providers. The team did consider, however, that these reports provided valuable comment on areas relating to academic standards, such as student assessments and whether the course content is current, relevant and meets the needs of industry and the sector.
162. To test whether the college makes use of external and independent expertise in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications in practice, the assessment team reviewed a sample of two external examiner reports and responses from the college covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for the academic year 2022-23. The assessment team also reviewed a sample of minutes from one Subject Assessment Board, one Course Assessment Board and one Subject/Course (Re)assessment Board covering the academic year 2022-23, as well as a ScreenSkills professional body report dated March 2021 and a quality assurance report on external examiners for academic year 2022-23.
163. The assessment team noted that the professional body report for the college's own Level 6 games art programmes tended to focus on the development of student skills and student employability and did not specifically address academic standards. Nonetheless, the report was overwhelmingly positive, noting that the course is achieving standards of excellence in terms of its industry relevance.
164. The assessment team found that external examiner reports provided appropriate constructive and valuable feedback on academic standards. The external examiner reports reviewed by the team confirmed that the threshold academic standards set for the awards are in accordance with the FHEQ and applicable subject benchmark statements, and that the academic standards and the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions.
165. The assessment team noted that the external examiner reports it sampled did not include any issues or recommendations around significant concerns in relation to academic standards, and that the external examiners' comments were particularly positive in relation to assessment and feedback practices. The assessment team also found that the college provided detailed

responses to areas of good practice and issues raised by the external examiners. The assessment team was therefore of the view that the college makes effective use of external examiner reports, drawing on their recommendations to ensure the maintenance of academic standards.

166. The assessment team also found that the minutes from Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards evidenced robust discussion, which included positive and constructive comments regarding academic standards from external examiners who were present, particularly in relation to assessment and moderation processes. No concerns regarding academic standards were raised by external examiners, while one external examiner commented explicitly that the college's academic standards, quality process and boards were in line with other institutions.

167. The assessment team therefore concluded that, in establishing and maintaining threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications for its Level 6 qualifications, the college makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise.

Conclusions

168. The assessment team concluded that the college's higher education qualifications, approved under its own Bachelors' DAPs, are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ, and the college has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining academic standards.

169. The assessment team also concluded that the college's course approval and review procedures and documentation are appropriate, and they demonstrate that the college designs and delivers higher education programmes and qualifications, approved under its own Bachelors' DAPs, that meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ.

170. The samples of assessed student work and minutes from assessment boards reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that credit and qualifications are only awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes for the higher education programme has been demonstrated and where academic standards have been satisfied.

171. The course approval and review documentation, external examiner reports and minutes from assessment boards demonstrated to the assessment team's satisfaction that the college makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise to establish and maintain threshold academic standards for its higher education programmes, which are reliable and reasonably comparable with other providers of equivalent level qualifications.

172. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college has exercised its DAPs securely over the previous three years, and that the college meets criterion B2.

Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience

Advice to the OfS

173. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience because it meets sub criteria B3.1.
174. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows, in summary, that the college demonstrates that it is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, and that learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.
175. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion B3.1

B3.1: Organisations with degree awarding powers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality. Learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.

Advice to the OfS

176. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B3.1 because it demonstrates that it is able to design and deliver courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their location, mode of study, academic subject, protected characteristics, previous educational background or nationality, and learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.
177. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows, in summary, that the college has effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes under its own Bachelors' DAPs, and the college implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching and valid and reliable processes for assessment, including the recognition of prior learning. Furthermore, the team considers that the college makes scrupulous use of external examiners in the setting of assessment tasks and marking of student work, and implements effective procedures for handling complaints and academic appeals.
178. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for B3.1.

Reasoning

Design and approval of programmes

179. To test whether the college operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, the assessment team considered:

- the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'
- an example of a completed new course proposal form
- programme development and approval documentation for two Level 6 new programme approval events
- terms of reference and minutes from three meetings of HEAB from academic year 2023-24
- the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report' to ASQA's meeting in February 2024.

180. As detailed in paragraphs 127 to 133, the assessment team found that the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' set out a clear and robust course development and approval process, which comprises:

- the submission of a new course proposal form by programme teams
- initial strategic planning approval from HEAB
- an internal reading group to provide a document check on programme specifications and module descriptors
- a formal course approval panel which includes external representation.

The assessment team noted that outcomes from new programme approval events are also received, discussed and approved at HEAB and included in the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report' to ASQA, along with outline proposals for new areas of curriculum.

181. The assessment team noted that the college's new course proposal forms provided a detailed overview of the proposed programme for strategic planning approval by HEAB, including:

- details of expected student numbers for the programme
- the rationale and fit with other provision
- evidence of competitor analysis, market demand and industry need for the programme
- areas such as risks associated with the programme and anticipated staffing and resource costs.

182. The assessment team found that the use of reading panels early in the approval process provided an effective internal check of the programme documentation going forward to the final course approval event, and this enabled the approval panel to focus on the overall programme.

183. The sample of minutes from course approval meetings demonstrated to the assessment team that robust and effective discussions had taken place in the approval of the new programmes. For example, the course approval meetings included an initial presentation of the programme from the course team, covering updates to course documentation and changes made by the reading group, a tour of resources, meetings with students and the course team. The assessment team also found that these meetings provided an opportunity for appropriate discussions around different aspects of the programme being considered, including industry demand, course structure and content, assessment, staffing, resources, industry links, sustainability and student employability.
184. Additionally, the assessment team noted that outcomes from each panel identified appropriate areas of strength and set out any conditions and recommendations with clear deadlines for completion. Examples of conditions included the need to update a programme specification to be clearer about the career options to students, and to broaden a module to have more 'Level 6-ness'. The assessment team was satisfied that any conditions or recommendations from course approval panels were low-level and demonstrated to the assessment team that the college's processes for the design and development of programmes were effective in ensuring that the course structures, content and associated documentation were sufficiently well-developed in readiness for the final course approval event.
185. The assessment team concluded that the college operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of its programmes approved under its own Bachelors' DAPs.
186. To test whether relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance and support on, the college's procedures for the design, development and approval of programmes and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them, the assessment team considered the college's 'Procedure approval process', the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', the college's template documents for programme specifications and module descriptors. The assessment team also considered a sample of three course team meeting minutes from academic year 2023-24.
187. The assessment team noted that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' identify that approved policies and procedures are placed on the college intranet and communicated to staff via an intranet post, and that the college's management team lead is responsible for ensuring that relevant staff are aware of new or amended policies and procedures.
188. The assessment team found that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' clearly and comprehensively set out the responsibilities and expectations of course designers and course teams when designing and developing new programmes, and give specific consideration at each stage of the process to aspects such as key external reference points and the expectations for employer and student engagement in the course development process. The assessment team also found the procedures included an extensive and comprehensive guide to course development for relevant staff and a useful course development checklist as an aid to help staff navigate the process. The procedures also include guidance for reading groups and approval panels on their roles and responsibilities in the process.

189. The assessment team also noted from the samples of minutes provided that, while not included in all agendas for such meetings, course team meetings did generally provide opportunities for guidance and supporting staff on progress with new course developments. The college's response to a request for additional information also outlined that given the size of the college, information filters down more organically than might be expected in a larger institution, and teaching staff are able to approach the Dean of Higher Education to discuss any subject. While the assessment team was satisfied that this approach was practical and proportionate given the size of the college, and this did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1, the team felt that a more formal approach to course team meetings and the dissemination of information was something that the college might wish to consider.
190. The assessment team found that the college's template documents for programme specifications and module descriptors included clear and extensive guidance on how to prepare and complete the documents, which parts of the document staff were expected to complete, the level of detail required and specific considerations to include. The templates also included standard text for regulatory aspects such as the level of credits required for the award and any external or cross-college aspects, such as the qualification descriptor for the higher education qualification at Level 6 and the college's own 'T-shaped employability framework' to develop transferable skills.¹⁰
191. Together, the above demonstrated to the assessment team that relevant staff are provided with guidance and support on their roles and responsibilities in the design, development and approval of programmes, and their roles and responsibilities in relation to them.
192. To test whether responsibility for approving new programme proposals is clearly assigned, including the involvement of external expertise where appropriate, and subsequent action is carefully monitored, the assessment team considered the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' and programme development and approval documentation for two Level 6 new programme approval events. The assessment team also reviewed the terms of reference and minutes from three meetings of HEAB from academic year 2023-24, and the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report' to the ASQA meeting of February 2024.
193. The assessment team noted that the college's procedures clearly set out appropriate arrangements for the membership for new programme approval panels, which include a chair, a member of the Higher Education Quality Team, one additional member of academic staff, an external academic for each broad subject area, an employer or industry representative, and a student member. Further panel members or observers may also be included at the discretion of the panel chair, such as members of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
194. The assessment team found that the college's procedures also clearly set out the responsibilities of reading groups and approval panels, and gave guidance on their roles in the process. Furthermore, the course approval meeting minutes for both new programmes that were reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that the membership for each approval panel was in line with the college's procedures. Additionally, the team found that the minutes

¹⁰ This framework presents breadth of capabilities and qualities on the horizontal arms of the 'T', and depth of technical and academic knowledge and skills on the vertical leg of the 'T'.

from new course approval meetings demonstrated that the approval panels included both an external academic adviser and an external employer representative, and that consultation had taken place with industry in developing the new programmes. For example, the minutes from the course approval meeting for BSc (Hons) Agritech (Horticulture) programme drew on consultation from the horticultural and agricultural research information for the West Midlands, which resulted in the action point to build strong partnerships with organisations for research development and work closely with regional higher education institutions.

195. This demonstrated to the team that responsibility for approving new programme proposals is clearly assigned, including the involvement of external expertise.
196. The assessment team noted that, following the course approval panel, any conditions must be evidenced prior to the course being finally approved by the chair and the response to conditions and associated documents are checked by the Higher Education Quality Team and the chair. In this respect, the assessment team also noted that recommendations from new course approval panels were followed up and responded to in detail as an appendix to annual course reports. Furthermore, the assessment team saw that a course approval final sign-off checklist was provided, listing actions required following approval of a new programme.
197. The assessment team found that the minutes from HEAB included standard agenda items on proposals for new course developments and major modifications, and confirmation of new course approvals. The samples of meeting minutes that were reviewed by the team included examples of changes that were signed off by chair's action, examples of programme proposals and examples of documents for new course approval events that were discussed at length by HEAB, with clear actions for taking them forward. The assessment team also found that outcomes from course approval events and proposals for new areas of curriculum were included in the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report' to ASQA. This demonstrated to the team that subsequent actions from new course approval events were carefully monitored by the college.
198. The assessment team concluded that the college clearly assigns responsibility for approving new programme proposals, including the involvement of external expertise, and subsequent action is carefully monitored.
199. To test whether the coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained, the assessment team considered the college's response to additional information requested in May 2024, and an example programme specification for a Level 6 programme validated by the college's partner university.
200. The assessment team observed that none of the college's courses awarded under its own Bachelors' DAPs have multiple elements or pathways.
201. However, the assessment team also noted that one of the college's other Level 6 programmes, validated by the college's partner universities, contained multiple elements in the form of module choices in year three of the programme. The assessment team found, from the programme specification provided, that the module choices provided appropriate opportunities for students to specialise in a specific area of expertise, and that this added diversity to the programme. The assessment team was satisfied that the inclusion of module choices did not affect the overall coherence of the programme structure.

202. The assessment team concluded that the coherence of the college's programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways was therefore secured and maintained.
203. To test whether close links are maintained between learning support services and the college's programme planning and approval arrangements, the assessment team considered the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', an example of a completed new course proposal form, and programme development and approval documentation for two Level 6 new programme approval events. The assessment team also reviewed the terms of reference and minutes from three meetings of HEAB from academic year 2023-24.
204. The assessment team noted that the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' include a requirement that subject areas must consider the resource needed to develop and deliver the proposed curricula when seeking strategic planning approval. The assessment team found that this was part of the new course approval form, which included appropriate consideration of staffing, physical space and equipment, and feedback from the college's library and IT services as to whether they were able to support the proposal.
205. The assessment team found that a tour of resources was part of the agenda for new course approval meetings, which included the physical resources for the course, the digital and specialist resources, the library, and the academic and pastoral support for students. The minutes of the new course approval meetings that were reviewed by the assessment team summarised the resources and support services included in the tour. The assessment team noted that this included discussion around staffing of support services, access to pastoral tutor and counselling services, and financial support for students. This demonstrated to the assessment team that close links are maintained between learning support services and the college's programme planning and approval arrangements throughout the process.
206. The assessment team also noted that the minutes from HEAB included standard agenda items on proposals for new course developments and confirmation of new course approvals, and that copies of the minutes from meetings are circulated to the college's senior leadership team, which includes representatives from support services.
207. Furthermore, the assessment team found the college confirmed that within the curriculum planning process each part of the organisation reviews its effectiveness and capacity. During this, the college's Inclusion and Welfare Services team review their capacity to ensure that they are still fully able to meet the needs of students and articulate their requirements for the next academic year.
208. From its review of evidence, the assessment team concluded that the college maintains close links between learning support services and the college's planning and approval arrangements for its programmes.

Learning and teaching

209. To test whether the college articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives, the assessment team considered the college's 'Higher education strategy 2024-2028', 'Higher education teaching and learning strategy', and 'Higher education teaching and learning policy'. The assessment team also considered a sample of six module guides at Levels 4, 5 and 6 for the 2023-24 academic year, the terms of reference and a sample of minutes from three meetings of

HETREC from academic year 2023-24, and the annual 'Higher education quality and standards report' for academic year 2022-23.

210. The assessment team noted that the 'Higher education strategy 2024-2028' sets out an overarching aim to maintain high levels of learner continuation, progression and completion through its teaching and learning strategy, supporting and challenging learners to achieve the highest individual outcomes. The team found further detail of the college's strategic approach to this was clearly articulated in the college's 'Higher education teaching and learning strategy', which appropriately focuses on teaching and learning activities that support student engagement, students' achievement of their full academic potential, and encouraging graduate attributes that enable progression into sustained employment and, where relevant, further study. Examples of activities outlined in the strategy to support the college's strategic approach to teaching and learning include:

- the development of discipline-specific, transferable and critical thinking skills
- the introduction of the college's 'T-shaped' employability skills framework to support the development of transferable skills
- teaching, learning and assessment methods that are in line with advice from industry advisers
- a commitment to 'flipped' learning drawing on e-learning tools and platforms.

The assessment team noted that this strategy also sets out how the senior management team and course teams will work to support the delivery of the strategy. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college clearly articulates a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives.

211. The assessment team found that module guides included useful information for students on approaches to teaching and learning that would be used in the module, and the team noted that these reflected the approaches outlined in the college's teaching and learning strategy document. Examples of teaching and learning approaches articulated in module guides included the development of critical thinking skills, the use of flipped learning and online learning and research, and the transferable skills developed within the module as part of the college's 'T-shaped' employability skills framework. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college's strategic approach to teaching and learning was implemented in practice.

212. The assessment team also noted that the college's 'Higher education teaching and learning policy' outlined that teaching and learning will be monitored by HETREC. The assessment team found that the minutes from HETREC included a standard agenda item on pedagogical approaches, where subject leaders provided updates on learning and teaching activity taking place within their subject areas. The assessment team also found that the quality of teaching is reported to HEAB via the college's annual report on higher education quality and standards.

213. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching that is consistent with its stated academic objectives.

214. To test whether the college maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy and respect in their use, the assessment team considered the following pieces of evidence:

- 'Digital strategy 2020-2025'
- 'ICT systems and security strategy 2020-2025'
- 'Service-level agreement for estates for 2023-24'
- 'Service-level agreement for IT services' dated January 2021
- 'IT services self-assessment report and improvement plan' dated October 2023
- 'Library self-assessment report and improvement plan' for 2022-23
- 'Higher education student handbook' for the academic year 2023-24
- a sample of three annual course reports covering academic year 2022-23
- minutes from two course approval events for new Level 6 programmes from academic year 2022-23
- terms of reference and three sets of minutes from meetings of HESEC for the 2023-24 academic year
- two sets of minutes from the college's space management group meetings from the 2023-24 academic year
- 'Quality monitoring report' to ASQA's meeting in February 2024
- the college's analysis of its NSS 2023 results
- a sample of eight risk assessments from the 2023-24 academic year covering areas including classrooms, use of computers, laboratories and subject-specific resources
- a set of minutes from the Equine Working Group meeting from September 2023 to discuss health and safety requirements for their programmes.

215. The assessment team found that access for students to appropriate subject-specific and cross-college physical, digital and social resources was discussed at new course approval events and considered in annual course reports as part of the college's annual monitoring and review process, with areas for review and enhancement identified for each. The assessment team noted that the college provides a library facility for students at each of its campuses, along with extensive electronic library resources in the form of e-books and online journals and articles to provide access to library resources outside of opening hours. The team also found that the college is in the process of investigating further improvements to the accessibility of online library resources through the use of 'read aloud' functionality on publisher platforms. Furthermore, the assessment team noted that the college's student handbook includes an extensive list of contact details to provide students with out-of-hours access to the college's support services and external support agencies. The assessment team

also noted that discussion of equality and diversity issues relating to the use of physical resources was a standing agenda item at the college's space management group meetings. The assessment team found that the college's digital strategy included a range of objectives to ensure safe, accessible and reliable access to digital resources. For example, the strategy sets out the college's objectives to invest in a Google-authenticated e-learning platform and development software tools to create the college's online and blended learning programmes, and to equip all students and apprentices with digital skills for life by providing online safety training as a compulsory element within their tutorial programmes. The latter was regarded as particularly noteworthy by the assessment team. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college provides accessible physical, virtual and social learning environments for students.

216. The assessment team found that detailed risk assessments were completed for learning environments, including classrooms, use of computers and subject-specific resources, and these were reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The team also noted that a meeting of the Equine Working Group was held at the start of the academic year to discuss the health and safety requirements and risk assessments for this high-risk area. Additionally, the assessment team found that the college's 'ICT systems and security strategy 2020-2025' sets out arrangements for technical systems and infrastructure to ensure online safety for students and staff, including cyber security, device security, security gateways and filtering. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college provides physical and digital resources for students that are safe.
217. The assessment team noted that service-level agreements are in place for estates and IT services, which set out the expectations for the delivery of the services that support the maintenance of physical, virtual, and social learning environments for students. Each service area undertakes an annual self-assessment of its service from which a student support area quality improvement plan is produced. For example, the 'Library self-assessment report and improvement plan' reviewed by the team included an action to investigate accessibility of e-books and online articles through read aloud functionality on publisher platforms and in Discovery.
218. The assessment team also noted that the 'Higher education student handbook' included useful guidance and information for students on the physical, virtual and social learning environments available to them, and this included guidance on responsible practice in their use. The assessment team was satisfied that the guidance was implicit in promoting dignity, courtesy and respectful behaviour in the use of physical, virtual and social learning environments, but felt that the college could make this more explicit in the handbook. Nonetheless, the team was satisfied that this weakness did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1.
219. The assessment team noted that issues and developments regarding physical, virtual and social learning environments were discussed at HESEC, including student feedback from CCCs. The assessment team considered that HESEC meeting minutes demonstrated there was appropriate opportunity for discussing student feedback on resources and that this discussion included updates on actions taken on issues raised at previous meetings. The assessment team was assured that the issues raised in the meeting minutes that were reviewed by the team reflected day-to-day operational issues, which did not significantly

impact on the overall safety, accessibility or reliability of resources, and that the college took appropriate action to address any issues raised.

220. The assessment team also noted that feedback from student surveys in the 'Quality monitoring report' to ASQA recorded very positive responses (over 95 per cent) to questions relating to the virtual learning environment, online facilities available from the college library, feeling safe, and the inclusiveness of the college. The assessment team noted that 2023 and 2024 NSS scores for the theme of learning resources were lower (both 75 per cent), but showed a significant improvement from 2022 (70 per cent), reflecting the college's ongoing approach to improving the physical, virtual, and social learning environments for students.
221. The assessment team concluded overall that the college maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments for its programmes that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy, and respect in their use.
222. To test whether robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the college are effective, the assessment team considered an example work-based learning module guide, a sample of two student work placement handbooks, and an example placement handbook for employers.
223. The assessment team noted that the college does not have any students studying by distance learning on its own Level 6 programmes. However, the team did note that all the college's higher education programmes, including its Level 6 programmes, include a work-based learning module in year 2 (Level 5) of the programme. The assessment team therefore considered the effectiveness of learning opportunities for students studying at distance from this perspective.
224. The assessment team noted that placement handbooks are provided for the work-based learning module for each programme, which are tailored to the requirements for that subject discipline. The placement handbooks that were sampled by the team included useful information for students on the expectations for the placement, finding and securing a suitable placement, supervision while on placement, and subject-specific requirements such as fitness to practice. The assessment team also found that the module guide for the work-based learning module included appropriate information for students on the delivery and assessment of the work-based learning module.
225. The assessment team found that the work-based learning module and the associated arrangements for work-based learning and assessment of the module are tailored to the individual programme. The delivery of the work-based learning module includes a combination of taught sessions to support students in their placement, tutorials (for example, meetings with placement coordinators and tutors and visits while on placement), placement hours and independent study. The assessment team noted that students also have access to the college's virtual learning environment for ongoing access to learning and support materials for their course while studying on their work experience.
226. The assessment team also found that students are supported in securing a placement by programme teams, who hold lists of placements regularly used by the college, and by a placement coordinator. The college's academic and pastoral tutors are also available to

provide support for students in preparing for their work experience by, for example, preparing for interviews and writing CVs. Furthermore, support is provided for students while on placement by an appointed placement supervisor in the workplace, with ongoing support from the college through visits by the placement coordinator.

227. The assessment team also noted that the college confirmed to it that for all student work-based learning providers a check of insurance is carried out prior to the placement beginning, and a risk assessment is completed. Students are also provided with an induction process and checklist for their first day, and placement coordinators undertake visits to all student placements to ensure that they are suitable.
228. The above demonstrated to the assessment team's satisfaction that the college provides effective and robust arrangements for the learning opportunities provided to students studying at distance while studying on its work-based learning modules.
229. To test whether every student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development, the assessment team considered the college's 'Higher education tutorial policy', along with examples of tutorial records and SMART targets from the college's student records and student monitoring system (ProMonitor), a sample of two Turnitin¹¹ assessment reports, and an example of the college's proposed basis for presenting student grades through ProMonitor.
230. The assessment team found that the college's 'Higher education tutorial policy' sets out appropriate arrangements for tutorials, which include providing feedback on the progress of students and ensuring all students have opportunities to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression. The policy also provides for students being allocated an academic tutor for each year of their course, and receiving a minimum of 90 minutes of one-to-one academic tutorials per year. Normally, students will have at least two academic tutorials during the academic year. Students are also allocated a pastoral tutor to provide the link between the student and the range of support services in the college. Pastoral tutors will meet each student for a one-to-one introductory tutorial during the autumn term. Further meetings will be at the request of either party. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college has appropriate arrangements in place for tutorials that enable students to monitor their progress and further their academic development.
231. Examples of tutorial records from the college's ProMonitor system reviewed by the assessment team provided opportunity for appropriate discussion of academic skills as outlined in the policy, which demonstrated to the assessment team that the college follows its tutorial policy in enabling students to monitor their progress and further their academic development. For example, the example tutorial records included opportunities to discuss academic skills such as essay planning, referencing and research skills, from which targets were agreed for the student to further their academic development.
232. The assessment team found that, at present, updates on academic progress are provided for students as part of the feedback process through Turnitin. However, the assessment team also noted that the college is currently developing a process for the use of a new

¹¹ Turnitin is the online system that the college uses for checking the originality of student work and providing feedback to students.

comprehensive grade report through ProMonitor, to provide students with updates on their academic progress throughout the year, as well as being able to access their results through Turnitin.

233. Together, the above demonstrated to the assessment team that the college's processes, including those in development, enable students to monitor their progress and further their academic development.

Assessment

234. To test whether the college operates valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought, the assessment team considered the following:

- the college's 2023-24 academic regulations
- associated policies and procedures for the 2023-24 academic year, including the:
 - 'Higher education assessment policy' and 'Higher education assessment guide'
 - 'Higher education recognition of prior learning policy'
 - 'Recognition of recognised prior learning in higher education' procedure
- student assessment documentation for a sample of 11 student assessments at Levels 4, 5 and 6 (including two Level 6 dissertations) from the 2023-24 academic year, alongside assessment briefs, grading criteria rubrics, and feedback to students
- a sample application for recognition of prior learning from the 2023-24 academic year
- a sample of two external examiner reports covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for academic year 2022-23
- a sample of minutes from one Subject Assessment Board, one Course Assessment Board and one Subject/Course (Re)assessment Board covering the academic year 2022-23.

235. The assessment team noted that the college's academic regulations set out the overarching regulatory requirements for assessment and recognition of prior learning, including that assessment must reflect the achievement of individual students in fulfilling the module's intended learning outcomes. The team considered the arrangements for assessment to be clearly set out in detail in the 'Higher education assessment policy', which includes arrangements for setting assessments and providing feedback. This is supported by the college's 'Higher education assessment guide', which provides detailed and useful information for teaching staff on the implementation of the assessment policy, including for different types of assessment.

236. The assessment team also noted that the 'Higher education assessment policy' articulates that all assessment tasks are internally verified by an appropriate member of staff prior to their issue to students, to provide an internal check that the form and content of assessment tasks

and briefs are appropriate, fair and valid, and will effectively assess the achievement of the specified learning outcomes. The assessment team noted that the form used by the college to record the pre-issue verification of assessment briefs employs a useful rating system for each criterion being checked ('1 = criterion met', '2 = criterion met but see notes', and '3 = criterion not met'). The assessment team found that the criteria for checks are comprehensive, including whether the assessment matches the validated module descriptor and whether the assessments reflect the learning outcomes aligned to them.

237. The assessment team found that samples of pre-issue verification of assessment briefs it reviewed had been fully completed with comments, including where a rating of '2 – met but see notes' had been given. The samples were also annotated by the assessor, showing responses to any comments raised requiring an action or amendment before the assessment brief was issued to students.
238. The assessment team found that the college's academic regulations, along with its associated assessment policy and guide, clearly set out detailed and robust guidance to ensure that the college's processes for assessment are valid and reliable.
239. Additionally, the assessment team noted that the amount of credit that can be claimed by a student through recognition of prior learning for each award offered by the college is appropriate and clearly set out in the college's academic regulations. The processes for students to claim recognition of prior learning, and the way such applications are assessed, are clearly set out in the college's 'Higher education recognition of prior learning policy' and 'Recognition of recognised prior learning in higher education' procedure. The assessment team found that the documents set out clear guidance on the processes and clearly articulate that, for recognition of prior learning to be assessed, students need to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of a module, either through certificated or experiential evidence.
240. The assessment team saw evidence in the sample application for recognition of prior learning it reviewed that, in determining the outcome of the claim, the college had undertaken appropriate mapping of the certificated module presented by the applicant against the intended learning outcomes of the module being claimed.
241. As detailed in paragraphs 134 to 148, the assessment team found that assessment briefs that were sampled by the team identified the relevant module learning outcomes being assessed, and clearly set out what the student was required to do to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The assessment briefs also included detailed grading criteria, which identified the threshold standards for different grade bandings, depending on the extent to which the student had met the intended learning outcomes. This demonstrated to the assessment team a clear process for setting assessments, enabling students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the assessment.
242. The assessment team found that in the sample of assessed student work, students had been marked in line with the expectations of the assignment brief and relevant learning outcomes. The assessment team also found that feedback to students included detailed and constructive comments that provided clear guidance to them on the extent to which they had met the intended learning outcomes and included feed-forward comments on how to improve for future assessments. Although the team noted that a copy of the grading criteria was not

always included in the feedback to students for the assessment samples provided, it was clear to the assessment team that the feedback did reflect the grading criteria and the team was satisfied that this omission did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1. The assessment team also found that Level 6 dissertations were double-marked and annotations of the text supplemented feedback to students. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college operates valid and reliable processes for assessment.

243. The assessment team observed that the college's processes for verification and moderation (as detailed in paragraphs 259 to 266), external examining and assessment boards confirmed the validity and reliability of assessments. The assessment team found that the minutes from the college's Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards provided a comprehensive and detailed record for the sign-off and confirmation of the assessment results presented to the boards. The assessment team further found that the external examiner reports it sampled confirmed that processes for assessment, examination and the determination of grades measured student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programmes, and that those processes had been conducted in line with the college's policies and regulations. The team also found that the external examiner reports and the minutes from assessment boards included positive and constructive comments regarding the quality of assessments and feedback.

244. The assessment team concluded that the college operates valid and reliable processes of assessment for its programmes, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

245. To test whether staff and students engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made, the assessment team considered:

- the 'Induction overview 2023-24'
- the 'Higher education assessment policy' and 'Higher education assessment guide'
- a sample of six module guides at Levels 4, 5 and 6 for the 2023-24 academic year
- assessment documentation for a sample of nine student assessments at Levels 4, 5 and 6 from the 2023-24 academic year, including assessment briefs, grading criteria rubrics, and feedback to students
- the 'Quality monitoring report' and 'Higher education annual quality and standards report 2022-23' presented to ASQA in February 2024
- the college's 2023 NSS results analysis and NSS outcomes for 2024.

246. The assessment team found that the college's induction arrangements for students include a useful introduction to the assessment methods used on their programme and the criteria used to determine the basis for assessments. The assessment team also noted that the 'Higher education assessment policy' clearly stated the intention that feedback to students on assessment may include oral and generic feedback to individuals or groups of students, in addition to individual written feedback, and that feedback should provide the students with an

understanding of the way in which their grade was derived and their relative success in meeting the learning outcomes. The assessment team found that this was achieved by the inclusion of detailed guidance and grading criteria in assessment briefs and module guides, which clearly set out the basis on which academic judgements are made for each assessment. Although the team noted, as detailed above, that a copy of the grading criteria was not always included in the feedback to students for the assessment samples provided, the assessment team was satisfied that this omission did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1. This is because it was clear to the assessment team from the sample of assessment documents it reviewed that the feedback given to students on their assessments provided them with a clear rationale for the outcome of the assessment and the grade achieved.

247. Additionally, the assessment team observed that feedback from 2023-24 student surveys in the 'Quality monitoring report' to ASQA recorded very positive responses (greater than 98 per cent) to a question around the extent to which 'my tutors have explained how my work on the course will be assessed'. The assessment team noted that NSS 2023 scores for the question 'how clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work' were lower (66 per cent). The assessment team found that the 'Quality and standards report 2022-23' to ASQA identified this as a specific area of focus and action; for example, it identified that course teams have been working on making the marking criteria more transparent. The assessment team was satisfied that the NSS outcomes for this question did not pose a significant overall risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1, as the NSS outcomes for this question had increased in the 2024 NSS (71 per cent), suggesting that the college's focus on this area may have started to have a positive effect, and the outcomes from the college's own internal 2023-24 survey were significantly higher.

248. The assessment team concluded from the evidence it had seen that staff and students engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made.

249. To test whether students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice, the assessment team considered:

- the 'Induction overview 2023-24'
- the library's induction webpage
- the 'Higher education study skills guide' dated September 2022
- an example course handbook
- the college's generic 'Academic Study Skills, Employability and T-Shaped' module for 2023-24
- a sample of six module guides at Levels 4, 5 and 6 for the 2023-24 academic year.

250. The assessment team noted that useful information and guidance on the necessary skills to develop good academic practice are provided for students at induction, through online resources such as the library webpages and the college's 'Higher education study skills

guide', a course handbook produced for each programme and module guides. The assessment team considered these resources to provide extensive information and guidance on academic skills, such as:

- independent study skills
- using the library and reading
- note taking
- using quotes and sources
- citations and referencing
- websites as sources
- essay planning
- proof reading
- listening to feedback.

251. The assessment team also found that the generic Level 4 'Academic Study Skills, Employability and T-Shaped' module is included as an integral part of all the college's programmes which include Level 4 modules. The module aims to help prepare students effectively for both study and employability through content that includes academic writing and evidencing research, communication skills, the development of transferable skills under the college's T-shaped employability model, and professional development planning. The assessment team considered that the inclusion of this module makes a valuable contribution to the curriculum. Together with the guidance documents outlined above, these demonstrated to the assessment team that students are provided with extensive information and guidance on the necessary skills to develop good academic practice throughout their studies.

252. The assessment team therefore concluded that students on the college's higher education programmes are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice.

253. To test how the college operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice, the assessment team considered:

- the 'Higher education academic misconduct procedure'
- the 'Higher education examinations conduct procedure'
- the college's intranet section on academic misconduct
- assessment documentation for a sample of eleven student assessments at Levels 4, 5 and 6 from the 2023-24 academic year
- a sample of two academic misconduct outcomes communications to students
- an academic appeals and misconduct summary dated January 2023-24 to HEQAS.

254. The assessment team observed that the college's 'Higher education academic misconduct procedure', which is made available for students on the college intranet, clearly sets out appropriate arrangements for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable practice. The team also found that the college has a 'Higher education examinations conduct procedure', which sets out the college's requirements for academic conduct in relation to examinations.
255. The assessment team noted that the 'Higher education academic misconduct procedure' sets out that the college uses text-matching software by Turnitin as a deterrent and an aid to identify plagiarism. This involves electronic copies of assignments being submitted online and checked for similar wording against published sources of information and other students' assignments. This was confirmed to the team by review of the assessment samples, which included samples of student work that had been marked via Turnitin. The assessment team also observed that a guide to the use of Turnitin is made available for students via the virtual learning environment. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college has in place appropriate processes for preventing and identifying unacceptable academic practices.
256. The assessment team found that the college's 'Higher education academic misconduct procedure' includes definitions of different types of unacceptable academic practice, appropriate arrangements for evidence gathering when it is suspected that a student has committed academic misconduct, guidance for students to explain and help prevent plagiarism and poor academic practice, and robust procedures for investigating poor academic practice. These set out a three-stage process, where stage one is an informal, preliminary investigation for cases of less serious poor academic practice; stage two is a formal investigation for more serious cases of academic misconduct; and stage three is a hearing by an academic misconduct panel (in cases where the allegation against the student cannot be concluded at an earlier stage). The procedure outlines that an academic misconduct panel will normally comprise the Dean of Higher Education (in the role of chair), the Head of Higher Education Quality, a subject leader from a different department, and a notetaker. Other attendees may include any witnesses brought by the student, any witnesses brought by the relevant department, including the tutor who raised the allegation, and the student's supporter, if applicable. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college has in place appropriate processes for investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.
257. The assessment team also saw evidence that outcomes from academic misconduct meetings were communicated directly to students by the Head of Higher Education Quality, and that a summary report of academic misconduct cases was provided to HEQAS for consideration. The academic misconduct outcomes letters reviewed by the team confirmed that formal hearings had taken place, in line with the college's policy, and that students were given appropriate opportunity to rectify the issues. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college's academic misconduct procedure is operated appropriately in practice.
258. The assessment team concluded that the college operates appropriate processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice for its higher education programmes.
259. To test whether the college's processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process, the assessment team reviewed the college's 'Higher education assessment policy' and 'Higher

education assessment guide' for the 2023-24 academic year, which include arrangements for the verification (moderation) of assessments. The team also reviewed:

- assessment documentation for a sample of eleven student assessments at Levels 4, 5 and 6 (including two Level 6 dissertations) from the 2023-24 academic year (including assessment verification records)
- a sample of two external examiner reports covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for the academic year 2022-23
- a sample of minutes from one Subject Assessment Board, one Course Assessment Board and one Subject/Course (Re)assessment Board covering the academic year 2022-23.

260. The assessment team noted that the college's assessment and guide clearly set out appropriate arrangements for the marking of assessments, including that a process of standardisation is completed in advance of marking to ensure all members of the course team have a common understanding of the marking standards. The policy and guide also set out that feedback on summative assignments should be provided electronically within 20 working days, that wherever possible and practical the anonymity of students in the marking process should be maintained, and that all independent studies or projects and dissertations at Level 5 and above should be blind double-marked.

261. The assessment team found, through review of the samples of assessed student work, that assessments had been marked consistently in line with the requirements of the policy, including requirements for maintaining the anonymity of students, provision of electronic feedback within 20 working days, and the requirement for all dissertations to be double-blind-marked.

262. The team also found the assessment policy and guide to clearly set out appropriate arrangements for the post-marking verification (moderation) of assessments. The policy articulates that a sample of marked student work (normally 10 per cent to include all first class degrees, borderlines and fails) will be internally verified to agree marks or grades and ensure consistency and fair application of assessment guidelines. Additionally, external examiners should see a range of internally verified assessment tasks (usually including all exam papers) and a range of assessed work.

263. The assessment team also found that the form used by the college to record the post-marking verification (moderation) of assessed student work used the same useful criteria rating system as that used in the pre-issue verification checks ('1 = criterion met', '2 = criterion met but see notes' and '3 = criterion not met'), and the criteria being checked included whether meaningful feedback is provided in relation to the learning outcomes and whether the marking criteria language used clearly relates to the marks or grades awarded. The form also recorded whether the mark was agreed by the internal verifier.

264. The assessment team found that samples of verification forms for assessed student work it reviewed included appropriate samples of marked student work in line with the college's policy, and confirmed the standard of marking and quality of feedback to students. This confirmed to the assessment team that the college's internal procedures for the verification (moderation) of assessments were consistently followed in practice.

265. The assessment team judged that the external examiner reports it sampled confirm that processes for assessment, examination and the determination of grades measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programmes, and that those processes have been conducted in line with the college's policies and regulations. The team also found that the external examiner reports and the minutes from assessment boards included positive and constructive comments regarding the quality of assessments and feedback.
266. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college's processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks for its programmes are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.

External examining

267. To test whether the college makes scrupulous use of external examiners, including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work, the assessment team reviewed the college's guidance and report template for external examiners, and a sample of two external examiner reports covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for the academic year 2022-23. The assessment team also reviewed a sample of minutes from one Subject Assessment Board, one Course Assessment Board and one Subject/Course (Re)assessment Board covering the academic year 2022-23.
268. The assessment team found that the college's guidance outlines appropriate arrangements for the role of external examiners in providing external oversight of the college's higher education provision, facilitated by a range of activities including visits to the college, meetings with staff and students, review of programme documentation, exam papers, assessment briefs, assessed student work and membership of assessment boards. External examiners produce an annual report on the programmes for which they are responsible. These reports include a review of the activities they have undertaken during the year and a discussion of any issues or recommendations to improve the provision, as well as areas of good practice. The assessment team also observed that external examiner reports are shared with students through the virtual learning environment.
269. The assessment team found that external examiners confirmed in their annual reports they had been provided with a full range of activities by the college to enable them to fulfil their role. These included meetings with course teams to discuss course developments and changes, meetings with students to discuss their experience on the programmes, sampling of the modules and assessments that make up the programmes, and attendance at assessment boards.
270. The assessment team found that external examiner reports provided appropriate constructive and valuable feedback from their review of assessment tasks and of assessed student work. The external examiner reports reviewed by the team confirmed that the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of grades measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programmes, and that those processes have been conducted in line with the college's policies and regulations.
271. The assessment team noted that the external examiner reports sampled by the team did not include any issues or recommendations that related to the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work. Furthermore, external examiners highlighted these as areas of

good practice. The assessment team also found that the minutes from Subject Assessment Boards and Course Assessment Boards included positive and constructive comments from external examiners who were present, particularly in relation to assessment and moderation processes.

272. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college made scrupulous use of external examiners in its assessment processes, including the moderation of assessed student work.

273. To test whether the college gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiner reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations, the assessment team considered:

- the college's guidance and report template for external examiners
- a sample of two external examiner reports and responses from the college covering the college's own Level 6 programmes for the academic year 2022-23
- a sample of three annual course reports from the academic year 2022-23
- three sets of minutes from subject quality review and monitoring meetings held in academic year 2023-24
- three subject area quality improvement plans for 2023-24
- the 'Review of 2022-23 external examiner reports' document
- the minutes of the meeting of HEQAS on 22 January 2024.

274. The assessment team found that the college's guidance for external examiners outlined appropriate arrangements for the monitoring of external examiner reports through the college's quality assurance processes. The course teams incorporate the external examiner report into their annual course report and quality improvement plan and respond to any comments and concerns. The course team's response is forwarded to the external examiner following annual course monitoring in the autumn term. The guidance also outlines that areas of good practice and any quality issues identified in external examiner reports are reported to HEQAS.

275. The assessment team observed that the college's template for external examiner reports contains a useful section for the college to provide a response to any areas of good practice or issues identified by the external examiner, although the team noted that this was not completed for the external examiner reports that were sampled. Nonetheless, the assessment team was satisfied that this did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1, as the team found that the college provided a separate formal response to issues raised by external examiners in December of the academic year, following the college's annual monitoring cycle. Additionally, external examiner reports confirmed that they had received a response from issues raised in the previous external examiner report. The external examiners noted that the response was appropriate, the comments from the previous report had been fully addressed, and they had confidence in the course team and their capacity to respond appropriately to recommendations and actions identified. This

demonstrated to the assessment team that the college provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.

276. The assessment team found that external examiner reports are reviewed by course teams and key themes and recommendations from external examiner reports feed into the evidence base for annual course reports. Examples of course reports that were reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that these documents included a summary of comments from external examiners by course teams, and that actions arising from issues raised in external examiner reports were taken forward in the quality improvement plans for that course. The team also found that minutes from subject quality review and monitoring meetings included updates from course teams on progress with actions from external examiner reports.
277. Furthermore, the college produces a quality assurance report on external examiners which includes a summary of key strengths and areas for development taken from external examiner reports across its higher education provision. The assessment team saw evidence that this was considered by and discussed at HEQAS.
278. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports for its programmes, and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.

Academic appeals and student complaints

279. To test whether the college has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience, and whether these procedures are fair, accessible, timely and enable enhancement, the assessment team considered:

- the 'Higher education complaints procedure' dated 29 November 2023
- the 'Higher education academic appeal procedure' dated 4 March 2024
- the college's academic misconduct intranet page
- terms of reference and three sets of minutes from meetings of HESEC for the 2023-24 academic year
- three sets of minutes from the college's HEQAS for the 2023-24 academic year
- the 'Annual complaints, comments and compliments report 2022-23' provided to ASQA's meeting in October 2023
- the 'Higher education annual quality and standards report 2022-23' provided to ASQA's meeting in February 2024
- a summary of complaints dated 9 May 2024 provided to HESEC
- an example of a complaint from March 2023.

280. The assessment team noted that both the 'Higher education complaints procedure' and 'Academic appeal procedure' set out appropriate arrangements for a three-stage process for handling complaints and appeals, where stage one is informal early resolution; stage two is for formal complaints and appeals; and stage three is for review and appeals against complaints outcomes, or academic appeals hearings. The assessment team considered both procedures to be timely, because they identify clear timescales for handling complaints and academic appeals, including the expectation to complete the processing of a formal complaint or appeal and associated reviews within 90 calendar days.
281. The assessment team found that the procedures clearly set out appropriate grounds for complaints and academic appeals, as well as circumstances which do not fall under the grounds for complaints. For complaints, these relate primarily to academic matters; in the assessment team's view, this provides appropriate differentiation for areas which are dealt with under the college's other procedures for student discipline, academic misconduct, academic appeals and fitness to practice. For academic appeals, circumstances which do not fall under the grounds for appeal include appeals relating to academic judgement.
282. The college's complaints and academic appeals procedures also clearly set out useful arrangements for support for students making a complaint, including support from pastoral tutors, members of the welfare or inclusion teams, and members of the students' union. The complaints procedure also provides the opportunity for students to be accompanied by a representative for support at any informal or formal meetings arranged to discuss the complaint. Additionally, the complaints and appeals procedures clearly set out the expectations for behaviour from both staff and students during the complaints and academic appeals processes, to ensure that complaints and academic appeals are dealt with courteously and respectfully. The assessment team also noted that both the complaints and academic appeals procedures are made available to students on the college intranet. These observations demonstrated to the assessment team that the college's procedures for complaints and academic appeals are both fair and accessible.
283. The assessment team found that HESEC, which includes a student member, includes a standing agenda item on updates and outcomes from higher education complaints, providing opportunities for appropriate oversight and discussion of complaints by this body. The assessment team also observed that minutes from meetings included examples of any actions taken following complaints to enhance provision or update policies and procedures.
284. The assessment team further noted that an annual report on complaints is provided to ASQA, which ensures there is appropriate oversight from senior staff. The team found that reports that were reviewed by the team included appropriate consideration of the 16 higher education complaints that had been raised during the academic year. Furthermore, the assessment team saw useful evidence where investigations and outcomes for individual complaints had led to enhancement, with one complaint outcome noting that the system had been improved and the college had provided staff training to avoid similar complaints re-occurring in the future.
285. The assessment team found that HEQAS includes a standing agenda item on updates and outcomes from higher education academic appeals, providing opportunity for appropriate oversight and discussion of academic appeals. For example, outcomes from three academic

appeals were reported to the September 2023 meeting of this subcommittee, one of which was due to severe extenuating circumstances which were not previously reported.

286. The assessment team concluded that the college has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience for its higher education programmes, and that these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

287. To test that appropriate action is taken following an appeal or complaint, the assessment team considered:

- an example of a complaint from March 2023
- an example of an academic appeal from October 2022
- an example of an admissions appeal from July 2023
- the college's 'Admissions policy' dated 6 September 2023
- its 'Higher education complaints procedure' dated 29 November 2023
- its 'Higher education academic appeal procedure' dated 4 March 2024.

288. The example complaints that were provided to the assessment team as evidence resulted in positive outcomes for the students. The assessment team found that both complaints were considered and responded to directly, without the need for a more detailed investigation or formal panel hearing. The team also found that the outcomes of the complaints were appropriate, confirmation of outcomes was provided for students within the college's stated timelines, and prompt follow-up was provided to students for any further correspondence regarding the complaints. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college takes appropriate action following student complaints.

289. One of the examples of complaints that was provided as evidence related to an admissions appeal, and the assessment team noted that the 'Admissions policy' confirms that students can appeal against admissions decisions using the college's complaints procedure. However, the team also noted that the college's complaints procedure only applied to current enrolled students and the team felt that this could provide conflicting information for students.

290. Additionally, the assessment team noted that, although both complaints were made in writing by students, which are dealt with under stage 2 (formal complaint) of the procedure, this was not made clear to the students. In the case of the complaint regarding the admissions appeal there was some confusion regarding the initial processing of the complaint, although this related to confusion in the communications between the student and customer services team, rather than any inaccuracy in the procedure. Additionally, the evidence lacked detailed documentation of how the college's procedure for formal complaints had been followed. Although in these instances both complaints were resolved positively, a lack of detailed evidence documenting that the college's procedure had been followed could potentially be a concern for complaints with less positive outcomes, which might be taken further by students. The assessment team was satisfied that these concerns and that identified in paragraph 289 did not pose a significant risk to the college meeting the requirements of criterion B3.1. This is

because the content of the policy meets the requirements of the criterion and the concerns did not impact on the application of the policy, which resulted in appropriate and positive outcomes in each case. However, the team felt that these were areas that the college could review and clarify to ensure that it is robust in its communications with applicants and current students.

291. The college confirmed to the assessment team that there had been no formal academic appeals for its own degree programmes since the college was awarded Bachelors' DAPs. However, to demonstrate how the process works in practice, the college provided evidence of an academic appeal which was conducted by the college for a programme that is validated by its university partner. The assessment team found that the college provided a timely and appropriate response and investigation into the appeal, which was undertaken by the Dean of Higher Education. This included an initial check to determine the eligibility of the appeal, an appeal hearing where the student was able to present their case, and formal confirmation of the outcome of the appeal to the student. The team found that the student was provided with clear and courteous communication regarding the progress and outcome of their appeal, and the appeal was conducted in an appropriate and timely manner, as detailed in the appeals procedure.
292. This demonstrated to the assessment team that the college takes appropriate action following an academic appeal.

Conclusions

293. The assessment team concluded that the college's arrangements for the design and approval of programmes under its own Bachelors' DAPs are appropriate and effective, with clear allocation of responsibilities, use of external expertise, guidance for staff, and consideration of learning support services.
294. The assessment team also concluded that the college articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching for its programmes, which includes appropriate physical, virtual and social learning environments, robust arrangements for students studying at a distance from the college, and appropriate arrangements that enable students to monitor their progress.
295. The assessment documents reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that the college operates valid and reliable processes for assessment, including recognition of prior learning, which enabled a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements were made and appropriate opportunities for students to develop skills that reflect good academic practice. The college's assessment procedures were supported by clear and appropriate processes for the marking and moderation of student work, and for preventing and investigating unacceptable academic practice.
296. The assessment team also concluded that the college makes scrupulous use of external examiners in the moderation of assessment tasks and marked student work for its programmes, and that the college gives full and serious consideration to comments and recommendations made by external examiners.
297. Through scrutiny of procedures and examples of complaints and academic appeals, the assessment team concluded that the college has effective procedures for handling complaints

and academic appeals, which are fair, accessible and timely, and that appropriate action is taken following a complaint or academic appeal.

298. The assessment team concluded that the college meets criterion B3, and it has exercised its DAPs securely over the previous three years.

Assessment of DAPs criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff

Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff

Advice to the OfS

299. The assessment team's view is that the college meets the requirements for criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff.
300. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows, in summary, that the provider has adequate numbers of staff with relevant qualifications and the requisite academic, professional and/or vocational expertise to deliver effectively its curriculum offer to Level 6. Opportunities are provided, and availed of, for staff to develop their knowledge and practice.
301. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion C1.1

C1.1: An organisation granted powers to award degrees assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students. Everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level(s) and subject(s) of the qualifications being awarded.

Advice to the OfS

302. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion C1.1 because it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students, and that all involved in teaching or supporting learning are appropriately qualified, supported and developed.
303. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence. This shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for C1.1.

Reasoning

304. To provide context, the assessment team began its evaluation of criterion C by considering the college's 'Higher education strategy 2024-28' and its higher education organisational structure. The team noted that the guiding principles of the college's higher education strategy document acknowledge the importance of quality teaching and facilitation of learning to the student academic experience in stating that 'all students, from all backgrounds, should receive a high quality academic experience [and] should be supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education'.
305. The team found that overarching responsibility for the quality of higher education teaching and learning rests with the Dean of Higher Education, who reports directly to the college's Group Principal. The Dean of Higher Education manages provision through the Director of

Apprenticeships and 12 subject leaders who each work with a small team of lecturers and tutors. Academic staff and students are supported by professional services staff in a dedicated Higher Education Quality and Registry Team and in a number of college-wide central services.

306. In evaluating the relevance of learning, teaching and assessment practices and the extent to which these areas are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice and subject-specific and educational scholarship, the assessment team reviewed a selection of module guides and assessment briefs for diverse courses across Levels 4, 5 and 6. The assessment team found these documents demonstrated that within each subject area approaches to teaching and assessment are varied and, where appropriate, designed with the flexibility to accommodate in-person and distance learners. As is now common across the sector, the college uses blended approaches to teaching, with traditional face-to-face sessions supported and augmented by the use of a virtual learning platform. Opportunities are embedded for discussion and interaction between students and between students and staff. The assessment team also found the volume of assessment generally to be manageable and reasonably consistent across modules, and the style of assignments indicate they are designed in line with the FHEQ level descriptors (see paragraphs 105 to 114). The team found evidence of good engagement with learning technologies both in the delivery of learning and assessment and in the provision of student feedback, in keeping with the college's digital strategy.
307. With respect to the currency of teaching and learning, within module guides and assessment briefs, the assessment team found up to date reading lists, engagement with the primary literature, and clear industry links. For example, a Level 4 assessment required students to evaluate roles and responsibilities in veterinary practice in the context of relevant legislation; a Level 5 student presentation addresses statutory and voluntary child health provision; and a Level 6 task is a critical appraisal of a recent research paper including the impact of the research on the animal behaviour industry. These, and other examples, were indicative to the team of contemporary and industry-relevant subject matter. Given the diversity of courses offered by the college, the team sought further confirmation within the sample of recent reports from subject-specialist external examiners. Overall, these reports are very positive and consistent with the view of the assessment team that pedagogical practices at the college are informed by subject-specific and educational scholarship and should enable students to develop a range of generic skills alongside subject knowledge and expertise.
308. The assessment team found evidence of reflection and evaluation of professional practice in the college's annual course reports and quality improvement plans prepared at the end of each teaching cycle. The team noted that annual course reports are particularly detailed documents that bring together a range of quantitative information (such as data on student characteristics, attendance, progression and achievement) and qualitative information (such as student feedback, external examiner reports, staff expertise and scholarship) to evaluate the quality of the student experience in terms of teaching, learning and assessment, employability and work readiness, and personal development. The team also found that students are actively involved through dedicated annual course report staff-student meetings above and beyond in-course feedback forums. Annual course reports identify strengths and areas for improvement or enhancement, with the latter taken forward in quality improvement plans, which track the progress of specific actions.
309. To gauge student perception of the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, the assessment team reviewed NSS results and, although not necessarily a direct measure, also

considered data on continuation rates provided by the college alongside the OfS's publicly available student outcomes data. NSS results show that students are generally complimentary about teaching and learning on their courses. 'Teaching on my course' and 'Learning opportunities' were the highest scoring themes in 2023, at 85.9 and 83.9 per cent satisfaction respectively. These scores have dropped a little in NSS 2024, but in the team's view not excessively or beyond what might be expected of year-on-year variation. While overall continuation rates across the college's higher education provision are healthy based on the OfS's student outcomes data, the college's internal data shows a few programmes with lower rates of continuation. In respect of this internal data, however, the team noted that these programmes generally related to very low numbers of students (such that the outcomes of only one or two students could lead to a very low or very high continuation rate for the programme in question). The team did not verify to what extent the methodology used by the college aligned with the OfS's student outcomes methodology, which showed generally very positive continuation rates at the level of individual subject areas. Furthermore, in the context of criterion C the assessment team could not see any correlation between low continuation on specific courses reported by the college and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff on those programmes. Indeed, the team found that an external examiner on one course with a low continuation rate noted that the course was performing 'at an above-average standard when compared to other courses [they] have had interactions with in the same subject area in the UK'.

310. To evaluate academic and professional expertise, the assessment team considered the profile of staff involved in managing, delivering and facilitating the college's higher education courses by using a sample of job descriptions and CVs, summaries of teaching teams found in annual course reports, the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', and additional relevant information contained in the college's self-assessment narrative.
311. The team found that, collectively, the sample of job descriptions and CVs it reviewed for senior academic staff involved in teaching and leadership roles indicate an appropriate level of academic and management expertise. Within this sample, it was evident to the team that staff meet the essential requirements for their role, as set out in the job descriptions. The 'Higher education course approval procedures' stipulate that staff must be qualified to at least the level they are teaching and ideally a level above, and the team found that this procedure is followed in practice. The team did note that it would be common practice to expect teaching staff to have a qualification at least one level above the level at which they are teaching, or be working towards this, and that therefore the college might raise their expectation. Nonetheless, judging by the sample provided, the team found in practice that the majority of senior teaching staff and subject leaders teaching at Level 6 are qualified to masters' level and would therefore meet this expectation. Some individuals engaged in teaching and research also hold doctoral qualifications. Among the sample, a range of teaching qualifications was evidenced including the Postgraduate Certificate in Education, Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education, Diploma in Education and similar. The team considered this was consistent with the college's policy that all teaching and training staff have on appointment, or obtain within a specified timeframe, a teaching qualification. The team also found that some teaching staff have relevant industry experience.
312. The team referred to annual course reports for three of the college's courses to gain insight into the constitution and expertise of subject teaching teams. Although not considered a major factor in the context of this review, it is notable that teaching teams are small (as few as four to

five individuals). While recognising that student numbers are also low and acknowledging the advantages of small group teaching, the team considered that this naturally limits the diversity of expertise and teaching styles to which students are exposed. That aside, these reports highlight a significant level of industry experience amongst the teaching staff. For example, a financial services practitioner teaches economics to business students, and practising professionals contribute to counselling and psychotherapy courses. The team considered this to be clearly beneficial in bringing real-world relevance and is commendable. Feedback from course validation panels and industry advisers corroborate this view; for example, in relation to one course, the teaching team is described by a panel as 'well-qualified and experienced' and by an industry adviser as 'evidently knowledgeable of the sector'.

313. The assessment team also found that sample job descriptions and CVs provided for some of the college's senior professional services staff evidenced a well-qualified and agile team. The team noted that many are long-standing employees of the college, who have transitioned through various roles, gaining a range of relevant Continued professional development (CPD) qualifications which enable them to support students and staff.
314. To assess active engagement of staff with the pedagogical development of their discipline knowledge, the team considered the college's 'Higher education strategy 2024-2028', its 'Learning and development policy', sample academic CVs, minutes of HETREC and staff conference agendas.
315. The team found from these policy and strategy documents that the college strongly encourages staff to apply for fellowship of Advance HE. The 'Learning and development policy' cites an ambitious target of 80 per cent of substantive staff to have gained fellowship by 2023. The team considered this an effective route to prompt reflection and evaluation of staff's own practice, and to consolidate, and gain recognition for, scholarly work in teaching and learning. The team found evidence of very good uptake of this opportunity: among the nine academic CVs provided, there are four Senior Fellows and two Fellows. Development of Level 6 courses was given by the college as an indicative case study in successful senior fellowship applications. With respect to progress against its target, the college explained to the team that the number of staff with either fellowship or other relevant recognition (such as being accredited by a professional body) currently stands at 70 per cent. The team considered this to be satisfactory given factors such as staff turnover and the ambitious nature of the target.
316. The team reviewed two forums identified by the college as the primary formal internal means of sharing pedagogical knowledge and best practice. The first of these is HETREC, a committee which meets regularly (six times per year). HETREC's remit includes leading academic debate, sharing good practice and monitoring staff engagement with the higher education professional standards framework. The assessment team noted that the pedagogic effectiveness of staff was added as a standing item in January 2024, prompted by this Bachelors' DAPs assessment. The team did not take this to imply the college did not consider this matter previously in practice, but rather that adding it as a standing item formalises the college's approach going forward. As HETREC membership is constituted of senior academic and professional services staff, the team considered what mechanisms are in place to ensure the wider teaching team, including part-time or hourly-paid staff, can and do contribute to the discussion and work of the committee. Specifically, the team explored subject team meetings, and the college provided some examples of recent meetings for one course which, in the

assessment team's view, evidence good practice, documenting attendance and apologies for absence, and covering a range of matters. However, the team found there was also some evidence that such team meetings have not been the norm for all courses to date, and that there has been a reliance on information flowing organically. The team considered this to be a weakness but one that can, if not already, be easily resolved by regular team meetings for all courses which feed into HETREC. It therefore did not impact significantly the assessment team's overall conclusions in relation to this evidence requirement.

317. The second forum for sharing pedagogical knowledge and practice is the biannual higher education staff conference. Based on the sample provided, conference speakers typically are internal to the college. Recent topics have included 'The student expert: how lecturers can develop and utilise specialist expertise in students' and 'Turnitin and AI' in July 2023, and 'NSS planning – how to react to student feedback and embed good practice' in January 2024, which the team considered all relevant to contemporary higher education teaching and learning. The team did note that relatively few staff members have presented at these conferences in the past three years, which questions the level of active participation. The team also noted while conferences in the past (2021-22) have included external contributions from partner universities or others, this has not been the case more recently. The team considered this should be encouraged as a way to share and disseminate knowledge and practice more widely and potentially develop collaborative activity.
318. The above examples, alongside evidence of an early-stage proposal by a subject team to develop a pedagogical project, and the general quality and currency of the programmes of study (see paragraphs 306 to 307), satisfied the team that staff are engaging with the pedagogical development of their discipline knowledge.
319. In evaluating understanding of, and active engagement with, current research and advanced scholarship, the assessment team considered definitive programme specifications, the 'Learning and development policy', the 'Guidelines for staff CPD, scholarly activity and development days', examples of research and advanced scholarship, the 'Higher education curriculum and scholarship annual report' and the college's research strategy, in addition to information such as staff CVs.
320. The team's findings in paragraphs 306 to 307 are relevant here in so far as they present evidence that teaching across the college's programmes is informed by subject and pedagogical knowledge. In the team's view, the development of these programmes to Level 6, which includes a 40-credit capstone project or dissertation and a pre-requisite 20-credit research theory and design module, reflects positively the knowledge and understanding of current disciplinary research and scholarship by the staff involved. So too does their evident tenacity in identifying industry experts and practitioners to contribute to programme development and delivery, and to co-curricular events such as 'Futures Week'. As noted in paragraph 312, relatively low numbers of staff are associated with each subject area. The assessment team found that this may restrict the breadth of subject matter, such that few programmes have optional modules even at Level 6. Nonetheless, the programmes are judged by subject-specialist external examiners to meet sector standards (see paragraph 307) and on that basis and alongside the evidence considered above, the team was satisfied overall that teaching is sufficiently informed by current research and scholarship.

321. The assessment team found it difficult to get a clear picture of active engagement with research and advanced scholarship (where defined as the creation, or novel interpretation or application, of knowledge, i.e. an activity that goes beyond accessing information) and how the college judges whether it is commensurate with the subject and level of qualification. The college's 'Learning and development policy' sets out aims including to support 30 per cent of substantive higher education staff to undertake research worthy of publication by 2023. The 'Guidelines for staff CPD, scholarly activity and development days' state the expectation that 'staff teaching at Level 4-6 (honours level) are expected to be involved in some form of research or be able to demonstrate high-level subject updating that is at the forefront of their subject or discipline'. The team found that this document provides a useful list of types or examples of scholarly activity; however, it does not distinguish what activity is considered to be commensurate with Level 6 as opposed to Levels 4 and 5 teaching or consider possible subject-level differences. The team explored with the college whether there is any granularity in these guidelines in this respect. In particular, and mindful that this is a college setting where the majority of staff are employed in teaching rather than teaching/research roles, the team was interested to establish whether subject-specific advanced scholarship or research is promoted to support and enhance Level 6 teaching. The college responded that it does not seek to distinguish the scholarly expectations of staff teaching at different degree levels but that appropriate scholarship and CPD are discussed and agreed with individuals as part of annual reviews. In practice, the team found that relatively few staff are actively engaging with advanced scholarship or research, as further discussed below (paragraphs 322 to 324).
322. The team found evidence that while individual staff record their personal CPD and scholarly activities (see paragraphs 331 to 333), the college does not appear to maintain a readily accessible internal database of outputs. For example, these could be internal or external publications, creative works, enterprise achievements, conference presentations, seminars or other verifiable forms. Firstly, the team considers that the lack of such a record is not consistent with the college's definition of scholarly activity or research as an activity which 'must demonstrate positive impact across a discipline, the college or sector of further or higher education' and which 'must be shared with peers and across [the college] and where possible beyond'. Secondly, it makes it difficult for the college to evidence any relevant outputs which are not in the public domain.
323. From the available evidence, the team found that research and advanced scholarship is largely confined to land- and animal-based subjects. This is clearly evidenced by conventional peer-reviewed publications, short reports, conference presentations and similar. There is also some evidence of work in progress in other subject areas, such as engineering. However, the team did not find evidence of advanced subject-specific scholarship or research, or concrete plans to develop this, across the breadth of the college's current educational provision. The team found that the college's research strategy identifies land-based science and engineering as priority areas. It does not contain discussion of other subject areas or present a strategy for diversifying the research and advanced scholarship portfolio to encompass these.
324. In summary, the team concluded there is evidence that teaching across subject areas is informed by understanding of research and professional practice. It was evident to the team that students taking selected degree courses benefit from exposure to an active research and advanced scholarship culture. However, it was not evident that there is active engagement with advanced scholarship or research (commensurate with subject and level) across the

range of degree subjects offered by the college. Therefore, the team concluded that some but not all elements of this evidence requirement are met. The team recommends that the college be advised to develop a comprehensive advanced scholarship and research strategy that takes account of the subject diversity of its courses, and that it develops internal mechanisms (for example, a database) for collating and disseminating the outputs of advanced scholarly activity and research.

325. To assess opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice, the team reviewed the college's 'Learning and development policy', and its procedures for peer observation of teaching and for objective-setting and performance reviews.
326. The team found that the 'Learning and development policy' requires all staff participate in peer observation of teaching at least once over the academic year. Observers are experienced practitioners and members of a dedicated Teaching and Learning Improvement sub-team with a specific remit to enhance quality through observation and developmental feedback, as well as to provide general mentorship. Observations are guided by a comprehensive set of criteria and identify any individual training needs and recommended CPD. Teaching and Learning Improvement team members each prepare an annual report which summarises their activities (for example, lesson observations, coaching and training sessions) and their findings. The team considered the sample report provided to be exemplary, drawing together observations from 16 lesson observations and audits of 29 subject or module guides, among other coaching and training activities. It highlights collective strengths and areas for improvement which can, in turn, inform future group CPD, staff conference themes and other development activities.
327. The team found that objective setting and performance reviews, arranged annually by line managers, provide individuals with the opportunity to reflect on their work in relation to the college's 'Corporate plan 2023-2028'. Agreed objectives, which are linked to relevant key performance indicators, and associated personal development plans are logged on a Human Resources (HR) online system for future reference and review.
328. The team also found that additional opportunities for self- and group reflection and evaluation include preparation of portfolios for teaching qualifications and fellowship of Advance HE (see paragraphs 315 and 334), participation in staff conferences (paragraph 317) and preparation of annual course reports and quality improvement plans (paragraph 308).
329. Based on the evidence it reviewed, the assessment team was satisfied that the college offers appropriate opportunities for staff, individually and collectively, to reflect upon and evaluate their learning, teaching and assessment practice, and that these opportunities are taken up by staff.
330. To identify development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their practice and scholarship, the team referred to:
- the 'Learning and development policy'
 - the 'Higher education teaching and learning strategy'
 - the 'HR strategy 2023-2028'

- an indicative list of CPD and screenshot of the college's e-learning platform
- various CPD guides for staff
- a spreadsheet of CPD hours approved in recent years.

331. The 'Learning and development policy' sets out the institutional commitment to provide professional development support and the responsibility of staff to engage with opportunities. The 'Higher education teaching and learning strategy' and 'HR strategy 2023-2028' briefly address continuing professional development. From these documents, the team found that training needs are identified on appointment and subsequently through performance reviews. In the case of teaching staff, teaching observations and mentorship from the Teaching and Learning Improvement team may also lead to recommendations for CPD. Essential general training (such as on equality and diversity, health and safety and data protection) or role-specific training (such as teaching and work-based learning) are logged and monitored through an HR online system, with possible sanctions up to disciplinary proceedings in the event of non-compliance. The team saw no evidence of failure of staff to comply with the requirements and clear evidence from sample CVs (paragraphs 311 and 313) that staff are recording their personal CPD and scholarly activities.
332. In terms of time allocated to professional development, the team noted that full-time staff are expected to complete a minimum of 30 hours per year, and pro rata-ed to a minimum of six hours for those on fractional contracts. Applications or requests for additional time for development or scholarly activities may be made; for example, up to five days per year for academic staff. Selected examples and a list of approved CPD hours over the past few years provided evidence that this policy is working to support staff to engage in a range of CPD and scholarly activities, including subject updating, applying for fellowship of Advance HE, attendance at internal and external conferences and participation in training programmes. The team noted that only a few individuals had been supported to undertake advanced scholarship or research (see paragraphs 323 to 324 for further discussion on this point).
333. An indicative list of internal opportunities and a screen shot of the college's e-learning platform evidenced to the assessment team a good range of CPD courses. Guides to CPD for staff promote participation and logging of activities. In the context of teaching, all staff are required to have, or to gain within three years of appointment, a teaching qualification. Staff without an appropriate qualification employed on academic contracts of greater than 50 per cent FTE are offered the Diploma in Education and Training, while those on contracts of less than 50 per cent FTE are offered an Award in Education and Training. Academic staff who only teach on higher education (and not further education) courses may alternatively gain fellowship of Advance HE. In addition to the required formal qualification, the college offers a course called 'Higher Teaching, Higher Practice' to introduce lecturers to teaching at higher levels. A narrative summary indicates that this includes an introduction to college systems (such as Google Classroom, module guides and relevant academic policies) and taught sessions covering topics such as effective teaching practice, contrasting learning theories and assessment strategies. This is followed by lesson observation (see paragraph 326), and completion of a reflective journal evaluating practice and areas for further development. The college offers leadership and management development programmes to support talent management and succession planning, among other courses. General training (for example, on health and safety) and themed modules (such as mental health awareness) can be

accessed online or face-to-face, depending on demand. Based on the evidence provided, the team's view is that the teaching training and wider CPD courses offered are adequate and there is clear evidence of active engagement with such opportunities in the sample of staff CVs reviewed (paragraphs 311 and 313).

334. As outlined elsewhere in this report (paragraph 315), the college particularly promotes fellowship of Advance HE as a CPD goal for those who have yet to gain recognition through this route. The assessment team found there are various sources of support for staff developing their application portfolios; for example, staff conferences in recent years have included presentations on 'Higher teaching, higher practice' and on applying for fellowship of Advance HE. One-on-one mentorship is also available from Teaching and Learning Improvement Team members (see paragraph 326). The numbers of Fellows and Senior Fellows among the college's higher education staff indicated to the team that this support is effective.
335. The team concluded that development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their subject and pedagogical knowledge and professional practice are sufficient, but that more thought needs to be given to the development of advanced scholarship or research.
336. In considering opportunities to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design, and engagement with the activities of other higher education providers (through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, or external reviewers), the assessment team considered course approval documentation, module guides and assessment briefs for courses delivered under the college's own DAPs. In considering engagement with the activities of other higher education providers, the team reviewed staff CVs.
337. Approval documentation for the BA (Hons) Media Content Creation and the BSc (Hons) Sustainable Horticulture Technology (Agritech) programmes, both dating to mid-2023, evidenced to the team a robust process that involved the course team (subject leaders, lecturers, Dean or Professorial Head), Group Deputy Principal, Head of the Higher Education Quality Team, external and internal academics, an industry expert and a student representative. Consideration was given in the documents to all aspects ranging from the business case (approved in advanced) to the taught content, assessment methods and resources. The assessment team's view is that involvement in such a process provides an appropriate learning opportunity for less experienced staff and an opportunity to develop or consolidate knowledge and expertise for those with prior experience.
338. All teaching staff are responsible for the preparation of module guides and assessment briefs. The quality of these documents demonstrated to the assessment team's satisfaction a very good level of engagement with the design of teaching, learning and assessment materials at a modular level. The documents are audited by a member of the Teaching and Learning Improvement Team, which provides quality assurance and, where appropriate, opportunity for staff to develop their knowledge and practice in response to feedback.
339. From the sample of academic staff CVs, it was evident to the team that a number of individuals are actively engaging with the activities of other organisations providing higher education and with other relevant bodies. For example, staff members are engaged as

external examiners, members of professional bodies, journal senior editor, peer reviewers and members of the Association of Colleges and the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges.

340. To evaluate expertise in providing feedback on assessment which is timely, constructive and developmental, the assessment team reviewed a sample of assessment briefs and assessment feedback for Level 4, 5 and 6 modules, as well as internal verification documents for each assessment and for the feedback or grade. Collectively, these evidenced to the assessment team a thorough process that complies with the college's 'Higher education assessment policy'. The team considered the assessment briefs to be appropriately detailed, setting out the task and the intended learning outcomes, including transferable skills gained, and providing contextualised marking criteria. Grades are referenced to these criteria and the feedback includes strengths and limitations in the given assignment and guidance on how students can improve, and which students are encouraged to address in future work. Overall, the team considered the assessment and feedback process to be very good, despite the inconsistencies noted in practice in relation to criterion B3 (see paragraph 242). The team noted that external examiners, in the sample of reports made available to the team, have likewise commented positively on assessment feedback.
341. The team noted that to further enhance its practice in assessment feedback, the college is working towards embedding assessment rubrics. In this vein, 'Good practice on rubrics', for example, was a discussion topic at the July 2023 staff conference.
342. The college's submission did not include data on turnaround of feedback on student work, i.e. the percentage of all work within an academic year returned within 20 days, which is the time period stipulated in the college's 'Higher education assessment policy'. It was not therefore possible for the assessment team to comment directly on timeliness of feedback. NSS 2023 scores are below benchmark for a number of the criteria relating to assessment, including timely return, clarity of marking criteria and the value of feedback in improving work. However, these specific questions have all shown an improvement in NSS 2024 and this theme has improved overall. On the basis of these improvements and the assessment team's review of the college's processes in practice, the team was of the view that assessment and feedback practices are generally robust and staff are working effectively to enhance practice and student satisfaction in this area.
343. To address whether the college has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and the appropriate staff-to-student ratios, the team reviewed the college's 'HR strategy 2023-2028', the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', sample minutes from course approval panel meetings, an annual curriculum planning document, three iterations of a staff resourcing document, and a staff list showing full-time equivalent worked.
344. The 'HR strategy 2023-2028' makes reference to the use of an integrated staff utilisation policy to meet strategic objectives and inform organisational design. The college explained this policy as an annual key performance indicator of staff utilisation of greater than 95 per cent, applicable to its further and higher education provision. Annual target hours for a full-time member of teaching staff are 864 (pro rata for fractional contracts), which equates to approximately 24 hours per week over the teaching terms. The assessment team found it difficult to see how this policy has been implemented and monitored in practice to assure appropriate staff numbers and expertise across diverse subjects, and to manage risks pre-

emptively. The college's course approval procedures specify a requirement to consider teaching staff resource in detail but, at this early stage, staff appointments may still be necessary in some cases. The annual curriculum planning document focuses on costs and income. It was evident to the team, both from the minutes of a January 2024 HETREC meeting and in the college's response to the team's queries that the staff resourcing spreadsheet is a relatively new document, actioned in anticipation of the current Bachelors' DAPs review, and is not yet a tried and tested tool. The college explained to the assessment team that staff resourcing matters have generally been managed through regular discussions and meetings between the Dean of Higher Education, subject leaders and HR, including during curriculum planning, i.e. that matters have been, in part, managed organically to date. As the points below indicate (paragraphs 345 to 346), the team has found no evidence to suggest that this approach has not been effective in practice. The team's view is that a more formalised and fully documented process would create a more rigorous process going forward, but the absence of an established formal process at this time does not lead the team to consider the college does not satisfy the criterion.

345. The team found that the college employs a total of around 70 higher education teaching staff, of whom approximately 22 (31 per cent) are full-time and 48 (69 per cent) are working on a fractional or hourly-paid basis. Working patterns for those on fractional or hourly-paid contracts vary; for example, some staff teach across both higher and further education, while others have substantive positions external to the college. The student-to-staff ratio, as full person equivalent, is given by the college as 14.7:1, calculated as 531 students divided by 36 full-time equivalent teaching staff for the 2022-23 academic year. The assessment team considered this to be well within the range found across the sector (ten to 22 students per staff member according to the latest Complete University Guide League Tables). The team was therefore satisfied that the college has appropriate student-to-staff ratios.
346. To consider whether there is sufficient subject expertise to deliver securely all courses, the team looked at the constitution of teaching teams on each course. This highlighted some possible risks, which were explored further with the college. Specifically, the team found that the initial versions of the staff resourcing document provided by the college showed, for a number of programmes, only a single member of staff as available or able to supervise the Level 6 capstone project or dissertation and teach other core modules at Levels 5 and 6. It was not evident to the team what, if any, contingency was in place in the event of an unplanned absence of key staff. The team considered this to be particularly important in a college setting where, unlike in a traditional university, there may be less scope to fill gaps from among existing staff given teaching loads may already be high, not all staff may be qualified to teach across degree levels, and there are no doctoral or postdoctoral researchers who could contribute to teaching. In response to these concerns, the college explained that it has, or could find, contingency within its higher and further education teams or through increasing fractional contracts, and submitted a revised resourcing document to the team reflecting this approach. This, together with positive comments from subject-specific external examiners and advisers on teaching teams noted elsewhere in this report (paragraph 312), satisfied the assessment team that the college does have sufficient numbers of staff with the appropriate skills and expertise to deliver its programmes of study.
347. Finally, to assess whether the college has appropriate staff recruitment practices, the team reviewed the college's 'Recruitment and selection guidance and procedures', 'Shortlisting

form' and a sample of job descriptions. The team found the college's guidance and procedures document comprehensively describes the procedures for recruiting staff from the initial job analysis, through advertising, shortlisting and interviewing to offer and appointment. It includes helpful flow charts outlining the process for various categories of staff including full employees, visiting lecturers, volunteers, work experience and self-employed individuals and agency workers. On the issue of equality and diversity, the guidance notes the college holds the 'Positive about disabled people' award and commits to interviewing all candidates who meet the essential criteria. Furthermore, recruiters, interviewers and candidates are required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest. All appropriate pre-employment checks, such as a person's eligibility to work in the UK and Disclosure and Barring Service are carried out. The 'Shortlisting form' ensures candidates are selected against the criteria set out in the job description. These documents, alongside its review of sample job descriptions, satisfied the assessment team that selection and recruitment practices are clearly documented and designed to ensure fairness.

Conclusions

348. The assessment team concluded that teaching and the facilitation of learning at the college is undertaken by adequate numbers of staff with relevant academic, professional and vocational expertise, and with a commitment to enable students to develop as independent learners.
349. The team concluded that opportunities for reflection and evaluation of current practice and for continuing professional development are provided, and that such opportunities are taken up by staff to maintain the relevance and currency of their subject-specific, pedagogical or professional knowledge and practice.
350. The assessment team judged that the college's courses are industry-informed at the level of design and delivery, and that students benefit from exposure to industry experts and practising professionals. The team noted a range of scholarly activity amongst the teaching staff. It did not find evidence of active engagement with discipline-specific advanced scholarship or research across the breadth of the college's educational provision, although noted pockets of activity in some subjects.
351. In the course of its analysis of this criterion, the team identified weaknesses in some areas and has offered recommendations. While there were some reservations, particularly in relation to active engagement in scholarly activity, the team concluded there were sufficient positive elements to meet the criterion.

Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students

Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement

Advice to the OfS

352. The assessment team's view is that the college meets the requirements for criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement.

353. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence that shows in summary that the college has mechanisms in place, including specialist support services, to support and develop students beyond the arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment addressed in criterion B3.

354. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Criterion D1.1

D1.1: Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Advice to the OfS

355. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion D1.1 because there is evidence that shows, in summary, that the provider has a teaching and learning infrastructure in place – including welfare and counselling, library, careers and IT – to support students, both as a cohort and individually, to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

356. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for D1.1.

Reasoning

357. To assess whether the college takes a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students, the team reviewed:

- the 'Corporate plan 2023-2028'
- 'Higher education prospectus'
- 'Higher education strategy 2024-2028'
- 'Admissions policy'
- 'Higher education learning and teaching policy'

- 'Higher education quality and enhancement policy'
- a number of other documents pertaining to diversity, inclusion and student experience.

358. The team was satisfied from the evidence provided that publicly available documents, such as the prospectus, are prepared, edited and approved with a view to ensuring accuracy. Engagement with Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) regulations in general, and specifically in preparing the prospectus, is evidenced by the college's CMA panel meeting minutes. The team noted that while the majority of documents on the college's website are in date, a few have older dates such as the 'Higher education strategy 2019-23' and 'Higher education terms and conditions 2022'. While the assessment team did not judge this to impact their overall assessment, the college is advised to review the currency of these documents.

359. The team noted that the college's corporate plan identifies 'student success' as one of the college's six priorities, with the goal being 'to deliver a dynamic and responsive curriculum designed to maximise student outcomes and economic impact'. It was evident to the assessment team from the prospectus that the college actively markets itself to attract students from all backgrounds. This document outlines academic, pastoral and careers support and the college's inclusive learning environment, alongside information about the courses offered, student facilities and accommodation. Policy and strategy documents, including the 'Admissions policy', 'Higher education strategy 2024-2028', 'Learning and teaching policy', 'Quality and enhancement policy' and 'Fitness to study policy' commit to enabling all students to achieve their potential.

360. The assessment team found clear evidence that the college has appropriate mechanisms in place to monitor the diversity of its student body with a view to ensuring equality of opportunity. HEAPC (whose members include the Dean of Higher Education, Head of Higher Education Quality, Higher Education Inclusion Coordinator, Head of Student Welfare and Safeguarding, Head of Careers and Information, and a marketing representative) is responsible for overseeing the development of the college's access and participation plan and evaluating its impact. To inform its activities, HEAPC receives and analyses various data sets. Examples of this data given as evidence by the provider include 'Student characteristics of all students' and 'Higher education student equality and diversity data' reports. The former report tracks data on gender, age, ethnicity, participation of local areas (POLAR) and learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (LLDD) by subject area, and analyses it against set targets. The latter report, which forms part of the college's 'Annual report on equality and diversity', considers numbers of students with declared LLDD and their outcomes by both subject area and college campus. ASQA considers both access and participation and equality and diversity as part of its monitoring of key performance indicators.

361. HESEC is the college's working committee for enabling student development and achievement, with some matters – such as student induction and library – also considered by HETREC. Staff members of HESEC include the Dean of Higher Education (as chair), Heads of Higher Education Quality and Student Welfare and Safeguarding, Customer Services and Residential Managers, and the Student Engagement Officer. The student voice is represented by the student envoy(s) and (if also a higher education student) the sabbatical students' union president. The committee meets up to five times per year to consider matters pertaining to student experience. It discusses and plans induction (paragraphs 364 to 367) and enhancement activities, such as 'Futures Week' and student conferences (paragraph 389).

Feedback from individual students, CCCs and student surveys is considered by HESEC, and responses and actions are communicated to students, as evidenced to the assessment team through its review of an example 'You said, we did' document.

362. Evidence seen by the assessment team of the positive impact of the college's approach to managing student experience include the progressive attainment of access and participation targets, improvement in completion rates for students declaring LLDD, student appreciation of co-curricular enhancement activities and strong graduate outcomes, some of which are explained further in other sections of this report.
363. The assessment team found that students' perceptions of their experience, however, presents a mixed picture. For example, NSS 2023 scores are close to benchmark for questions such as 'How well communicated was information about mental wellbeing support services' and 'To what extent did you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course'. Scores are below benchmark for 'How clear is it that students' feedback is acted upon' and 'How easy is it to access subject-specific resources (for example, equipment, facilities, software) when you need them'. The team observed that NSS 2024 results show an improvement in the scores for subject-specific resources but a decline in the score for the question on opportunities to give feedback on courses. Taking a balanced view, these NSS outcomes (which as the data indicates fluctuate from one year or cohort to the next) did not raise a major concern because the assessment team found evidence of a responsive environment (paragraphs 372 to 375) and a good range of learning support facilities at the college (paragraphs 393 to 396). The college is advised to monitor the data over time to identify any persistent trends including, where possible, at the level of individual courses.
364. To assess whether students are effectively advised about and inducted into their programme of study, the team reviewed the college's 'Induction programme' document, the 'Student handbook' and 'Study skills guide', and considered the outcomes of an internal survey of new starters carried out by the college.
365. The programme of induction for new starters, spanning around three days, consists of welcome talks and activities that introduce students to key staff (including the Dean of Higher Education, subject leaders, pastoral tutors and Inclusion Coordinator), central services including careers, welfare, library and IT, the students' union, and to one another. Formal presentations are followed by interactive activities, such as tours and hands-on exploration of subject-specialist facilities, workshops on the intranet and the virtual learning environment, in-person library inductions, and opportunities to socialise. A separate, shorter programme is offered to progressing students; this addresses the step-up to Level 5 with a library refresher and sessions on topics such as using journals and critical thinking. The 'Student handbook' and a 'Study skills guide' provided at induction were considered by the assessment team to be excellent resources for students throughout their studies and presented in a student-friendly fashion.
366. The assessment team found that the college's incorporation of subject-based activities into the induction programme provides students with an early opportunity to re-consider their choice of course. The involvement of the Inclusion Coordinator and pastoral tutors ensures that students who declare a disability, learning difficulty or illness know how to access relevant support.

367. The assessment team noted that feedback on induction is gathered through a well-crafted 'First impressions survey', which seeks students' views on the learning environment (welcome, sense of safety and inclusivity and course fit), awareness of their responsibilities (as regards, for example, attendance and health and safety), their rights (including to a handbook, login and course representative), and the support available (pastoral and counselling, among other support). Responses to this survey for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years were very positive and show an improving trend, which the assessment team judged may reflect year-on-year developments to the programme actioned via HESEC and HETREC (paragraph 361).
368. In considering the effectiveness of student and staff advisory, support and counselling services, the assessment team reviewed college-wide central services and dedicated higher education support services. The college's Student Services Directorate encompasses welfare, careers and library. The welfare function incorporates counselling, mental health and wellbeing, pastoral tutors, a college nurse (at residential colleges), support funds, student voice and the students' union. Higher education students also benefit from a dedicated Higher Education Inclusion Coordinator and study coach who liaise with the wider welfare service. Although it does not impact this review, the assessment team felt a clear and comprehensive organisational chart for the directorate (and a higher education version highlighting the inclusion service) would increase the visibility of the various roles and activities and aid in signposting students to relevant services. In addition to this directorate, staff and students are supported by various business functions including IT and estates.
369. The team reviewed annual self-assessment reports for welfare, careers, library and IT services. The assessment team considered these to be detailed reflective documents informed by quantitative data (such as the number of individuals supported, workshops delivered and outcomes), and a variety of feedback from students and staff, as appropriate to the service (for example, NSS, local service-user surveys, reports from individual role holders and CCCs). Matters arising over the course of the year, the impact of year-on-year changes and resourcing needs, among other things, are considered in the reports, and areas for improvement or enhancement are identified and addressed in a forward plan.
370. The team found that individualised support for students is provided by two tutors – one academic and one pastoral – as described in the 'Tutorial policy'. This policy provides for a minimum of 90 minutes or two sessions of one-to-one contact with an academic tutor per year, and students are able to book these appointments online. A one-to-one introductory tutorial with a student's pastoral tutor is scheduled for the autumn term, and thereafter meetings are by request of either party. Pastoral tutors provide a link between tutees and the central support services. An online system on ProMonitor, which is accessible to all relevant staff, is used for keeping a record of meetings. The college's extenuating circumstances procedures are clearly documented, with examples of mitigating circumstances, reporting mechanisms and timeframes set out, which the team considered benefits both students and tutors. Higher or degree apprenticeship students are allocated a work-based learning manager or mentor, with reviews approximately every ten to 12 weeks of the apprenticeship.
371. The college's higher education section employs an Inclusion Coordinator and study coach to provide extra support to students who declare a learning difficulty or disability. The coordinator acts as a point of contact between students, staff and external bodies in ensuring the relevant support is in place. The study coach provides learning assistance to students who may be

awaiting Disabled Students' Allowance or cannot access this support. The team noted the college's current study coach has recently gained the necessary qualifications to carry out initial dyslexia screening, which speeds up referral and further support. The college's 'Higher education access arrangements for examinations' ensures that eligible students are provided with tailored support to undertake timed assessments and exams through, for example, the provision of extra time, rest breaks, assistive technology, a reader or scribe.

372. The assessment team found clear evidence from self-assessment reports that the college's professional services seek continuously to improve and enhance their offer in response to feedback and changing requirements. Each self-assessment report includes a dedicated higher education section which considers resource needs and how best to manage the available resources specifically for this group alongside general requirements. For example, the college's welfare services team was able to offer more counselling hours to higher education students by having individual counsellors work from one college site, rather than travelling between sites. To increase engagement from higher education students, the college's careers service launched a regular higher education newsletter and an online resource called 'Careers Launchpad' (an Abintegro platform purchased by the college on subscription). This provides students with options such as mock interview recording, CV checking, aptitude tests and a job search engine. A report function allows student usage, currently showing an upward trend, to be monitored by the college. The college's library has increased provision of e-books for better availability and accessibility, and is investigating assistive technology for 'read aloud' e-books. The library also secured funding for weekend opening in response to a request from higher education students and offered space out-of-hours for subject-level activities, such as rehearsal space for performing arts students. IT services have worked with the higher education teaching team to set up and develop ProMonitor for local needs, as well as investing in college-wide teaching space technology upgrades.
373. In the assessment team's view, all of the central services demonstrate strong collaborative working with higher education curriculum, quality and support teams providing joined-up support for students. The paid student envoy role has improved representation from students across various committees, including HESEC.
374. In the context of estates, feedback from staff and students has been taken on board in the introduction of higher education zones across the college's campuses, which provide learning and social spaces for higher education students away from the wider further education student body. Examples include a higher education study centre at the Moreton Morrell land-based college; a fifth floor at Leamington Spa housing refurbished classrooms and break-out spaces for business, computing, early years and counselling and psychotherapy students; and, also at the college's Leamington Spa site, a higher education creative area, where students can access various resources and enjoy a 'relax' area equipped with retro video games, board games and a pool table. The assessment team also noted that the college is planning further enhancement.
375. From the evidence it had seen, the assessment team was satisfied that the college gives due consideration to resource needs in its student and staff services, and continues to invest in these areas. The assessment team noted only a few issues. The college's welfare team recommended in its self-assessment report for 2022-23 quicker recruitment after a resignation to avoid gaps in provision and undue pressure on existing staff. Similarly, the careers team's

self-assessment for the same year mentioned staffing constraints and an unfilled vacancy. While slower than desirable recruitment inevitably negatively impacts the workloads of staff and should be avoided where possible, the assessment team did not see evidence that this had a significant negative impact on student support.

376. To consider the effectiveness of administrative systems in monitoring student progression and performance, the assessment team had regard both to annual and intermittent rounds of data collection and day-to-day monitoring.
377. To probe the security and accuracy with which student progression and performance is monitored throughout the course of the academic year, the team looked at procedures for monitoring and recording assessment outcomes and attendance. The team found that the college uses two software systems, ProMonitor and Turnitin, for this purpose.
378. The college's submissions explained that it is still developing ProMonitor for its needs. This is consistent with the IT services self-assessment report, which documents its support for the higher education team in this endeavour (paragraph 372). In the meantime, Turnitin is used to provide grades to students, with marks added to the system within 20 days of submission of the work. The college's intention is that this will continue, but students will additionally be able to access their record on ProMonitor.
379. Attendance monitoring is currently via ProMonitor and is managed by pastoral tutors (paragraph 370), with input from teaching staff and subject leaders. In the case of international students (of which there are currently only eight on higher education programmes), the college's International Team oversees attendance to ensure compliance with the requirements of UK Visas and Immigration. A register of attendance is taken at all higher education teaching sessions, clearly aided by the college's small class sizes, and recorded on ProSolution, which feeds through to ProMonitor. Once every six weeks an attendance report is run and sent to pastoral tutors. An attendance record of below 80 per cent triggers an 'at risk' procedure, whereby the student is added to the 'at risk' register for close monitoring and any appropriate support. In the case of international students, ten consecutive days of unauthorised absences from timetabled activities is reported to the Home Office.
380. The team found that data pertaining to student progression and performance is collated by the Higher Education Registry and Quality Office. This data is used in the preparation of a number of reports, including reports of student outcomes and progression, college performance reports, Higher Education Quality Team reports, annual course reports, and the higher education annual quality and standards reports. Reports are considered by HEQAS, which has a remit to consider in-year and OfS data. HEQAS meets five times a year, and reports to HEAB. The higher education annual quality and standards report is also presented to the ASQA, which covers both further and higher education. Based on the evidence, the assessment team's view is that data is effectively captured, and the information is considered in a timely fashion by the relevant committees.
381. To explore opportunities for students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, the assessment team reviewed a sample of programme specifications, module guides and assessments briefs to identify opportunities embedded in the core curricula. In addition, the team considered co-curricular activities available to students such as 'Futures Week' and student symposia and conferences.

382. Consistent with best practice in the sector, the team found that the college designs its programmes of study to develop transferable skills alongside subject or industry-specific knowledge and expertise. The college formalises this approach in its 'T-shaped' framework, which presents breadth of capabilities and qualities on the arms of the 'T', and depth of technical and academic knowledge and skills on the 'T' leg. The former encompasses 15 transferable skills categorised into one of three groups: personal effectiveness (resilience, focus and drive, reliability, reflectiveness and adaptability), enterprise (business awareness, creativity, problem-solving, initiative and risk-taking), and social skills (communication, teamwork, networking, leadership and empathy). The framework is evident throughout all module guides reviewed by the team, in a dedicated section entitled 'How does this module prepare me for employment' in the form of a T-shaped table outlining which transferable skill(s) will be developed and how.
383. The team considered the T-shaped approach effective in highlighting the links between study and work for students, which in turn aids engagement. Across the sample of module guides and assessment briefs reviewed, the team found evidence of a very good range of transferable skills embedded in taught modules, and considered more would clearly be gained through the compulsory work-based and placement learning modules (paragraph 385).
384. The team noted that while the college's T-shaped framework is used in module guides, a more conventional academic framework is used in the college's 'Definitive programme specifications' to map learning outcomes, i.e. the framework used at the modular level does not neatly follow through into the programme specifications. The assessment team felt that, for clarity and consistency, it would be better to use a single framework or create better cohesion between the two.
385. Work-based and placement learning is integral to the college's programmes. At a minimum, all students take a compulsory Level 5 module entitled 'Work-based learning and placement'. In some cases, this work-based learning is in-house; for example, enterprise initiatives based on a model of client-led briefs, work-based projects, and work-based experiential learning opportunities such as simulations. For courses such as counselling and psychotherapy, early years development and education and veterinary nursing, where work-based placement learning is a requirement of validation or accreditation, placements are external to the college. These follow the college's 'Higher education work-based placement learning procedure'. While not impacting the assessment against this criterion, the assessment team would recommend the word 'placement' should not be included in the title of the generic module unless a real placement is offered.
386. To assess the support available for work-based placement learning, the team reviewed a module guide, placement handbooks and the role of placement tutors. The sample module guide and placement handbooks are detailed documents that set out the nature of the placement, length of work experience required and form of assessment(s). Students are expected to be pro-active in obtaining placements, whether in sourcing a provider from the college's existing contacts or finding new ones, subject to approval. They are supported by a Higher Education Placement Coordinator, who has responsibility for organising placements, liaising with employers, carrying out health and safety checks and risk assessments, undertaking site visits, and other relevant administrative activities. This individual and, if needed, the subject and pastoral tutors provide advice to students on applications and interviews. Students also have access to resources centrally available through the college's

careers service. Assessment varies depending on the course and is carried out by the placement supervisor and course tutors, ensuring all appropriate permissions have been obtained (for example, for workplace observations). The assessment team considered these procedures to be satisfactory.

387. Some of the college's courses are accredited by professional bodies, verifying that the training provided and skills gained meet industry standards. For all courses, external industry advisers are appointed, which the assessment team considered to be an example of good practice. These advisers visit the college (with funding for up to two visits per year) to meet with students and staff and offer advice, which may inform changes or enhancements.
388. All students take a generic Level 4 module entitled 'Academic Study Skills, Employability and T-shaped' (ASSET), which supports development of core skills such as writing, presentation and research applicable throughout their study period. The team again considered this an example of good practice. The module is supplemented by a very useful study skills guide. Higher-level research skills are developed in the Level 6 'Research Theory and Design' or 'Research Methods' modules, which prepare students for their final year capstone project or dissertation. In addition, the library offers support to develop key study skills during and after induction; for example, training on accessing online resources, finding peer-reviewed scholarly articles, and Harvard referencing. In support of this, an action point in the library's self-assessment report for 2022-23 was to develop more academic skills presentations, such as critical thinking and time management for higher education students.
389. Outside of the core curriculum, the assessment team found that students have a number of opportunities to develop transferable skills. 'Futures Week' is an annual event which offers a varied schedule of co-curricular activities, including subject-specific masterclasses, and enterprise and employability workshops. There is a student symposium for new entrants which, judging by the sample agenda provided, appeared to the team to be an excellent way to promote academic community and encourage key skills such as teamwork and problem-solving. The college's higher education student conference has featured presentations from external and internal speakers on topics such as CV writing, creating LinkedIn profiles, setting up a business, mindful learning and resilience skills, and living with Asperger's. Subject-specialist guest talks, both during this conference and at other times, enhance the core curriculum and aid networking. Roles such as course representative and student envoy offer opportunities for students to develop leadership and networking skills and gain experience of committee work.
390. The college's 'Annual report 2022' and 'Higher education prospectus 2025' identify a range of extracurricular opportunities available to students during their time at the college, which may further support personal and professional development. These include students' union societies, sports facilities, volunteering and community engagement activities.
391. The assessment team considered the college's strong graduate outcomes reflect positively on the opportunities for professional development. Consistent with this, NSS results show that students' perceptions of learning opportunities are positive, with this theme achieving just above the benchmark score of 83 per cent in 2023. NSS 2024 has shown a slight drop in satisfaction (78 per cent versus a benchmark of 81 per cent) but in the team's view this is not beyond what might be expected of year-on-year variation.

392. To assess opportunities for students to develop skills to make effective use of learning resources, the team considered the college's specialist facilities and general digital and virtual facilities. It also reviewed reports from external advisers for any commentary on facilities.
393. In relation to specialist facilities at the college, students taking courses in land- and animal-based subjects benefit from a national horticulture centre and equine and canine centres. Respectively, these are equipped with state-of-the-art research laboratories for agritech projects and animal therapy centres, including a new canine hydrotherapy unit where students gain hands-on and observational experience of animal work and veterinary practice. An engineering lab, specialist workshops (for instance, for vehicle engineering) and an advanced robotics-equipped machining centre are also available at the college. Performing arts students have access to a 100-seat theatre, which was recently upgraded with OfS funding, and a dedicated professional dance studio.
394. As the assessment team did not undertake a site visit or have access to videos, it did not directly observe how effectively or safely students are using these specialist facilities. The team did, however, see evidence of relevant safety-related documentation, including the college's 'Health, safety and wellbeing strategy' and health and safety, fitness to study and fitness to practice policies for courses such as veterinary nursing and counselling and psychotherapy, where students undertake placements in clinical settings, as well as a range of sample risk assessments for facilities and activities.
395. The team found within reports from external advisers complimentary comments on specific facilities, but noted mixed comments as regards health and safety matters. The 'Qualification approval and monitoring report' from the Animal Health Professions' Register, for example, stated there were 'excellent student learning facilities on both equine and canine sides' and 'a good level of health and safety procedure' based on videos of practical assessments. The external examiner report for veterinary physiotherapy similarly considered the equine facilities to be excellent, but cautioned that 'some health and safety matters need to be reviewed when using these'. In response to queries from the assessment team in relation to these concerns, the college provided documentary evidence that the issues raised had since been considered and addressed. Additionally, the assessment team noted that the college has satisfactorily addressed action points in relation to health and safety and risk assessments arising during the ongoing re-accreditation of the veterinary nursing course by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.
396. The college's 'Digital strategy 2020-2025' encompasses a section on student success, summarising its approach to supporting digital learning. This includes the provision of the Google G Suite for Education which provides all students with access to word processing and spreadsheet software, and storage on Google Drive. As discussed elsewhere in this report, e-learning appears to be integral to all programmes of study at the college (paragraph 306) and is supported by the Google Classroom virtual learning environment. Chromebooks are also available in college libraries and other learning spaces for student use, and students are free to bring their own devices.
397. As summarised in paragraph 365, new students are introduced to digital resources at induction via presentations and hands-on workshops, including on Google Classroom. The student handbook has information on how to access the student account and the intranet, as well as information on internet safety and a link to the college's data protection policy.

Similarly, library and careers resources are introduced at induction, and the 'Study skills guide' appears to the team to be a handy source of information on such things as library-related matters, writing and referencing. The response to the internal 'First impressions survey', completed by new students shortly after induction (paragraph 367), indicates that this is effective in getting students started. Thereafter, support is available from tutors and professional services staff (paragraph 368). For example, the library provides video guides to supplement the initial induction. The library further offers a variety of in-person and online training sessions to students as they progress through their degrees, such as an online tutorial on Google Scholar. Similarly, careers support is available online through the Careers Launchpad platform or in-person (paragraph 372). The team found evidence that students become familiar with the use of Turnitin, and increasingly with ProMonitor, to submit assessments, receive feedback and marks, and monitor their own progress.

398. The college's higher education student support funds offer financial support for various purposes. This includes the purchase of study materials, as evidenced to the team by the summary of recent spend which provided 80 book bursaries among other awards.
399. The team considered that NSS results indicate students rate some facilities more highly than others. In NSS 2023, the positivity score for 'How well have library facilities supported your learning' was 82 per cent, close to the benchmark of 86 per cent. The same question on IT resources and facilities yielded a score of 74 per cent against a benchmark of 81 per cent. Students were less positive again on the question of 'How easy is it to access subject-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software)', returning a score of 69 per cent versus a benchmark of 84 per cent. NSS 2024 shows a similar pattern, with slight increases in the scores for IT and subject-specific facilities and a slight decrease in the score for library facilities. In the college's local course survey for 2022-23, on the other hand, there was less discrepancy between facilities, and subject-specific resources scored more highly than either library or IT. The team found it was difficult to draw conclusions from these responses. In general, and particularly with respect to subject-specific resources, the team felt that the college may wish to tease apart whether there are course differences in student satisfaction and take action to address these.
400. To assess whether the college's approach is guided by equity, the team reviewed the 'Equality and diversity policy' and related policies and procedures. The 'Equality and diversity policy' commits to the Equality Act 2010 and sets out roles and responsibilities. Appendix A of the policy is a statement of commitment to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Implementation of the policy rests with the senior leadership team. The Equality and Diversity Committee meets three times per year and monitors the action plan. The reporting structure is evidenced by the 'Annual equality and diversity report 2023', prepared by the Deputy Principal, which was received by ASQA in December 2023. Policies related to the 'Equality and diversity policy' include the 'Higher education anti-bullying policy', 'Harassment and sexual misconduct policy' and a recently implemented 'Suicide safer strategy 2023-2025'.
401. Evidence that the college's approach is guided by a commitment to equity has been presented elsewhere in this report. Paragraph 360 outlines the collection and monitoring of data relevant to widening participation and the preparation of the access and participation plan. The college's 'Inclusion support' documents, extenuating circumstances procedure and 'Access arrangements for examinations' are discussed in paragraphs 370 to 371. On a day-to-day basis, the assessment team considered these procedures actively enable equitable access to

education. Annual course reports consider outcomes by student characteristics in a section headed 'Positive outcomes for all'. All subcommittees at the college, irrespective of their specific remit, draw attention to the core value of equality and diversity by concluding with consideration of whether the equality code has been followed.

Conclusions

402. The assessment team concluded that the teaching and learning infrastructure at the college is designed to support and develop students, including individually, beyond the arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment addressed in criterion B3. Inherent in this infrastructure are specialist facilities, library, welfare, careers and digital facilities and tutorial and inclusion services that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
403. The assessment team concluded that there is coherence and cooperation between academic units, professional services and student representative bodies in the development and provision of student support. There are mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources to ensure these remain appropriate.

Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance

Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance

Advice to the OfS

404. The assessment team's view is that the college meets the requirements for criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.
405. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows in summary that the provider takes effective action to assess its own performance, responds to identified weaknesses, and develops further its strengths.
406. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

E1: An organisation granted degree awarding powers takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further its strengths.

Advice to the OfS

407. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion E1 because there is evidence that the college has robust mechanisms for identifying and responding to areas of strength or development. Alongside effective internal processes such as annual course reports, the college draws on external reviews and expertise, including professional, statutory and regulatory body approvals and input from external examiners, industry advisers and other partners, to bring a self-critical approach to its higher education provision.
408. The assessment team's view is based on the review of evidence, which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for E1.

Reasoning

409. To assess whether critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of higher education and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal monitoring and review, the assessment team considered the governance structure and reporting mechanisms (paragraphs 29 to 58), and examples of external and internal review and audit. The assessment team also explored the activities undertaken as part of the college's 'Higher education quality framework' in line with the 'Higher education quality and enhancement manual', and the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures', including annual course reports and self-assessment reports.
410. The assessment team concluded that the college's governance structure provides the opportunity for self-criticality, which is confirmed in the reporting and monitoring of student data, student satisfaction, complaints and appeals and external examiner feedback. The college's success indicators are outlined in the college's 'Corporate plan 2023-2028' and its 'Key success indicators 2023-24' document. As noted in paragraph 34, reporting against the

key success indicators is undertaken using the 'ASQA key success indicators report template', with the completed example seen by the team showing robust reporting, including for higher education; this includes reporting against retention, continuation and completion, and an update on higher technical qualifications. Minutes from HEQAS also indicate that discussion of higher education performance data takes place and reporting against higher education-specific data is also noted in the 'Higher education quality monitoring report June 2024', evidencing critical self-assessment.

411. Recent external review includes a review for the Animal Health Professions' Register, where the resulting report indicates a review of course design, assessment and programme quality assurance, with no actions identified; and a peer review with Landex (a membership organisation of 'Land-Based Colleges and Universities Aspiring to Excellence'). The peer review report from Landex is positive, highlighting robust quality systems and processes as part of the stated good practice, and notes some areas that the college may wish to consider. While these reviews are not necessarily aimed at the programmes awarded through the college's own DAPs, the assessment team concluded that they do nonetheless evidence critical self-assessment and demonstrate that actions are taken in response to external monitoring and review where required. The college also successfully undertakes regular reviews with its validating partner for programmes not delivered under the college's own DAPs.
412. In relation to internal audit, the college's Audit Committee receives an annual report that includes consideration of the adequacy and effectiveness of assurance arrangements, showing discussion of the college's higher education risk register. The audit plan outlined to the Audit Committee included an audit of OfS regulatory compliance, but the report had not been finalised in time to be submitted for the assessment team's consideration. While the assessment team was therefore unable to explore any specific findings from the report, the team judged that the activities of the Audit Committee and the information it receives does provide assurance of internal consideration of regulatory compliance.
413. The assessment team reviewed the 'Higher education quality and enhancement policy', which sets out a commitment to a culture of critical self-review, linking to core strategies and outlining that the key processes include annual course reports, external examiners, industry experts, course approval and review processes, student evaluation, peer review and monitoring. This is supported by the 'Higher education quality framework' (which provides a one-page summary of quality assurance checks and controls, quality improvement mechanisms and quality reporting processes), the 'Higher education quality improvement cycle' (which articulates the cycle of annual reporting as a process diagram), and the 'Higher education quality and enhancement manual' (which provides key information on governance and academic leadership, and identifies relevant policies and documents). Further detail regarding the annual and periodic review processes is available in the college's 'Higher education course approval and review procedures'. The assessment team was of the view that these processes were clearly articulated.
414. All programmes complete an annual course report and quality improvement plan evaluating a range of data and information, which are reviewed in meetings with the Higher Education Quality Team and presented to HEQAS. The assessment team reviewed examples of annual course reports, which provide an overview of the programme, report student numbers and articulate student involvement in the annual course report process. The assessment team

found the reports to be robust, showing a clear level of self-criticality, discussing student satisfaction data, external examiner feedback, resources, student partnership, educational gain, employability and scholarship. Student outcomes are also compared to sector benchmarks, and data by student characteristics is considered.

415. Annual course reports are reviewed in quality review meetings, which take place in spring and summer term, and review progress against the quality improvement plan. The assessment team reviewed a selection of quality review meeting minutes which provide evidence of this in practice. A summary of annual course reports, including outcomes, strengths and improvements made in the previous year, is provided to HEQAS, as seen by the team through the relevant minutes.
416. In addition to annual programme reporting, business areas complete a self-assessment report with a quality improvement plan. The assessment team found these reports to be robust, with a clear split discussion between higher education and further education where relevant, such as in the careers service's self-assessment report, and they show a clear level of self-criticality alongside articulating robust action plans for improvement. Self-assessment reports form the annual report to governors through HEQAS in line with its terms of reference and the college's schedule of higher education business.
417. The 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' also outline the process for six-yearly review which includes a self-evaluation, a reading group and a scrutiny panel, to include an external and student member. The process is managed by the Higher Education Quality Team and appears robust and detailed. Although this process has not yet taken place for the programmes awarded under the college's own DAPs, the assessment team saw evidence that a similar process has taken place successfully with a validating partner. An overview of the planned periodic review process, which includes a detailed template, was provided to the team for reviews that will take place in 2025-26. This provided assurance to the assessment team that periodic review was likely to be managed successfully in the future.
418. To test whether clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of the college's academic provision, the assessment team reviewed annual course reports and self-assessment reports, alongside their resulting quality improvement plans, reporting related to student and external examiner feedback, and responses to external examiner reports.
419. As outlined above in paragraph 414, the assessment team noted that the annual course reports are robust and detailed, showing clear self-criticality. The assessment team reviewed the resulting quality improvement plans, concluding that they show relevant actions, identifying a lead person responsible for them, deadlines for completion and indications of how improvement will be measured. The quality improvement plans are then reviewed at quality review meetings, as evidenced in the minutes of these meetings reviewed by the assessment team. The team also found that the quality improvement plans that are included in a business area's self-assessment report indicate clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging actions.
420. The assessment team found various examples of reporting on the monitoring and review mechanisms through the governance structure within meeting minutes for HEQAS and HESEC. The minutes of the meetings indicate where actions are required as a result of the

reporting, with updates in subsequent meetings evidencing clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to scrutiny and monitoring. The assessment team reviewed responses to external examiner reports, which outline any planned actions as a result of recommendations made, and the team noted that these are then discussed in the annual course reports. While the team observed that these actions are not always apparent in the resulting quality improvement plans, they saw evidence that recommendations are acted on immediately and later action is not required.

421. The team found that reporting to HEQAS in relation to external examiner comments show discussion of external examiner feedback, though they did note that this does not include an overview of all external examiner-related actions. While the assessment team noted that the actions themselves could be clearer in reporting, on balance they concluded that there are nonetheless clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action.
422. To explore how ideas and expertise from both within and outside the organisation are drawn into the arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review, the assessment team reviewed the 'Higher education course approval and review procedures' and evidence of these procedures in practice. They also explored the college's external examiner guidance, external examiner reports, responses to these reports and the college's 'Quality assurance and enhancement partnership statement'.
423. The course approval and review procedures outline the processes for course approval, modification and review. The documents suggest that consultation is a key element to the course development process, with input from employers, an external academic and students. Module approval reading groups take place prior to the course approval and review panels, which require external members, an academic peer and an industry representative or employer, alongside an internal academic peer and a student. The assessment team found that expectations and areas of responsibilities for the internal and external academic, industry and student panel members are clearly set out and a review of course approval panel agendas, minutes and course approval decisions evidenced this in practice.
424. The college's 'Industry adviser guidance' confirms expectations for engagement in relation to design, delivery and review, which is further supported by 'Industry adviser report template'. The assessment team reviewed two industry adviser reports for 2022-23, which show comment on course design and content, skills and behaviours, and whether the course meets sector needs. The team also reviewed responses to these reports, which show action taken or planned in response to the feedback provided, and the team concluded that this is evidenced in practice.
425. External examiner allocations, approval and appointment are discussed at HEQAS. The college's guidance for external examiners confirms expectations for engagement in relation to delivery and review, which is further supported by an external examiner template. The assessment team reviewed reports from external examiners, and concluded from these that the college utilises external expertise in delivery and review. This is because in their reports, external examiners comment on academic standards, student performance, assessment, quality of teaching, learning opportunities and the conduct of boards, and outline any recommendations and areas for potential enhancement. The college responds to the external examiner reports, providing an overview of actions it has taken or plans to take in response to any recommendations made.

426. As outlined above, the assessment team was satisfied that HEQAS receives a clear summary of external examiner feedback. In addition, the college's 2022-23 review of external examiner reports for its own awards identifies the key strengths and areas for development noted by external examiners, with institutional issues identified.

427. In addition to internal and external academic and industry expertise, the college sets out its approach to engaging students in its 'Quality assurance and enhancement partnership statement', outlining a commitment to student engagement and partnership working. Engaging students in the college's governance is outlined in more detail in paragraphs 61 to 69; in summary, however, the statement confirms student advisers as part of course approval and review processes. Course monitoring and review processes include consideration of student satisfaction and feedback, external examiner feedback – as evidenced in the annual course reports – and action taken as a result of this reflection is noted in the quality improvement plans.

Conclusions

428. The assessment team concluded that the college takes effective action to assess its own performance through its governance arrangements and the monitoring and review processes outlined above. These processes provide opportunities to respond to identified weaknesses and further develop strengths. Critical self-assessment is integral, with clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action, that ensure ideas and expertise, both from within and outside of the organisation, are drawn into the college's arrangements.

Assessment of overarching criterion for the authorisation of DAPs

Full DAPs: A self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective quality systems

Advice to the OfS

429. The assessment team's view is that the college meets the overarching criterion for Full DAPs because it meets all the underpinning criteria.
430. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that the college develops and encourages a self-critical and cohesive academic community. It has a clear commitment to the assurance of standards, which is supported by effective and robust quality systems.
431. This view is based on consideration of the evidence requirements for the DAPs criteria, alongside any other relevant information.

Reasoning

432. The assessment team found that self-criticality is demonstrated throughout the governance arrangements and the robust monitoring and review processes that effectively utilise the student voice and external feedback. This enables timely and effective action across the college's academic community.
433. The college has a proven commitment to the assurance of standards, as demonstrated through the procedures it has in place to ensure effective benchmarking to sector thresholds, protecting the integrity of its assessment process and the use of external examiners to provide assurance that standards have been met.
434. The assessment team considers the effectiveness of the college's quality systems is apparent through, for example, its effective programme design and monitoring and review processes, and utilising external expertise and student feedback.

Conclusions

435. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college meets the overarching criterion as the evidence demonstrates that the college has a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to the assurance of standards supported by effective quality systems.

Annex A: Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Meaning |
|--------------|--|
| ASQA | Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee |
| CCC | Course Consultative Committee |
| DAPs | Degree awarding powers |
| FHEQ | Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications |
| HEAB | Higher Education Academic Board |
| HEAPC | Higher Education Access and Participation Committee |
| HEQAS | Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee |
| HESEC | Higher Education Student Experience Committee |
| HETREC | Higher Education Teaching, Research and Enterprise Committee |
| NSS | National Student Survey |
| OfS | Office for Students |
| QAC | [OfS's] Quality Assessment Committee |
| WCG | Warwickshire College Group |



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