Name of Provider: Moorlands College
UKPRN: 10023454

TEF Year Four provider submission

1 Provider Context

1.1 Moorlands College is a small institution offering programmes in Applied Theology. Formerly an Alternative Provider, it registered with the Office for Students at Approved (Fee Cap) level in October 2018, with no conditions. Its Higher Education (HE) provision has been validated since 1994 by the University of Gloucestershire (the University) and implements the College's strategy of developing people for or in Christian ministry or other, similar, social-service related employment.[1] This tight focus facilitates a high level of cohesion throughout the provision.

1.2 The primary focus of the College's activities is on two undergraduate programmes, with, in 2017-18, 195 students, almost all of whom were full-time.[2] These programmes are closely related, with:

- most of the programmes' learning outcomes either shared or differing by minor variations;
- the majority of the programmes' modules appearing in both Course Maps;
- a joint Course Leader, a single Course Committee, and shared External Examiners.[3]

1.3 This means that student or External Examiner comment about any undergraduate activity is effectively about the whole of the provision that this submission discusses.

1.4 The programmes can be accessed

- via the Campus-Based mode, which is the traditional mode of HE study, based on weekly timetables across terms and semesters, or
- through a number of Placement-Based modes, which involve at least some modules being delivered in intensive study blocks, and which, in some cases, involve certain modules[4] being delivered at locations other than the main campus, that is, at sites in Torquay and Birmingham.

1.5 The introduction of non-traditional modes was designed to best enable a wide range of students to reach their full potential, and has assisted the College to grow, so that the student body is now around 40% larger than ten years ago. The careful management of this growth is at the heart of the College's strategic plan.[5]

1.6 This submission is structured around the TEF assessment criteria, but in an order approximating reverse. This allows the pedagogical goals of the College to be made clear through discussing intended and actual student outcomes (SO2, SO1, SO3), before considering issues relating to the institutional approach to learning (TQ2, LE2, LE1, LE3) and to the delivery to students (TQ3, TQ4, TQ1).

1.7 Before starting the main discussion, it will be beneficial to explain one internal student feedback mechanism used annually with students at all undergraduate levels, the Extra-Modular Survey

[1] Strategic Plan 2018-2023.
[2] AP Student Return 2017-18. The College offers a postgraduate programme: for information, in 2017-18, it had 81 students, all part-time; AP Student Return for 2017-18.
[3] Relevant Programme Specifications, 14; relevant Course Maps. Modules are divided between the External Examiners, on a basis of more theoretical and more practical, rather than by programme.
[4] 27% of all module deliveries are not at the main campus, divided roughly equally between two Regional Centres.
[5] Strategic Plan 2018-2023.

(EMS). In 2016 the EMS used the same set of questions as the NSS, and so provides an internal perspective of students of all levels on the standard set of issues. From 2017, to avoid a sense of survey overload for Level 6 students (who also participated in the NSS), the number of questions was reduced to a smaller set that complements the NSS.

2 Employability and transferable skills (SO2)

2.1 In line with the mission of the College, the undergraduate programmes have as their explicit goal to equip people for work, rather than simply to enable them to study a body of knowledge.[6] The programmes' learning outcomes expect graduates to demonstrate "vocational suitability, through excellent professional understanding, abilities and skills, for a variety of service and leadership settings, in the Christian sector and public arena".[7] Thus, development in knowledge, skills and attitudes that are valued by employers and that enhance students' personal and professional lives stand at the centre of the College's provision. The principles of the assurance of academic quality and the maintaining of academic standards in HE therefore ensure that in these programmes "learning gain"[8] is the focus of teaching, personal support and assessment, and the ultimate destination of the undergraduate programmes: learning gain is not a mere hoped-for result of a parallel or extracurricular process. When a student graduates from these programmes, it is because they have proved themselves to be employable.

2.2 This philosophy and strategy is embedded in the College by various means, including:

- employment of teachers with significant experience of on-going engagement in and deeply held commitment to the importance of practice;
- careful construction of the programmes to balance modules between theory, theory of practice, personal development and practice;[9]
- "the careful design of programmes to integrate theory and practice, which enables students to apply their learning successfully", as recognised by the QAA,[10] including an emphasis on theory-practice linking in assessment tasks;[11]
- an active Professional Advisory Group, whose members are mainly placement supervisors and who are typical employers of graduates, advising on course design and effectiveness;[12]
- well-attended, optional extra-curricular activities, including opportunities to develop specific skills, such as interview technique and CV-writing, as well as staff-led trips, for example, to work with orphans in Ukraine (2016) and to Israel/Palestine to study the historical background of the Bible (2017), and engagement in practice alongside teachers.

2.3 The College's understanding of learning is not only delivered to students, but modelled as it learns about and develops its own professional practice, in line with its Enhancement Policy.

[6] Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, 1.1; relevant Programme Specifications, 13/1.
[7] BA in Applied Theology Programme Specification, 14/6. The Youth and Community Work programme replaces "service and leadership" with "youth and community work". Cf. the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, which sees learning as "a holistic process of personal development, covering inter-relating aspects of human personality, the intellectual, spiritual, practical and relational."
[8] Defined by OfS as "improvements in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development".
[9] Periodic Review Submission 2015, Rationale.
[10] QAA, HER (AP) Response, 2018, Good Practice.
[11] External Examiner Report 2017-18, BA Salter, 5.1.
[12] QAA, HER (AP) Response, 2018, 2.37.

2.4 Perhaps the most important mechanism for enhancing the employability of students is the design and management of practice modules. These modules are centred on placements, in locations of the type that students aspire to be employed in, and tailored to the specific goals of students. They do not simply require hours of activity, but actively form students as skilled and reflective practitioners. The effectiveness of the placement provision is consistently affirmed internally and externally.[13] For example, one External Examiner reported, "Students are also getting a diverse range of placement experiences, including innovative projects which deliver programmes such as: working with refugees, bespoke young women's projects, working with the homeless to name a few."[14] A further, strong piece of evidence for this is in the recent QAA HER report, which noted as good practice "the reflective nature of learning, reinforced by the comprehensive nature of the placements, which provides vocationally relevant enrichment to the programmes, thus greatly enhancing the students' competence in practice."[15]

2.5 One of the two programmes is "professionally validated" by the National Youth Agency (NYA), resulting in the qualification generally referred to as "JNC". The NYA promotes the formation of qualities necessary for the relevant area of professional work, and many of these have been found appropriate for adoption into the other programme, though it is not associated with the NYA.

2.6 The very high number of graduates recorded as entering employment or further study (all but six individuals over the last three years) indicates the success of the College in attaining its goals.[16] This is particularly notable for students with disabilities, which is a reflection of the quality of the College's Learning Support department.[17]

2.7 Students confirm that the programmes prepare them well for employment: in the 2018 NSS the College opted in to the bank of questions relating to employability and skills. In response to the statement, "The skills I have developed during my time in HE will be useful for my future career", 97% of respondents were positive.[18] A similar picture was painted previously when the NSS had certain compulsory questions on transferable skills development.

NSS 2016 question	**Joint ranking (out of 371 institutions)**
19. My course has helped me present myself with confidence.	10th
20. My communication skills have improved.	38th
21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.	5th

2.8 Students recognise the developmental process they are undergoing. The 2018 EMS questions about personal development (questions 5-8, regarding spiritual, practical skill-based, intellectual and relational growth) received very high levels of positive responses: respectively, 90%, 86%, 98% and 93%.[19]

2.9 Similarly, External Examiners reflect on employability (though not using the term itself): "Being able to put theory into practice, or ensure that practice is informed by theory, was evident across the board."[20] Assessment tasks "demonstrate that students are being well equipped

[13] BA Course Committee 7 July 2017, item 10; BA Course Committee 6 July 2018, item 7; External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Salter, 4.1.
[14] External Examiner 2017-18, BA Salter, 11.1.
[15] QAA, HER (AP) Report 2018, Good Practice.
[16] TEF Year 4 Core Metrics.
[17] QAA, HER (AP) Response 2018, Good Practice. Discussed further in section 4.
[18] NSS 2018, B15.3. This compares to a "sector" average of 87%, but note that the statistic was not gathered from all institutions. It may be that institutions more interested in this area chose to opt in to this bank of questions.
[19] These show a clear improvement on the positive responses to the same questions in 2017, being respectively: 89%, 81%, 94% and 86%.
[20] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Salter, 5.1.

and enabled to relate their theological learning to today's world in thoughtful and creative ways."[21] "The course is clearly designed to help students critique theory using practice and vice versa."[22]

2.10 Comparatively few graduates go straight into further study (4.3%[23]), because of the programmes' immediate focus on practice. That is not to say that the College's students are unprepared or lacking in desire for further study. Indeed, the College's last three years' MA intakes have seen a total of 23 graduates of the College registering. Given the small numbers of students graduating each year in the past, this is a strong vote of confidence from graduates in the excellence of the College's teaching, and validates the understanding that graduates tend to be focused on practice immediately on graduation, but are well equipped and motivated for further study at a later date.

3 Highly skilled employment and further study (SO1)

3.1 In the College's case, the entire discussion above, relating to the development of students' employability, is also directly relevant to the criterion of student attainment of their goals: the programmes are marketed as training for employment, and students chose them with future employment as a primary goal. Thus, the College is confident in the high quality of its provision in enabling students to attain their educational and professional goals. The recent QAA panel concluded that the College demonstrated good practice in this area: "The careful design of programmes to integrate theory and practice, which enables students and graduates to apply their learning successfully."[24]

3.2 The type of employment for which the students are prepared is accurately described as highly skilled. And, at the end of students' studies, the jobs taken by a large majority of graduates are of this nature, whether classified as professional, e.g., church leadership, school teaching roles, or as associate professional and technical occupations, e.g., youth or community workers. The success in this area overcomes at least two obstacles that the College faces in comparison to similar institutions.

- The College is not tied to any particular denomination, so its provision is not a phase within a system flowing towards ordination (though many graduates do get ordained in their first jobs).
- The College has been more successful than other theological colleges in recruiting younger people, and there are graduates and employers who prefer older church leaders, given the high level of responsibility for other people that most such jobs entail.

3.3 The College has been directing resources towards this area in recent years, and has a trajectory of success,[25] culminating in an 87% rating in the most recent year of TEF data.[26] In order to further strengthen this area. the College has developed a Vocations Strategy,[27] which brings together a number of related initiatives, including improved access to relevant job opportunities and an emphasis on entering professional-level employment for those who choose to work initially in jobs outside the primary focus of the training.

3.4 The split metrics show particular success in entering highly skilled employment or further study for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The College believes this is a result of

[21] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 2.1.
[22] External Examiner Report 2017-18, BA Salter, 5.1.
[23] Average DLHE data for leavers between 2015 and 2017.
[24] QAA HER(AP), Good Practice.
[25] TEF Year 4, Core Metrics and Splits.
[26] TEF Year 4, Metric Detail Indicator (a).
[27] Academic Board, 20 03 2018, item 21b; Academic Board, 28 11 2018, item 19.

the College's general development of students' employability, self-confidence and desire to contribute to society, which has a particularly high impact on this group of students.

3.5 The strength of the situation is recognised by External Examiners:

> "Both [programmes] have clear structures in place to ensure that students qualify with a solid understanding of what it means to work professionally as a youth and community worker alongside their theological qualification. Being able to put theory into practice, or ensure that practice is informed by theory, was evident across the board."[28]

> "The majority of the work practice and placement work continues to be good, very good or excellent and clearly meets the requirements and expectations of the churches, agencies and other organisations that provide placements to the students."[29]

4 Positive outcomes for all (SO3)

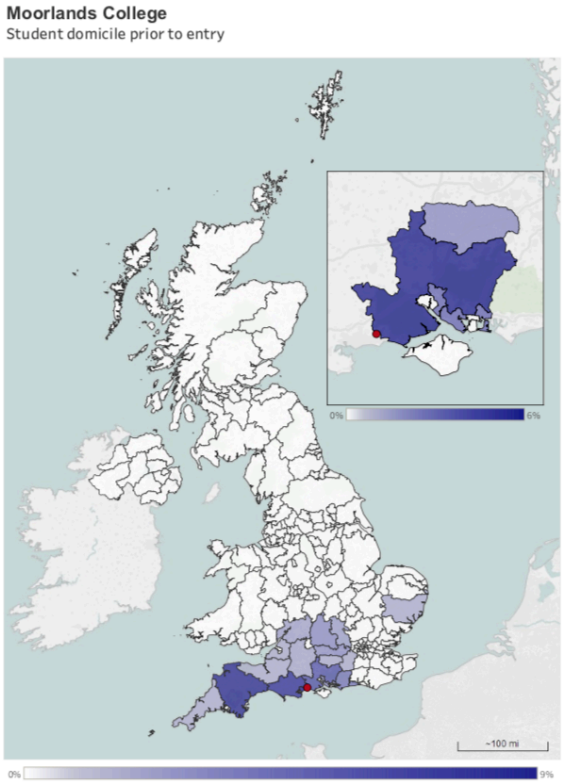
4.1 As discussed above (sections 2, 3), the College is succeeding in developing the typical student's employability and enabling them to attain their goals. Furthermore, since there are no statistically significant negative indicators in the split metrics,[30] it might be said that this is at least as true for disadvantaged groups as it is for the student body as a whole.

4.2 Following the publication of Access Statements in both 2016 and 2017, an Access and Participation Plan was agreed by the Office for Students, as part of the process of registration with that body in 2018. Reflecting the value the College places on the individual student (see section 8) and the seriousness with which the College addresses issues of equality, the College's Access Statements were not simply indications of intent, but were firm and strategic commitments backed up by extensive statistical analyses, presented as an appendix, in 2017, of 17 pages.[31] The College's Access and Participation Plan demonstrates a continuation in the same direction, with, for 2019-20 and onwards, a certain revenue stream dedicated to these ends.

4.3 Of the 96 reportable split metrics for the College, only eight have a z-score of less than zero. Seven of these are -0.5 or below, the other being -0.9.[32] Of the eight, two are of such small populations that the numbers are data protected (DP).[33] Two metrics have negative z-scores, but, respectively, only one and two respondents failed to give NSS positive responses.[34] The remaining four metrics relate to Highly Skilled Employment or Further Study, for (1) mature students, (2) students from National IMD quartiles 1 and 2, (3) overall for Year 1, and (4) overall for year 2. The overall z-score for this indicator in Year 3 is 2.5, which is an indicator of the direction of movement. Nevertheless, the College continues to commit significant resources to its work in this important area, as discussed in section 3, and the relatively slight negative z-scores should be correctable through these actions.

[28] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Salter, 5.1.
[29] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Twilley, 2.1.
[30] TEF Year 4, Core Metrics and Splits.
[31] Access and Participation Statement.
[32] TEF Year 4, Metric Details Z-score.
[33] Employment or Further Study for National IMD Q1-2 and Continuation for POLAR Q1-2.
[34] The first is Employment or Further Study for POLAR Q1-2, which shows 13 positive responses and one non-positive. The second is Assessment and Feedback for BME, which shows 8 positive results out of 10.

4.4 The College recruits more White students (92%[35]) than the national average, though the student body is clearly more diverse than the three counties from which the College recruits most students: Devon (96.6% White), Dorset (98.7%) and Hampshire (95.0%).[36] There are no adverse issues for non-White students in acceptance, continuation, or attainment.



4.5 The student body is older than sector norms: 32% are 21-30; 22% are over 30.[37] These students tend to do well in the College, despite the challenges they face, with many of them having to balance study, family and placement commitments (and in some cases, particularly for these older students, who are more likely to opt for the Placement-Based mode of study, the placements overlap with part-time employment).

4.6 The College has a high proportion of disabled students (19%[38]), reflecting the College's success in attracting and supporting students with Specific Learning Difficulties (discussed in section 8). Notably, 100% of the graduates with a disability entered employment or further study (though caution about comparatively small numbers may also be relevant here).

5 Valuing teaching (TQ2)

5.1 The primary aim of the College is "to equip people…"[39] Thus, learning is the College's most valued goal, and teaching is the most valued College activity. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework indicates that teaching is understood broadly as whatever facilitates learning.[40] The College recruits teachers who share its ethos and values, and who have an evidenced sense of vocation to the development of others: among them teaching is of fundamental importance. Four of the thirteen teachers employed for more than 1/3 of full-time hold postgraduate teaching qualifications. With its small staff team (nine full-time teaching staff), the College has chosen not to develop a system of rewards specifically for comparative performance in teaching, although student feedback on teaching within modules is discussed openly as part of the programmes' Course Committee, and issues relating to teaching, including student feedback, are at the heart of teachers' annual review processes.[41]

5.2 The College continues to develop its academics as teachers through three staff development events per annum focussed on pedagogy. Recent topics have included: dealing with students in crises as a personal tutor, use of the VLE for effective learning, good practice in electronic annotation of student submissions, the nature and purpose of assessment, and differentiation. Teachers discuss each other's teaching annually in pairs of peers, using a system that formally records the discussion and is overseen by the Vice-Principal (Academic), and which identifies

[35] TEF Year 4, Contextual Data.
[36] Statistics from relevant County Council websites.
[37] TEF Year 4 metrics, Contextual Data.
[38] TEF Year 4 metrics, Contextual Data. Cf. the national average of 6.6%: HESA, UKPI 2016-17, Table C.
[39] Strategic Plan, 2018-23.
[40] Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, 2.3.
[41] Academic Staff Annual Review Form. The details of the policy are contained within the form, so that they have maximum communicational effectiveness.

good practice for wider dissemination and any issues that need remedial addressing.[42] An annual 27-hour summit gathers teachers from all locations together and has developing pedagogy as one of its focuses.

5.3 The success in fostering high-quality teaching is reflected in student feedback, including the very positive TEF metric for teaching. This is in the top 10% nationally, with an NSS score of 97% for the average of the four NSS questions, 13 percentage points above the sector average.[43] There was a 100% positive rating for "Staff have made the subject interesting" and 98% positive ratings for both "Staff are good at explaining things" and "The course is intellectually stimulating".[44] Student representatives at Course Committee frequently start their reports with references to the high quality of teaching.[45]

5.4 Other means by which the College promotes, facilitates and recognises excellent teaching for the purposes of the programmes are discussed in section 2.

6 Scholarship, research and professional practice (LE2)

6.1 The College's teaching is enriched with scholarship and professional practice, and to a lesser extent, research.

- The College's Quality Manual embeds a policy that controls the increasing academic qualifications required of staff at different levels of study, starting with a requirement that to teach at Level 4 an Honours qualification must be held.[46]
- Doctorates are held by 44% of full-time staff, and 32% of all teaching staff. The College is committed to increase those percentages as staff are replaced.[47]
- Staff loadings, which are managed in detail, include a standard allotment of over four hours/week for research, training and conferences.[48] Some staff have increased allowances, e.g., in 2018-19 three of the full-time teachers have an allotment of, on average, over three hours/week to support current writing projects, including in one case a term-length study leave for the completion of a doctoral thesis.
- In addition to supporting the member of staff pursuing a doctorate, the College is also facilitating three part-time staff who are working on Masters' qualifications (two teachers and the Librarian).

6.2 The impact of scholarship is vital to and significant in the programmes: as one External Examiner commented, "The curriculum is very well designed and organised; material is regularly updated in line with developments in scholarship."[49]

6.3 Just as the programmes emphasise the linking of theory and practice (see section 2), so the staff engage in practice in a way that enriches their teaching. Most of the academic staff are regularly engaged in teaching events, with adults and/or youth, in conferences, churches and other settings. It is estimated that on average the full-time staff are engaged in just under two such events per month. Of the nine full-time teaching staff,

- two are currently leaders in local churches,

[42] QAA, HER (AP) Report 2018, 2.28.
[43] NSS 2018.
[44] NSS 2018, questions 1-4, with the 100% positivity for question 2.
[45] BA Course Committee, 7 July 2017, 5; BA Course Committee 15 11 2017, item 5a.
[46] Quality Manual 2017-18, 1.5; QAA, HER (AP) 2018 Report, 2.27.
[47] HER (AP) 2018 submission, 56.
[48] HER (AP) 2018 submission, 58.
[49] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 5.1.

- four are ordained ministers,
- two have professional qualification in Youth and Community Work ("JNC"),
- and between them they are trustees of seven charities, responsible for precisely the kind of work the College prepares students for.

6.4 The result of all this is the stretching provision discussed in section 9, leading to employable students, as discussed in sections 2-4.

7 Resources (LE1)

7.1 For "the student learning experience… to be very positive"[50] requires a well-resourced provision, including a "learning environment where students are enabled to fulfil — and exceed — their potential."[51] Another External Examiner reports, "The resources available through the [physical] library and electronically are very much fit for purpose".[52] Similarly, in the 2018 EMS, 88% of students gave a positive response regarding facilities.[53]

7.2 In 2015 a building project was completed which added new teaching spaces and improved student social areas. A sum equivalent to 1.6 times the College's annual turnover was invested in this way without incurring any debt. The Academic Board noted the significant contribution this enhancement made to the provision of the College.[54]

7.3 At the start of the 2015-16 academic year, the College invested in an improved, Moodle-based, Virtual Learning Environment. This is now a central feature of the delivery of the programmes. The College has reviewed its use of the VLE and found it to be an effective enhancement facilitating students to attain their learning goals.[55]

7.4 The libraries hold more than 40,000 hard copy books, with over 1,000 added each year. Considerable attention has been given to ensuring that students irrespective of mode of study are able to access sufficient materials. In summer 2016, the University withdrew access to its electronic resources from students at validated partners, but the College was well-prepared for this and had already purchased licences for relevant databases of electronic learning resources. As of the start of the 2018-19 academic year, the College had over 3,000 subject-relevant, full-text journals (with over 2.5 million articles) and over 7,500 e-books, with a particular emphasis on core text books for modules.[56] The transition to greater use of electronic resources requires careful and strategic action: a recent piece of work established that of 159 key books in a set of six modules, only four were available electronically. The College is adapting its acquisitions strategy to maximise effectiveness for learning.

7.5 During the first semester of 2016-17, the College introduced a new, online library database system (Heritage), for all physical and electronic items at all locations. It is seamlessly integrated within the VLE platform. A review of the provision for undergraduates concluded that the system was very helpful for students, particularly off-campus.[57]

7.6 From the start of the 2016-17 academic year, the College launched a new, online system for submission and marking of assignments. This was developed in-house, requiring considerable investment in design and development. Students, irrespective of location, submit assignments via a VLE page, marking and moderation are undertaken electronically, and feedback is sent

[50] External Examiner Report 2017-18, BA Cazaly, 4.1.
[51] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 1.1.
[52] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 4.1.
[53] Extra-Modular Survey 2017, Q1.
[54] Academic Board, 8 September 2015, 41.
[55] Academic Board, 28 March 2017, 8.
[56] Learning Resources Development Policy.
[57] BA Course Committee, 9 November 2016, 12(b).

by email instantly. Student representatives have reported that the system is "functioning well" and "really helpful".[58]

8 Personalised learning (LE3)

8.1 In line with the College's ethos, which puts the development of the person at the heart of the educational process,[59] staff invest considerable time in engaging with students at the individual level. The result, "the multi-layered support structures, which enable students to develop fully their academic, personal and professional potential", is recognised as good practice.[60]

8.2 A relationship is built up between the student and their personal tutor through timetabled tutor group times (1-2 hours per week, depending on mode) and through five, half-hour one-to-one personal tutorials per year.[61] In addition, personal tutors are available to discuss issues at other times and support the student as the primary point of contact with the College; all but two of the full-time academics operate open-door policies, so that students know that concerns and questions can easily be raised.

8.3 The success of these structures is confirmed by NSS 2018 results, where the College scores 92% for the Academic Support category, one percentage point above the benchmark and twelve percentage points above the sector.[62] After meeting students, the University noted, "There was a constant line of communication with teaching staff at the College to support [students'] learning and research."[63] Similarly, External Examiners have recorded:

> "The personal and practice tutors should be commended on the work that they do to support and encourage students."[64]
>
> "There appears to be a high level of commitment and engagement from students as the College provides a supportive learning environment evidenced by good communication and rapport between staff and students."[65]

8.4 The College inducts students into their studies thoroughly, taking account of individual needs. The few students who enter at level 5 or 6 are supported by means of a system, including a course leader's checklist, that ensures that all appropriate aspects of orientation are properly addressed.[66] Students are informed accurately about transitions and options in their studies through various sessions, particularly those at the start and the end of each academic year. Consequently, the NSS 2018 result for "I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course" was 95% positive: this is four percentage points above the very competitive NSS benchmark and seventeen above the sector figure.[67]

8.5 The College enables students to identify placements that are appropriate for them, with personal tutors and the placements team playing key roles. The College's strategic and embedded focus on the individual student's learning means that there is a good range of optional modules, enabling students to develop their own interests and ensuring that teaching is personalised in terms of class size, with the median size being 12 students, and only 11% of classes having more than 30 students.

[58] BA Course Committee, 1 March 2017, 6(b, g). A third reporting representative was similarly positive, 6(j).
[59] Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, 1.2.
[60] QAA, HER (AP) Report 2018, Good Practice.
[61] Quality Manual, 2018-19, 6.1.2.
[62] NSS 2018, based on questions 12-14.
[63] University of Gloucestershire, Partnership Review 2015 Report, 8.2.
[64] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Twilley, 11.1
[65] External Examiner Report 2017-18, BA Salter, 4.1.
[66] Academic Board, 28 11 2018, item 3.
[67] NSS 2018, question 13.

8.6 The College's overall figure for students with disabilities is high (19%[68]), and more than half of them had a Specific Learning Difficulty. This is a result of the College's successful marketing strategy, which emphasises the quality of the Learning Support available to such students. The College's well-qualified and committed Learning Support tutors[69] work with these students to empower them to make the most of their learning opportunities. Students eligible to respond gave an 80% positive rating to the Learning Support service in 2017-18.[70]

8.7 From the start of the 2017-18 academic year, and with the goal of further enhancing the College's strong continuation rates, the College offers to any student who fails an assessment two half-hour or one hour-long free session with a Learning Support tutor. This enables the student to review and comprehend the reasons for the fail grade, and to plan better for the next assignment. Further activity in the last two years includes a thorough review of the study skills sessions offered in level 4 and the development of a study skills VLE page accessible by all students.[71] These enhancements have been greeted positively by student representatives.[72]

8.8 Thus, students, in the last two EMS, have given 92% and 90% positive responses regarding support for their learning.[73] Similarly, an External Examiner noted,

> "I'm particularly impressed with the individual pastoral relationships between tutors and students which are evident from comments on assessments and the like… and the availability of tutors to students outside classes is very good… My sense is of a very good learning community in which students are helped and supported to grow intellectually very well indeed."[74]

9 Rigour and stretch (TQ3)

9.1 The rigour of the College's provision can best be attested to by external bodies. The College engages with regular scrutiny processes conducted by the University and QAA. The most recent processes concluded positively.

- At the end of the Higher Education Review (Plus) process, the QAA review team found that the College met national expectations in all four areas, identified three aspects of good practice, and made six recommendations.[75] For each expectation relating to standards and quality of the (then pertaining) Quality Code, the level of risk was deemed to be low. An action plan was created to address issues raised by the report, and progress on it is monitored by the Academic Board. Three of the report's recommendations were swiftly closed by specific actions for the start of the 2018-19 academic year, and the other issues, which by their nature require actions of longer time-frame or later review, are being taken forward appropriately.[76]

- In 2015, the College underwent processes of partnership approval and periodic review and revalidation of its programmes with the University. In the concluding report, the University team placed no conditions on the re-approvals, made two recommendations

[68] TEF Year 4, Contextual Data.
[69] See HER (AP) submission, 74; QAA, HER (AP) Report, 2018, 2.41.
[70] EMS 2018, Q4.
[71] Academic Board, 20 03, 2018 item 24.
[72] BA Course Committee 14 11 2018, item 6.
[73] EMS 2017, Q2.
[74] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 4.1.
[75] QAA, HER (AP) Report, 2018.
[76] HER (AP) Action Plan, 28 November 2018. Cf. Academic Board minutes: 11 September 2018, 17; 28 November 2018, item 3(17).

to the College, and gave a commendation for the clarity and helpfulness of the documentation supplied.[77]

9.2 The College's approach to rigour is also demonstrated by its decision to pursue a systematic, policy-based, internal periodic review process, when the University decided to withdraw its former system of cyclical Periodic Review and Revalidation (opting for a "risk-based", non-cyclical system). The College's decision was taken in the light of best practice in the sector, including the QAA Quality Code. A first such internal periodic review is currently taking place, with events scheduled for the summer term of 2019.

9.3 The same values are embedded in assessment.

> "The marking processes are rigorous and clearly recorded."
>
> Assessment "procedures are sound and appropriate".
>
> "The College executes a valid and reliable processes [*sic*] of assessment, ensuring marking and moderation processes are transparent and fair."[78]

9.4 Indeed, for the last decade at least, External Examiners have raised no questions about the rigour of the College's processes and have consistently affirmed the maintenance of academic standards, and the robustness, rigour and consistency of the assessment processes.[79] Moderation and placement processes have been repeatedly singled out for particular praise, respectively, for example, "very good indeed" and "very well developed and… to be commended."[80] Overall, assessments "provide students with a range of academic skills and practice abilities to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes" and "are well-structured, encouraging the students to be both practical and creative but with a strong academic underpinning."[81]

9.5 The University of Gloucestershire is ultimately responsible for the maintenance of national standards relating to the classification of degrees at the College. The College rigorously implements the University's policies and closely monitors closely the results. No anomalies have been identified.

9.6 The stretching of students is a function of the approach to teaching, including course design, which is discussed thoroughly throughout this report. Students have strongly affirmed the provision in these areas. In the NSS 2018, 98% of students found their course to be intellectually stimulating, and (again) 98% reported that they had been presented with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts at depth.[82]

10 Feedback (TQ4)

10.1 The College's approach to assessment, including feedback, is directed by the strategy of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework.[83] This is embedded in practice by means of various policies.[84]

10.2 The College eschews merely formative assessment exercises, but rather has developed a culture where every assessment is viewed as being as much formative as summative, and in

[77] Report of Partnership and PRRs, 2015.
[78] External Examiner Reports 2017-18, BA Salter, 11.1, BA Cazaly, 3.4. QAA, HER (AP) 2018 Report, 2.65.
[79] E.g., External Examiner Reports 2017-18, BA Cazaly, 1.1-1.5, 3.1-3.5, 5.1, 6.1-6.5, 9.1, 11.1, BA Salter, 1.1-1.5, 3.1-3.5, 6.1-6.5, 7.1-7.2, 11.1.
[80] External Examiner Reports 2016-17, BA Walton, 3.4, BA Twilley, 11.1.
[81] External Examiner Reports 2016-17, BA Twilley, 3.1, 2017-18, BA Cazaly, 3.1.
[82] NSS 2018, Q3, 5.
[83] Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework.
[84] Academic Staff Induction Policy; Moderation Policy; Feedback Expectations Policy.

which markers strive to maximise the effectiveness of their feedback as a means of enabling learning.[85] As part of the approach, the College's management strategically schedules assessments across the year.

10.3 The results of the approach are evident to both students, 91% of whom responded positively to "I have received detailed comments on my work",[86] and to External Examiners, whose similar comments were made despite their tenures not overlapping.

> "The quality of marking and feedback is exemplary, including annotations on the (electronic) submissions and overall comments, usually of most of a page, which give detailed and clear advice on strengths and areas to improve (even for students scoring high marks)."[87]

> "The team is particularly strong in the feedback given to students. Considerable feedback is given on students' scripts as well as through the formal feedback process and it is done in such a way as to be encouraging while ensuring that shortcomings in the work are pointed out and pointers are given to help students improve their marks."[88]

10.4 The College ensures that its approach is embedded across all its staff and at all locations through the policies and staff induction sessions. An External Examiner identified as an example of good practice the "very high quality of feedback and notes to students on assessment task[s], which is consistent across the college's [modes of delivery]."[89]

10.5 Consequently, the College's TEF metric for assessment and feedback is in the top 10% nationally, six percentage points higher than the NSS benchmark and sixteen higher than the NSS sector average. Since entering the NSS, the College has consistently performed well in most areas related to assessment, but the success relating to the timeliness of feedback, now rated at 89% positive,[90] is a result of recent endeavours, monitored closely by the Academic Board,[91] and demonstrates the College's ability to improve through close monitoring and management initiatives. In 2017-18, the College gave feedback on 96% of marking batches within the prescribed timeframe, and strives to reach 100%.[92]

10.6 See also the discussions of rigour and stretch in the College's delivery (section 9) and of the learning evidence in student outcomes (sections 2, 3).

11 Student engagement in teaching and learning (TQ1)

11.1 The College's students are extremely enthusiastic about the quality of teaching they receive, with a TEF Year 4 core metric of 95.3% for "The teaching on my course". The benchmark figure of 91.6% presumably reflects the high quality of teaching typical in similar institutions, but the quality of the College's teaching well exceeds this. The positivity about teaching is confirmed by other feedback from students, for example, in the 2018 NSS the scores for "Staff have made

[85] Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, 3.1, 3.4; Feedback Expectations Policy,
[86] EMS 2016.
[87] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 3.3.
[88] External Examiner Report 2017-18, BA Cazaly, 11.1. Cf. the equally positive assessments of the remaining two examiners: External Examiner Reports 2015-16, BA Twilley, 3.3, 11.1; and 2017-18, BA Salter, 1.5, 3.3, 11.1.
[89] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 11.1.
[90] NSS 2018, Q10: 12% above benchmark and 16% above sector.
[91] Academic Board, 14 September 2017, 8; 29 November 2017, 10; 20 March 2018, 10; 29 June 2018, 6; 11 September 2018 8.
[92] Academic Board, 11 September 2018, 8.

the subject interesting", "The course is intellectually stimulating" and "My course has challenged me to achieve my best work" were 100%, 98% and 93% respectively.[93]

11.2 These statistics, reflecting the student perception of teaching quality, are a result of the strategic and deliberate approach to learning and the mechanisms by which this approach is implemented, as discussed in all the preceding sections. The high level of student engagement is maintained by listening attentively to the student voice. Consequently, the three NSS questions under the "Student Voice" heading had responses on average seven percentage points above the benchmark and twenty above the sector. As per the Student Representation Policy, significantly revised for 2017-18, and reviewed and found to be operating effectively, student representatives are thoroughly trained and are members of committees at all levels of management, from the Student Journey Enhancement Group that worked on this submission, through Course Committees and Academic Board to the Board of Trustees.[94] The various (six) systems used to gather information from undergraduates have been reviewed. The College believes that they effectively enable the hearing of the student voice.[95]

11.3 The College recognises the virtuous cycle, whereby high rates of engagement with teaching maintain high quality teaching, which in turns promotes high rates of engagement. This is visible even to an External Examiner who only sees the resulting work produced for assessment: "There appears to be a high level of commitment and engagement from students as the College provides a supportive learning environment evidenced by good communication and rapport between staff and students".[96]

11.4 Attendance rates are presented as a final measure of the success of the College in fostering students' engagement with their learning opportunities. As of 7 January 2019, the mean attendance rate at all scheduled modular activities of all undergraduate students in the current year was 97.5%. The College suspects this is well above national averages.

11.5 In summary, the recent QAA team found the following.

> "The review team considers that through these robust processes of student engagement, the College defines, creates and maintains a supportive and productive environment for students to complete their programmes. With an ethos that aspires to bring about demonstrable enhancement to the learning environment, the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience, the College engages with students as partners on an institution-wide level."[97]

12 Summary

12.1 The strategic approach taken by the College ensures that, as External Examiners consistently identify, there is a "very high quality of teaching and learning".[98] Students consequently attain their personal goals, they report high levels of overall satisfaction: most recently 95%,[99] and have strong progression rates to useful employment.

[93] NSS 2018, Q2-4.
[94] Academic Board, 29 June 2018, 18; student representative training materials reviewed at that meeting.
[95] BA Course Committee, 7 July 2017, 12.
[96] External Examiner Report 2017-18, BA Salter, 4.1.
[97] QAA, HER (AP) 2018 Report, 2.58.
[98] External Examiner Report 2016-17, BA Walton, 1.5.
[99] NSS 2018, Q27.