

Office for
Students



Degree awarding powers assessment report for South Devon College

Assessment for variation of
degree awarding powers

Provider legal name: South Devon College

Provider trading name: University Centre South Devon

UKPRN: 10005977

Assessment conducted: 17 April 2024 to 16 December 2024

Reference: OfS 2025.19

Enquiries to: regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk

Publication date: 25 March 2025

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction and background	6
Context	6
Assessment process	8
Information gathering	8
Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance	9
Criterion A1: Academic governance	9
Sub-criterion A1.1	9
Sub-criterion A1.2	17
Sub-criterion A1.3	18
Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance	21
Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks	21
Sub-criterion B1.1	21
Sub-criterion B1.2	24
Criterion B2: Academic standards	27
Sub-criterion B2.1	27
Sub-criterion B2.2	30
Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience	37
Sub-criterion B3.1	37
Assessment of DAPs criterion C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff	50
Criterion C1: The role of academic and professional staff	50
Sub-criterion C1.1	50
Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students	61
Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement	61
Sub-criterion D1.1	61
Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance	73
Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance	73
Assessment of overarching criterion for the authorisation of DAPs	77
Advice to the OfS	77
Reasoning	77
Conclusions	78
Annex A: Abbreviations	79

Executive summary

Type of assessment	Quality and standards assessment for full degree awarding powers
For	South Devon College

1. This report represents the conclusions of an assessment for degree awarding powers (DAPs) at South Devon College ('the college'). The college is seeking indefinite Foundation DAPs.
2. To carry out the assessment, the Office for Students (OfS) appointed an independent team of academic experts. This report contains the advice and judgement of the team following its assessment.
3. The team concluded that the college met all the criteria for a Full DAPs authorisation (see Table 1). 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 the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (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 by 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 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 HERA on the quality of and standards applied to the higher education being delivered by providers for which the OfS is

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

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. South Devon College is a further education college and university centre. University Centre South Devon (UCSD) is the higher education brand. The college's portfolio of Level 4+ qualifications is varied and includes 23 under its Foundation DAPs across a range of subject areas such as Engineering, Health, Education and Youth Studies.
5. The college was awarded time-limited Foundation DAPs by the Privy Council in March 2019 for a period of six years. The time-limited Foundation DAPs Order is due to expire on 17 March 2025.
6. In accordance with the OfS's regulatory framework and Regulatory advice 17, the college is eligible to be considered for indefinite Foundation DAPs because it has held time-limited degree awarding powers for a period of three years.⁵
7. The OfS appointed an external assessment team on 30 May 2024 to undertake a desk-based DAPs variation assessment. The OfS asked the assessment team to give its advice 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 South Devon College in support of its application to vary its DAPs authorisation.
9. This report is provisionally scheduled for consideration by the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) on 22 January 2025. QAC will formulate its advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards at South Devon College having considered this report.

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

³ See GOV.UK, [Higher Education and Research Act 2017](#).

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

⁵ See [Regulatory advice 17: Variation and revocation of degree awarding powers \(OfS 2019.48\)](#), last updated July 2023.

10. The OfS will have regard to this assessment report and QAC's advice when making a decision about whether to vary the college's DAPs authorisation on the basis requested. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment for the college 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 GOV.UK, [Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 2](#).

Introduction and background

11. This report represents the conclusions of a DAPs assessment for a provider seeking indefinite Foundation DAPs. The assessment was a desk-based assessment and did not include a visit to the provider.
12. The OfS's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) will consider the report and formulate its advice to the OfS regarding quality and standards at South Devon College. The OfS will have regard to the assessment report and QAC's advice when making a decision about whether to vary South Devon College's DAPs authorisation on the basis requested.
13. The OfS will also consider its own risk assessment for the provider and will have regard to advice received from others where this has been sought, as well as other relevant considerations such as the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.⁷

Context

14. South Devon College is part of the Devon Colleges Group and operates from its campus in Torbay, Devon. It is a medium-sized further education college, and a significant employer in the region. The college's higher education brand is University Centre South Devon (UCSD). The college gained Foundation DAPs in March 2019.
15. With Foundation DAPs the college has developed Level 4 and 5 qualifications which it considers meet the needs of the region. It works in partnership with University of Plymouth to offer validated progression pathways towards bachelors' degrees. The college has successfully developed 23 qualifications: 17 Foundation degrees, four Certificates of Higher Education, one 20-credit short course and a five-credit micro-module. It offers these in a range of subjects including:
 - Adventure Sport
 - Art and Design
 - Children, Society and Education
 - Engineering
 - Health and Social Care
 - Music and Performing Arts
 - Social Sciences (Psychology, Criminology and Sociology)
 - Sports and Coaching.
16. Based on the latest available OfS data dashboard on 'Size and shape of provision',⁸ the college had a student population in academic year 2022-2023 of 850 students. This included 280 full-time undergraduate students, 240 part-time undergraduate students and 330 apprenticeship students. There were 10 postgraduate students, who were all part-time.

⁷ See GOV.UK, [Higher Education and Research Act 2017](#).

⁸ These figures come from the latest data available in the OfS's 'Size and shape of provision data dashboard', available at [Size and shape of provision data dashboard](#).

17. The college reported that it currently employs approximately 23 full-time academic staff, 16 part-time academic staff and 14 professional staff. These numbers include staff who are directly teaching on and supporting provision awarded by South Devon College through its university centre.
18. In October 2023, the college requested to be considered for indefinite Foundation DAPs, as it had held time-limited Foundation DAPs for four years.
19. In accordance with the OfS regulatory framework and OfS Regulatory advice 17, the OfS undertook an initial eligibility and suitability assessment of South Devon College and decided that a desk-based DAPs assessment should be undertaken. This assessment was to gather and test evidence to inform a judgement about 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
 - apply, and maintain the application of, appropriate standards to that higher education.
20. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 30 May 2024 which consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff in the following roles:
 - a. Dr Tricia Tikasingh – committee chair and lead assessor.
 - b. Dr Patrick John Ainsworth – deputy committee chair and assessor.
 - c. Dr Fay Glendenning – deputy committee chair and assessor.
 - d. Miss Molly Bonser – committee member and assessment coordinator.
21. The OfS asked the 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.
22. The assessment team considered a range of information submitted by South Devon College in support of its application to vary its DAPs authorisation.

Assessment process

Information gathering

23. South Devon College submitted a self-assessment document in June 2024, in accordance with the operational guidance on the variation and revocation of degree awarding powers outlined in Annex B of OfS Regulatory advice 17. The document set out how South Devon College considers it meets the DAPs criteria for the Foundation DAPs authorisation it already held.
24. To support the statements made in the self-assessment document, South Devon College submitted a range of documentary evidence. This included course documentation, information related to academic policies and processes, staff resources, academic and other teaching, learning and assessment resources, and governance information and documentation.
25. Following its review of South Devon College's initial evidence submission, the assessment team requested further evidence from the college on 29 July 2024 which was received by the assessment team on 19 August 2024. The team also requested further evidence on 17 September 2024 and received this on 2 October 2024.
26. The assessment team undertook its desk-based assessment of South Devon College's evidence submission between June 2024 and November 2024.

Assessment of DAPs criterion A: Academic governance

Criterion A1: Academic governance

Advice to the OfS

27. The assessment team's view is that the provider meets criterion A1: Academic governance because it meets sub-criteria A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3.
28. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that South Devon College has sound academic governance and management structures that deliver effective academic governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability. It also has appropriate oversight to ensure that if it decides to work with other organisations, these arrangements will ensure the academic standards and the quality of courses delivered by partner organisations. It engages students as partners in the academic governance and management of academic standards and quality.
29. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Sub-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

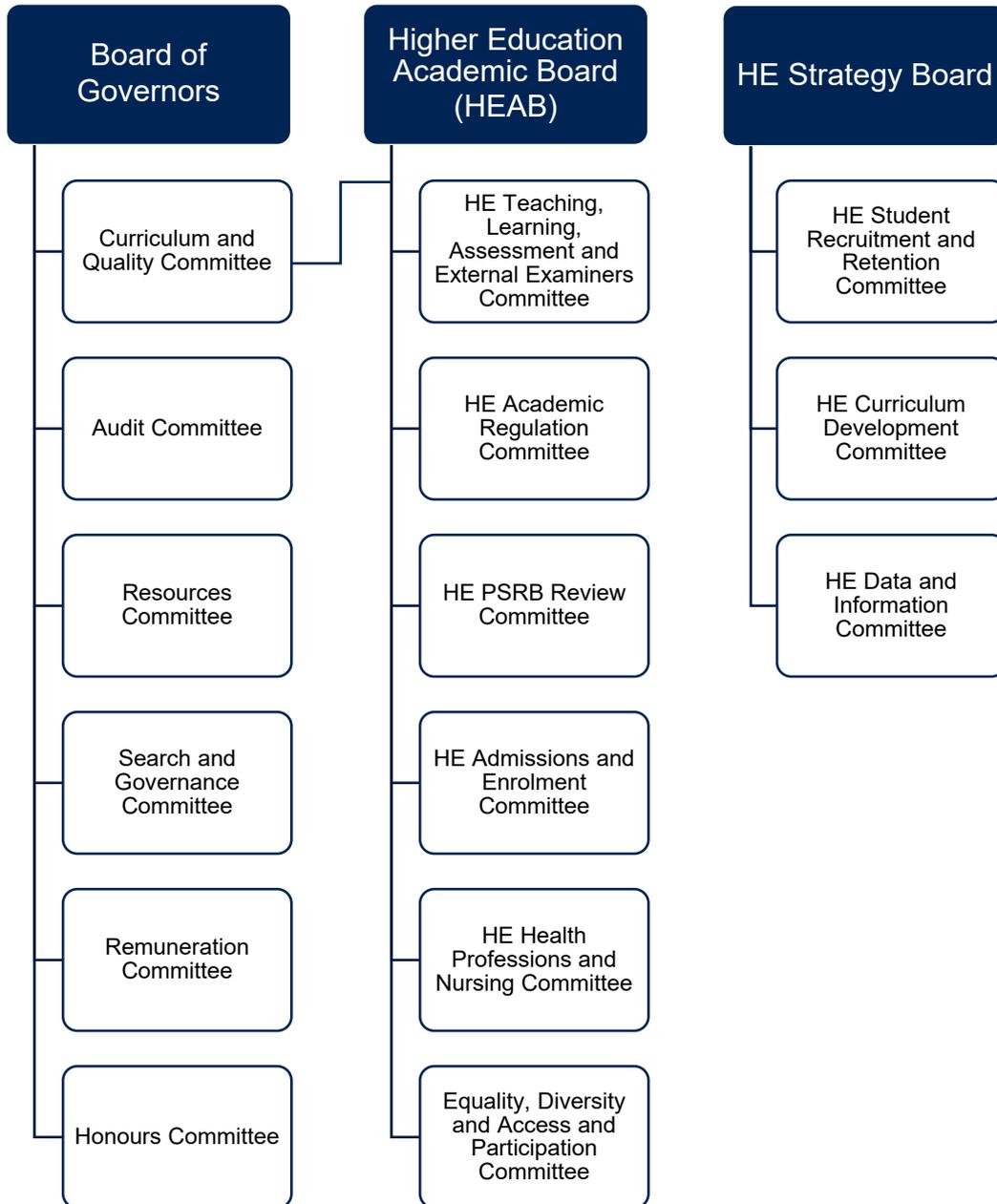
30. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion A1.1 because it has effective academic governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.
31. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for A1.1 and any other relevant requirements.

Reasoning

32. To inform the assessment team's consideration of its academic governance arrangements, the college provided the following contextual information regarding its management and governance structures.
33. The college's Strategic Leadership Framework 2023-30 sets out the college's higher education mission, vision and strategic priorities. The overview highlights a focus on academic quality and resources, community needs, effective leadership and student empowerment. This mission is supported by the values of aspiration, inclusion, innovation, support and progress. Strategic priorities are aimed at inspiring the community through learning and professional development in order to provide an edge to success.

34. The Board of Governors is the most senior decision-making body with responsibility for the overall strategic direction and mission of the college, including financial and academic affairs, and the maintenance of quality and standards of its higher education provision. The governing body oversight has been set out in the college's articles and instruments of governance and the standing orders. The Scheme of Delegation provides a framework for a devolved model of delegation to officers and committees.
35. The Board of Governors delegates responsibility as demonstrated in the college's HE Committee Structure, shown in Figure 1. Through the devolved Curriculum and Quality Committee (CQC), there is an interconnected governance matrix which includes the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) and its six subcommittees. These include:
- HE Teaching, Learning, Assessment and External Examiners Committee
 - HE Academic Regulations Committee
 - HE Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) Review Committee
 - HE Admissions and Enrolment Committee
 - HE Health Professionals and Nursing Committee
 - HE Equality, Diversity and Access and Participation Committee.
36. The parallel HE Strategy Board delegates responsibility to the:
- HE Student Recruitment and Retention Committee
 - HE Curriculum Development Committee
 - HE Data and Information Committee.
37. The HE Curriculum Development Committee is a senior leadership group which reports to the HE Strategy Board. It is responsible for reviewing proposals for new higher education curriculum content, agreeing proposals from development to approval, making decisions on internal approval or external approvals, and providing oversight of changes to the curriculum.

Figure 1: South Devon College Higher Education Oversight and Committee structure



38. The operation and implementation of the committee matrix is managed by the Vice Principal for Curriculum, Quality and Performance. The assessment team viewed the SDC Management Calendar/Schedule which confirms and illustrates how the committees are scheduled across the year. The terms of reference for the CQC clearly identify how the governing body is engaged in the oversight of the college’s higher education provision and how governor engagement is assured. The assessment team examined the minutes of the CQC which confirmed governor oversight of the academic quality assurance processes, recruitment and admissions, compliance, monitoring and evaluation.
39. To determine whether the college’s higher education mission and strategic direction and associated policies are coherent, published, understood and applied consistently, the assessment team reviewed the college’s current Strategic Leadership Framework 2023-2030 and its Higher Education Strategy. The Higher Education Strategy sets out the college’s

higher education mission, vision and strategic priorities. It includes coherent objectives to deliver a purposeful and credible student experience, with a focus on personal development and student empowerment. The strategy clearly outlines the progress of each objective, achieved or in progress, and maps these against the overall strategic intent. The college reviews its strategic objectives at both the Higher Education Strategy Board and the HEAB. The latter feeds into the Curriculum and Quality Committee which reports to the Board of Governors. The team reviewed the most recent termly report from the Curriculum and Quality Committee to the Board of Governors; this evidenced that the college considered how its regulations deliver and enhance academic quality and standards in line with its Higher Education Strategy.

40. To test if the college's strategic aims and academic policies are consistently applied in practice, the assessment team reviewed the college's key academic strategies and academic quality frameworks. The team reviewed the Quality Assurance and Improvement Guidance 2023-2024, a strategic document that includes the teaching and learning strategy and framework, and the quality assurance and improvement strategy. The team found that the document includes clear signposting and support that is available to staff to deliver the policies in line with the Higher Education Strategy. For example, one of the key academic policies, the higher education assessment policy, is reviewed annually and published on the college's website. The assessment team found that this policy is aligned with the college's Higher Education Strategy, with a focus on preparing students for life in the modern world, emphasising core transferable skills that are in line with the college's offer of a personalised, flexible, socially mobile, responsible, authentic, research-led experience. This provided evidence that the college's core academic policies and assessment processes are underpinned by the Higher Education Strategy and supported the team's view that the college's mission and strategic direction and associated policies are applied consistently.
41. The assessment team also considered the college's core strategic documents, such as the Higher Education Strategy 2023, Higher Education Engagement Strategy 2023, Teaching and Learning Strategy 2023-26, People Strategy 2023, and Higher Education Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability. The key strategy documents align well and reiterate the college's higher education mission and commitment to contributing to community development, employment and addressing skills needs and gaps.
42. Minutes from the Curriculum and Quality Committee were reviewed and triangulated with the Higher Education Termly Report – March 2024 which is presented to the Board of Governors. The assessment team was satisfied that the Board of Governors provides rigorous oversight of the college's higher education strategies. The report reflected a focus on updates by the OfS such as the Freedom of Speech consultation and subsequent actions to be taken by the college. The report also provided updates and actions for the access and participation plan, preparations for the college's application for permanent Foundation DAPs, professional body submissions, apprenticeships, student outcomes data, student support, student voice, student recruitment, and curriculum development activities.
43. The assessment team was satisfied that this evidence demonstrates that reporting is strategic rather than opportunistic so that strategic decisions are made which are comprehensive and consistent. This supports the view that there is effective academic governance.

44. In order to determine if the college's academic policies support its higher education mission, aims and objectives, the assessment team reviewed the higher education academic regulations and key policies that are accessible through the college's university centre website. The team reviewed the higher education regulations and found these demonstrated that the regulations support the higher education mission, aims and objectives.
45. The college's policies and procedures all have a designated 'owner' but are written and reviewed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including the student body. The team's review of the HEAB and strategy board terms of reference, alongside a sample of the committee minutes, found that development and consultation happen through the committee and group structure. Changes are then agreed at the relevant committee and then submitted to the HEAB or higher education strategy group for final approval as appropriate. The assessment team tested this process by tracking various policy and procedure updates from committee to academic board approval; for example, the curriculum development and approval procedure is annually reviewed and updated.
46. The assessment team was able to track the discussions for including new periodic review procedures in the curriculum development committee minutes and in the subsequent reporting and approval from the HEAB minutes. This update to process and the procedure document supports part of the college's wider curriculum strategy to ensure programmes are responsive and designed to address local skills gaps and meet local, regional and national needs. This evidence supports the team's view that each committee has a distinct purpose and remit and, as such, enables strong academic governance. The assessment team found that the college's regulations and policies are aligned with the college's higher education mission, aims and objectives. For example, the assessment team reviewed minutes from the HE Academic Regulations Committee. Minutes from June 2024 reflect a review of the college's academic regulations and proposals for changes to the regulations to allow for 30-credit short courses which would be attractive under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and meet the needs of the college's demographic. This proposal was referred to the HEAB for consideration and approval.
47. The college's academic regulations and policies are reviewed by the relevant committee annually, with a remit of making improvements and appropriate changes where necessary. The assessment team further considered the college's key academic regulations and policies under the governance structure, in particular the college's recruitment strategy and the research and retention reports. These are monitored by the higher education recruitment and retention group and then referred to the HEAB for final approval. The team found that in this process a variety of internal stakeholders are consulted as part of the committee structures. This includes student support and wellbeing staff, marketing and admissions staff, and academic staff members. The contribution to policies by committees shows that there is a collaborative working environment; this supports the team's view that there are effective governance arrangements.
48. The assessment team observed that the higher education policies, strategies and guidelines are published on the website for full transparency and student oversight. The website page also includes a link to the Higher Education Strategy 2019-2024 and provides information specifically for higher education students. Students are also given links to higher education policies and the academic regulations in the Student Handbook and the programme quality handbooks. The assessment team did, however, note that some policies were yet to be updated.

on the college's website for this current academic year in line with the college's annual review process. It was the team's view that the newest version of the policies should be made available. However, all policies were last reviewed and updated in June 2023 and sufficiently support its higher education mission, aims and objectives.

49. The contributions of committees and varying internal stakeholders to policies show that there is a collaborative working environment, which further supports the team's view that there are effective governance arrangements.
50. The assessment team assessed whether there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its academic governance structures and arrangements for managing its higher education provision. The provider's submission outlines that the Board of Governors delegates responsibility as demonstrated in the HE Committee Structure.
51. There is an interconnected governance matrix which includes the HEAB and its six subcommittees (see Figure 1). The governing body holds the ultimate decision-making authority for higher education provision and therefore is responsible for ensuring the college continues to meet the OfS's conditions of registration. The monitoring and reporting of compliance with OfS conditions is maintained in a 'mapping and risk of OfS conditions' document and is discussed as a standing item at the HEAB. This is demonstrated in a sample of board minutes reviewed by the team.
52. In order to test where responsibility for the governance structure lies, the team reviewed the governing body's Scheme of Delegation. This clearly states that the Board of Governors is responsible for the management of the college and has the power to delegate any powers conferred on it. As such, it has established the powers and responsibilities of the college's governance structure through the terms of reference for committees, their chairs and memberships. The overview of committee structure and Higher Education Framework demonstrates a focus on clarifying and differentiating functions and responsibilities across governance structures. Within this structure, the HEAB has been established as the highest academic authority at the college.
53. The assessment team considered whether the function and responsibility of senior academic authority is clearly articulated and consistently applied. The HEAB is the guiding academic authority of the college and is responsible for the higher education academic strategy and is accountable to the Board of Governors. The HEAB has the responsibility for maintaining academic standards, the assurance of academic integrity, the enhancement of all higher level provision at the college (in line with relevant regulatory requirements), and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The HEAB reports to the Higher Education Committee which is a subcommittee of the Board of Governors. The HEAB is chaired by the Vice Principal (Quality and Curriculum) and Deputy CEO. Membership of the HEAB includes an independent governor, a higher education student representative and members from across the college including curriculum managers, and staff from academic quality, professional services, learning resources and apprenticeships. The assessment team reviewed minutes of the HEAB. These confirmed student representation at this level, showing student oversight of the college's higher education provision. The sample minutes also confirmed that the HEAB maintains oversight of academic regulations and policies and monitors these for review.

54. The assessment team assessed the function of the six subcommittees reporting to the HEAB. It also considered reporting from the HEAB to the Board of Governors. The team reviewed the college's network of committees and boards which are clearly outlined in its higher education oversight and committee structure document which evidences that there is clarity and differentiation of function and responsibility at all levels of the college's academic governance structure.
55. To further examine the engagement of members of the key committees involved in academic governance, the assessment team reviewed the terms of reference of a number of committees including:
- Curriculum and Quality Committee (CQC)
 - Higher Education Recruitment and Retention Committee
 - Higher Education Admissions and Enrolment Committee
 - Health Professional and Nursing Committee
 - Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) and HTQ Committee.
56. It also examined the terms of reference for the HEAB and a sample of meeting minutes (June 2023, November 2023, February 2024), in order to determine: the purpose and structure of meetings; the roles and experience of committee members including the chairs; and the schedule of agenda items. The minutes show that there is active participation of members in these committees. For example, the assessment team reviewed a sample of three sets of minutes from HEAB and was satisfied with the engagement and contribution of staff, students and stakeholders.
57. Based on the review of the terms of reference for the committees and subcommittees, and the associated samples of minutes from these already cited, the assessment team was satisfied that each committee has a clear remit, and their connected structures are clear. The HEAB and CQC provide senior levels of oversight, monitoring and actions as required. The assessment team considered the effective operationalising of the different committees and subcommittees and determined that the governance structure is appropriate to the college's higher education provision size and context. The assessment team concluded that the function and responsibility of the senior academic authority are clearly articulated and consistently applied.
58. To test whether there is evidence of appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership, the assessment team reviewed the senior leadership structure. The college's higher education team is led by the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar. The structure reflects that the Dean has oversight of the HE Support Hub and Academic Development team and HE Operation, Quality and Compliance team. This team has oversight and management of quality and standards for the higher education provision at the college at an operational level, and covers student support and learning development, registry, admissions, quality assurance, student records, widening participation and outreach.
59. The assessment team reviewed the job descriptions for both the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar and the Higher Education Academic Quality and Standards

Manager which clearly frame the expectations of these key higher education senior leadership roles. The team has also reviewed the senior management and governor profiles on the college's website. The assessment team therefore considered that the current senior leadership team would be recruited to the job description specifications and those in post are suitably qualified and experienced to lead the development, oversight and academic quality of the higher education provision at the college.

60. Further evidence of the college's staff structure is illustrated in the college's organogram for 2023-24 which includes higher education academic quality and standards, registry, compliance, student support and wellbeing, study and employability skills, disability support, learning and academic skills development, admissions, outreach and engagement. The overall college leadership team structure and the senior leadership team structure have also been reviewed by the assessment team. Additionally, job descriptions have been shared for specific higher education roles such as the Senior Co-ordinator – Assistant Registrar for HE Quality, Higher Education Academic Quality Coordinator and the Higher Education Academic Standards and Quality Manager who all report to the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar. Roles and responsibilities are clear and demonstrate how the higher education provision at the college is managed. The academic leadership at programme level is clearly outlined in the HE Curriculum Staff Roles and Responsibilities 2023/24 document. The guide outlines leadership roles for the HE coordinator, HE lead, personal tutors and module leaders. The assessment team found that there is appropriate depth and strength of academic leadership – from senior management, central student services, to programme level and delivery.
61. In order to determine whether the college develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff, students and external stakeholders, the assessment team reviewed a range of minutes from the following committees: HEAB, HE Academic Regulations Committee, HE Health Professions and Nursing Committee, and CQC. HEAB and HE Academic Regulations Committee have student members, and HE leads for schools. The HE Health Professions and Nursing Committee seeks to ensure policies and procedures support practice in the Healthcare sector. Minutes from the October 2023 committee meeting reflect that an agenda item facilitates the review of regulations and policies. The minutes of these meetings are presented at the HEAB which is also responsible for the approval of updates to policies and procedures. Further scrutiny through governors occurs at the CQC. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college has processes in place to ensure it develops, implements and communicates its policies and procedures in collaboration with its staff, students and external stakeholders.
62. The college's policies and procedures in relation to the governance of the six subcommittees to the HEAB were examined in consideration of the college's management of its responsibilities in regard to degree awarding powers. For example, the assessment team reviewed minutes that included updates on Foundation DAPs, Teaching Excellence Framework outcomes, professional body matters, student voice, student outcomes, external examiners, and employer consultations. The assessment team triangulated this evidence with samples of terms of references, composition of members and meeting minutes from the six subcommittees to the HEAB to confirm that each of the subcommittees functions in accordance with its terms of reference. The HEAB has overall authority, and receives and notes subcommittee reports; any required actions are taken back from the HEAB to the

subcommittees. This evidence supports the view that the mechanisms in place are suitable and that there are effective academic governance structures that are managed successfully.

63. The assessment team was satisfied that the college has a robust strategy, vision and mission for its higher education provision. Evidence (such as strategic plans; academic regulations and policies; terms of reference for committees involved in academic governance, such as the HEAB; and a sample of minutes for these committees) demonstrates that there is successful management of responsibilities and the arrangements are based on a strategic approach, informed by the effective assessment of risks including the carrying out of due diligence.
64. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion A1.1 as the evidence shows that the college has effective governance with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities.

Sub-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

65. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion A1.2 because its academic governance is conducted in partnership with its students.
66. The team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for A1.2 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

67. To determine whether students are partners with the college in terms of academic governance and all aspects of the control and oversight of the college's higher education provision, the assessment team reviewed the college's key higher education governance committees' terms of reference and minutes. Student representatives are members of the following higher education committees: the HE Academic Regulations Committee; HEAB; Teaching, Learning, Assessment and External Examiner Committee. It was also noted that there is a student governor who is a member of the HEAB. The assessment team considered the remits of these key committees that provide ongoing and critical academic governance and oversight. There is an opportunity to engage students as partners in the process at the level of senior committees. The minutes of three meetings reviewed, however, indicated that the student representative sent apologies to one of the HEAB meetings. The college's Student Engagement Strategy 2023 sets out student engagement as a priority; the HEAB Student Voice report identified factors impacting on wider student representation and actions being taken to address this and improve engagement. The Student Voice report indicated that 12 student course representatives had joined the first forum in November 2023. The SDC Foundation DAPs student submission, provided by the lead student representative, mentions 'student consultative forums' which offer student representatives a positive space to share their views and provide feedback to the college.

68. The assessment team also considered the student submission for 2024. This report was completed by the lead student representative (who sits on the committees named above), with support from other student course representatives. Course representatives volunteer for the role and receive training from the Student Union prior to engaging in meetings. The report confirmed that students are able to feedback and engage in the Student Voice meetings for their respective courses. They were also very positive about the student consultative forums, where they had an opportunity to also engage directly with staff from other departments, such as the library, and to feedback on services and any issues. Staff also had an opportunity to highlight actions taken as a result of student feedback at the student forums. Student representatives also engage at course level meetings and have an opportunity to engage with their lecturers to provide feedback in those meetings. The assessment team viewed this report and the Student Voice Report as an indication that students felt that their voice was valued and were able to engage effectively in their roles.
69. The assessment team is therefore satisfied that the college meets sub-criterion A1.2 – its academic governance is conducted in partnership with its students. Based on the evidence of senior governance committees, there are two key student leadership roles – the lead student representative and the student governor – and both students are noted in meeting membership within the minutes. The college has identified that attendance for student representatives should be improved and has aimed to address the factors impacting on engagement. Students are individually and collectively able to engage effectively with the management of the college and its higher education provision.

Sub-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 sub-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 is 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 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

72. In order to determine how the college employs its governance structures to demonstrate effective and robust decision making based on a strategic approach, the assessment team considered the minutes of meetings from the HEAB, HE Strategy Board, and the CQC. It also considered the strategic approach set out in the college's self-assessment report. In this report, the college states that it views its higher education curriculum as being integral to its

mission to inspire the community through learning, and to contribute to the economic development of the community it serves. The assessment team determined that the college's Higher Education Strategy demonstrates its key priorities for its curriculum and its commitment to upholding the conditions necessary to seek permanent Foundation DAPs.

73. The assessment team reviewed the minutes from the HE Strategy Board and was able to confirm that the membership included senior staff for outreach, partnerships, and Heads of Curriculum. The minutes demonstrate that there is evidence-informed decision making which considers national and local developments and the impact of these on new course development or course closures. For example, the Board discussed the need to update its Gaming Technology portfolio based on developments in the industry. The Board also noted key university partners in the region and the strategic importance of maintaining these partnerships. The Board demonstrated a focus on new developments in the sector regarding Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) and micro-credentials for industry which would inform future planning. Based on the review of the minutes for the HE Strategy Board, the assessment team is confident that the Board maintains an evidence-based approach to strategic decision making and planning when working with other organisations.
74. The assessment team also considered the minutes of the HEAB which provided additional evidence of how this key board makes strategic decisions regarding the college's higher education provision. For example, the Board received reports from the Health Professions and Nursing Committee regarding its BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Audiology) course which was approved with University of Plymouth. The Board also monitors the college's OfS risk register, its PSRB risk register and noted OfS reports for one of its higher education partners. The assessment team considered that this demonstrates that the college also employs the HEAB to maintain effective and robust oversight of decisions related to working with other organisations such as other higher education institutions or PSRBs.
75. The college provided evidence to indicate that it engages in effective assessment of risk of its partnership including the carrying out of due diligence. Where the college works with other organisations, these are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the organisation's provision. For example, the assessment team viewed an exemplar Memorandum of Understanding between South Devon College and the Bay Education Trust (2021) which ensures continuity of educational opportunities for young people post-secondary school in the Paignton area. Where the college works with the University of Plymouth on Level 6 progression pathways, the assessment team also considered a sample of Letters of Amendments to Articulation Agreements (2023) for progressing students from Foundation degree programmes. Based on the self-assessment report, and the legal arrangements in place, the assessment team found that the college continues to maintain strong partnership arrangements with its higher education partners. The full Articulation Agreement was also reviewed and the assessment team's view was that this is appropriately detailed and robust. The assessment team was therefore assured that where the college works with other organisations, these relationships are defined in a written legal agreement and are subject to the same robust oversight and governance as the rest of the college's provision.

Conclusions

76. The assessment team considered the evidence provided by the college and their overall view is that it meets criterion A1: Academic governance.
77. In conclusion regarding sub-criterion A1.1, the assessment team formed the view that the college has effective academic governance structures, together with clear and appropriate lines of accountability. The assessment team therefore considered that the college is successfully managing the responsibilities under its current Foundation DAPs authorisation. Since gaining its DAPs, the college has demonstrated a commitment to ensuring its higher education senior management team has the appropriate experience, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and effective governance structures in place, to enable it to continue to meet this criterion in the future.
78. In conclusion regarding sub-criterion A1.2, the assessment team formed the view that the college conducts academic governance, including all aspects of the control and oversight of its higher education provision, in partnership with its students under its current Foundation DAPs authorisation. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team is confident that students have been at the centre of the higher education strategy and mission for the college, and are part of governance, monitoring and evaluation of its higher education provision, at course and college level.
79. In conclusion regarding sub-criterion A1.3, the assessment team formed the view that, where the college 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. The assessment team was confident that the college forms strategic partnerships within its local and regional community to ensure that its higher education provision meets the needs for post-16 education, employer needs, and the needs of the PSRBs that it works with. The robust and effective oversight of these partnerships are embedded within its governance structures and underpinned by formal and legal agreements.

Assessment of DAPs criterion B: Academic standards and quality assurance

Criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks

Advice to the OfS

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

Sub-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

83. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion B1.1 because it has in place transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications.
84. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for B1.1 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

85. To determine whether academic frameworks and regulations governing the college's higher education provision are appropriate for indefinite Foundation DAPs and are implemented fully and consistently, the assessment team reviewed the college's academic frameworks and regulations, and associated policies and monitoring mechanisms that govern its higher education provision. The Higher Education Framework maps the college's regulations, policies and procedures against a development and approval structure which has been in place since the college was awarded time-limited Foundation DAPs in 2019. The regulations are reviewed annually within the academic regulations subcommittee which reports directly to HEAB. In turn, the HEAB reports to the Higher Education Committee which is a subcommittee of the Board of Governors. This process ensures approval of changes to academic regulations have full oversight and agreement from the governing body, the senior academic authority in the college. The assessment team considered the content of the college's higher

education regulations, procedures and policies and concluded that they are transparent and comprehensive.

86. The assessment team reviewed the college's set of six key academic regulations including assessment regulations, admissions regulations, award design, validation and review regulations, external examiners regulations, student registration regulations and studying regulations. These key academic regulations are also supported by ten academic policies and procedures, including a code of conduct and disciplinary procedure,⁹ and procedures covering misconduct, appeals and complaints. The implementation of these regulations is supported through associated policies, procedures and strategies, such as the UCSD curriculum development and approval procedure. This is operationalised through validation procedures and associated guidance provided to staff, including the aide memoire for approval panel and academic staff training and development. Considerations of the suitability and effectiveness of regulations, policies and processes forms part of the college's annual review process which the assessment team reviewed through a cycle of higher education board minutes. Through this review the team was satisfied that appropriate consideration is given to the effectiveness of the college's regulations, policies and procedures.
87. Full and consistent application of the college's higher education regulations is achieved and monitored through several mechanisms, including external examiner reports and annual programme monitoring. The assessment team reviewed examples from the 2022-23 academic year, including an analysis of 32 external examiner reports, and noted a focus on maintaining academic standards and the consistent application across programmes. HE Academic Regulation Board minutes demonstrated an annual review and evaluation of the previous year's activity which included any regulation or policy/procedure updates to be considered. The assessment team reviewed approval schedules for all relevant regulations and found a record of annual committee approval by the HEAB in each case. The assessment team also reviewed an external audit of the college's academic quality framework from 2023 which highlighted the consistent use of regulations, policies and processes across programmes and demonstrated a commitment to the review and improvement of regulations, policies and procedures. In the assessment team's view, the college has examples of good practice in its ongoing policy development. For example, the assessment team considered the policy covering the use of artificial intelligence, its focus on how it can be used to enhance the student experience, and potential issues such as misuse and plagiarism, and found this to be comprehensive and appropriate for the college. Following the review of evidence of these monitoring mechanisms, it is the assessment team's view that there is consistent and appropriate application of academic regulations.
88. The assessment team reviewed a sample of two sets of minutes from the academic regulations subcommittee, which demonstrate regular reflection on, and amendments to, regulations, procedures and policies. The academic regulations sub-committee meets three times per academic year or as required. The academic regulations sub-committee reports directly to the HEAB which also meets three times a year; and a full annual cycle of academic board minutes was provided by the college. In its review of the committee and board minutes, the assessment team was able to test the reporting structure and identified examples such as a change to the external examiner moderation policy to rectify a contradiction with the Marking and Moderation Policy. This was discussed at the academic regulations

⁹ Available at UCSD, [University of Plymouth Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure](#).

subcommittee, reported and approved at the HEAB and the changes recorded through version control in the policy document. Following the review of this evidence, it was the assessment team's view that there is a consistent and transparent approach to the monitoring and review of academic regulations, policies and procedures; these are reviewed and updated annually and are published in one place on the South Devon College website under the college's higher education brand, University Centre South Devon.¹⁰

89. Following a comprehensive review of the college's academic regulations, related policies, procedures and its mechanisms for monitoring and review of its effective operation, it was the assessment team's view that the college's academic frameworks and regulations are well developed, appropriate to its current status and are implemented fully and consistently.
90. To determine whether the college has created, in readiness, one or more academic frameworks and regulations which will be appropriate for indefinite Foundation DAPs, the assessment team undertook a review of the academic regulations in place.
91. The college has had time-limited Foundation DAPs since 2019 so has already created appropriate academic frameworks and regulations which have been implemented, reviewed and updated since that time. The award design, validation and review regulations have been in place since 2017 and subsequently updated in 2021. They provide a clear framework for higher education provision at the college, clearly defining taught provision in terms of programmes, modules, levels and credits from Levels 4 to 6. They outline award structures, include generic learning outcomes for Levels 4 to 6, and detail the requirements for achieving qualifications. In 2021 the college's regulations were updated to include a framework for micro-credits, short course and continuing professional development awards: these are credit-bearing courses involving assessment which do not result in a qualification, but which may result in the award of academic credit completion. These regulations were updated again in 2022 to reflect new OfS conditions in quality and standards. The assessment team was satisfied with the monitoring and amendments to these regulations through annual review within the academic regulations subcommittee. The team tested the college's processes by reviewing two sets of academic regulation subcommittee minutes and three sets of minutes from the HEAB. This provided the team with evidence that the college is updating its regulations in line with changes, for example the approval of the first 30-credit modules under its own degree awarding powers. The team identified reference to critical reflections of this model, external drivers and sector changes such as Lifelong Learning Entitlement which informed the proposed amendments. The assessment team formed the view that this demonstrates the college's ongoing review of the appropriateness of its higher education regulations and demonstrates its suitability for indefinite Foundation degree awarding powers.
92. Following a review of the college's current higher education academic regulations, policies and procedures, it was the assessment team's view that they are comprehensive, clear and provide a suitable basis for the delivery of higher education qualifications. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion B1.1 as the evidence demonstrated that the college's academic regulations, policies and procedures are appropriate to its current status holding Foundation DAPs and are appropriate for the award of indefinite Foundation degree awarding powers.

¹⁰ See [Academic Regulations and Procedures and Policies - University Centre South Devon](#).

Sub-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

93. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion B1.2 as it 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 each programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.
94. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for B1.2 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

95. To determine whether the college has definitive and up-to-date records of each qualification being awarded and whether these records are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme, the assessment team undertook a review of the systems in place to record, manage and monitor the records for each programme. The college outlined that it maintains a definite record of each course. The assessment team reviewed the college's approval register and found that it listed all qualifications offered under the college's degree awarding powers. The team was satisfied that a centrally managed approach is employed to keep a definitive record of each programme and qualification with clear and consistent templates for all qualifications.
96. The assessment team reviewed a sample of 12 definitive module records which capture the date of approval, implementation, and details of changes and sign-off processes. The college considers these definite records as they cannot be amended without undertaking a 'minor change process'. The assessment team saw evidence of the approval process in all of these examples for minor changes or, if no changes were present, the sign-off for an annual review. The assessment team reviewed these recording systems and tools and concluded that the current systems enable recording of programme approvals and modifications, providing the college with necessary oversight over its course portfolio.
97. To further scrutinise the programme records the college keeps, particularly in relation to the delivery and assessment of each programme, the assessment team reviewed a sample of programme quality handbooks which are provided for all qualifications. They found the module records and programme specifications form part of the handbook, alongside signposting and guidance for students on teaching and learning, assessment, feedback strategies and the UCSD enterprise and employability framework. The assessment team evaluated an example programme quality handbook for the Foundation Degree in Science (FdSc) Nursing Associate programme, which contains detailed module records including aims, learning outcomes and details of delivery of teaching, learning and assessment. In

addition, a programme specification and module records for Foundation Degree in Arts (FdA) Youth Justice and Youth Studies were evaluated. All modules include dates of validation and the opportunity for module review is clearly signposted, enabling tracking of modifications. The evidence reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that the college has up-to-date records of each qualification and an adequate mechanism for the accurate recording of all modifications to courses of study, and that these records are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme.

98. The assessment team evaluated the college's monitoring and review procedure which indicated every higher education programme is subject to annual monitoring. The college's annual monitoring process comprises three stages: a programme committee meeting, student engagement and a final submission. Information gained from the annual monitoring procedure informs programme quality handbooks which are updated annually to reflect any minor or major modifications. The college's monitoring and review procedure identifies the curriculum head as responsible for ensuring the process meets the requirements set out in the document and the programme leader for collecting input from a wide variety of sources including current and former students, other subject areas, learning technologists, library and learning resources staff, disability practitioners, equality and diversity practitioners, and external bodies. Monitoring activity involves looking back to the previous year, and forward to action planning, incorporating feedback from those involved in programme delivery. To test this process, the assessment team reviewed three programme plans from different subject areas (Youth Justice, Assistant Practitioner, and Psychology and Social Science) and found that the monitoring and review procedure is applied consistently across subject areas. For example, the Youth Justice programme plan 2023-24 demonstrated the collection of feedback (spring term) from the programme committee, student feedback, relevant analysis of National Student Survey (NSS) data and external examiner commentary. Feedback from students around the significant step up to Level 5 learning and the subsequent implementation of step-up sessions to Level 5 and 6 was clearly recorded in the programme plan action plan. Together with the definitive records noted in paragraphs 93 and 95, it was the assessment team's view that these mechanisms for monitoring modifications enable a definitive and up-to-date record of each qualification to be awarded and each programme offered.
99. To determine if there was evidence that students and alumni are provided with records of study, the assessment team considered the processes which take place prior to and following an award board, which confirms each individual student's grade profile and outcome for the academic year. These processes are outlined in the Subject Assessment Panels and Awards Board Procedure. The college also has a detailed summary of the process of creating records of student results. Records are created for every student. If necessary, these are updated following award assessment boards to include any changes made at the boards (such as referrals changing to compensated passes). The team also reviewed examples of transcripts; these are printed on the college's certificates and include explanations of the transcript, enabling students to fully understand the content. The transcripts are accompanied by a results letter. The assessment team was satisfied that a record that is individual to each student – and includes the name and level of the qualification and modules studied, the awarding institution, the total number of credits achieved and the overall classification – is provided to the college's students. Transcripts that are not collected are mailed directly to students; recorded delivery is used for students with required to submit referral work. Students may also request emails as an option for receiving results. The assessment team

was satisfied that the content of the transcript, accompanying results letter and associated process provide sufficient evidence that the students and alumni are provided with records of study.

100. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion B1.2 as the evidence demonstrated that the college maintains definite records of each programme and qualification it approves for (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

101. The assessment team considered the evidence provided by the college and it is its overall view that it meets criterion B1: Regulatory frameworks.
102. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, particularly focused on how the college operates its regulatory frameworks for higher education, including academic regulations, procedures and policies. The assessment team additionally reviewed evidence of the mechanisms for monitoring the effective implementation and application of regulations, including regular reflection and review of procedures and policies. The assessment team concluded that the evidence reviewed is consistent with the college having in place appropriate regulatory frameworks and associated policies, procedures and guidance, and effective monitoring mechanisms to meet the requirements of sub-criterion B1.1.
103. Through scrutiny of the college's programme records; programme specifications; programme quality information; programme monitoring, review and modification; results tracking and distribution; the assessment team concluded that the college effectively maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification that it approves (and subsequent changes to it). These are used as the basis for the delivery and assessment of each programme, its monitoring and review, and the provision of records of study to students and alumni. As such, the assessment team was satisfied that the college meets the requirements of sub-criterion B1.2, and it has securely exercised its powers in this area in the period it has held DAPs.

Criterion B2: Academic standards

Advice to the OfS

104. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B2: Academic standards and quality assurance, because it meets sub-criteria B2.1 and B2.2.
105. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, which shows the college has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications. It has demonstrated that it can design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and has demonstrated that it sets and maintains standards above the threshold, comparable to those set and achieved by other UK degree awarding bodies.
106. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Sub-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

107. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion B2.1 because it has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.
108. 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 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

109. To determine whether the college has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications, the assessment team evaluated the college's award design validation and review regulations; these are reviewed on an annual basis. The regulations set out the college's overall approach to the design, validation and review of its higher education courses. The team found the inclusion of clear frameworks, with award credit requirements for exit awards, CertHE, Foundation Degree, DipHE and bachelors' degree, and generic learning outcomes are outlined for Levels 4, 5 and 6. The assessment team also found that the document set out the processes for course design, (re)validation, and course amendments, referring to compliance with external quality benchmarks. For example, the document explicitly states that each programme is intended to address the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) benchmark statements, and Foundation degrees are designed to meet in full the expectations of the QAA Foundation degree characteristics statement.

110. The assessment team was able to determine that the college's award design validation and review regulations were applied to its programmes consistently through a review of a sample of three programme specifications. This included the FdA in Youth Justice and Youth Studies, which referred clearly to QAA benchmarks. In addition to this, an aide memoire for programme approval panels refers directly to FHEQ requirements and QAA benchmarks. The assessment team was satisfied that the college offers education qualifications at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ.
111. The assessment team noted the development of a relatively new role introduced in September 2023 of Academic Standards and Quality Manager. The team evaluated the job description for this role and that of the Higher Education Academic Quality Coordinator. Both roles involve the monitoring of OfS standards to ensure that these are maintained, with the former role having a focus on OfS 'B' conditions. These roles further confirm that the college has mechanisms for maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications.
112. Overall, the assessment team formed the view that the college's higher education qualifications are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of FHEQ and the mechanisms for setting and maintaining academic standards are applied consistently.
113. The assessment team considered whether the setting and maintaining of academic standards take appropriate account of relevant external points of reference and external and independent points of expertise, including students.
114. The assessment team evaluated the college's curriculum development and approval procedure (see also paragraph 125). Programme approval involves academic and industry advisers to ensure programmes' alignment to educational expectations and frameworks (such as the FHEQ and the QAA Quality Code). A report from a stage two approval panel for FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies shows academic and industry representatives in attendance.
115. The college's monitoring review procedure was evaluated: this demonstrates that academic standards and the frameworks that support them (by this the team includes management, teaching, learning, assessment and student experience) are monitored, with input from staff from other higher education providers, contacts from academic subject associations, Advance HE, external examiners, PSRBs, industry partners, research collaborations and employers. Action plans are created in annual programme committee meetings. Following these meetings, to guarantee student involvement the action plans are shared with student representatives from each programme and cohort (see also paragraph 67).
116. The assessment team also noted further evidence that at the college, the setting and maintaining of academic standards take appropriate account of input from students: Academic Regulations Committee meeting minutes show that student representatives are invited to these meetings. Student consultative forum minutes demonstrate that the student voice is also used to help shape course delivery.
117. The assessment team evaluated the college's award design validation and review regulations. These regulations are overseen by the college's HEAB and are reviewed regularly to ensure their currency and that they are aligned with OfS sector-recognised

standards (see paragraph 111) regarding job descriptions for the Academic Standards and Quality Manager and the Higher Education Academic Quality Coordinator).

118. Clear evidence of external points of reference were demonstrated in example programme specifications including for the FdA in Youth Justice and Youth Studies. The team observed that this programme specification included the Institute of Apprenticeships youth justice practitioner standards. In addition, the HE Health Professionals and Nursing Committee terms of reference set out that regulation standards from professional bodies are reviewed three times a year. The team saw evidence of this in the Health Professionals and Nursing Committee meeting minutes. These contained discussions regarding review of regulations and summaries of updates made to programmes due to Nursing and Midwifery Council regulation changes. The college also has a HE Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) Committee which meets twice annually to monitor and review PSRB requirements across the institution.
119. The assessment team evaluated an external examiner report template and an external examiner report example. These documents show that a comprehensive set of materials – including module handbooks, module descriptors, assessment briefs and student work – are supplied to external examiners. Review of a sample of students' work, including a broad range of marks across 11 modules from two programmes, demonstrated detailed feedback from the external examiner and clear dialogue between assessors and the external examiner. The report highlighted good practice and contained recommendations from the external examiner. The report also included a review of internal moderation processes and a record of external examiner meetings with students. The report template and report example clearly demonstrate that the setting and maintaining of academic standards take appropriate account of input from, and discussions with, external examiners.
120. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion B2.1 as the evidence shows that it has clear mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications and that these are constantly applied. The assessment team was also satisfied that the college takes appropriate account of relevant external points of reference, and external and independent points of expertise, including students.

Sub-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 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

121. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion B2.2. This is because the college has demonstrated that it can design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and can demonstrate 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
122. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for B2.2 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

123. The assessment team considered whether the college's programme approval arrangements are robust, applied consistently, and whether they ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with its own academic frameworks and regulation. The assessment team evaluated: the college's curriculum development and approval procedure; a detailed aide memoire for all involved in approval panels; a guidance document for the final stage (stage two) of the approval process; an example of stage one approval minutes; a report (including minutes) from a stage two meeting; and a full approval document for FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies including qualifications and experience of the programme team.
124. The college's curriculum development and approval is a three-stage process involving an initial planning meeting, followed by stage one and stage two approval events.
125. The college's curriculum development and approval sets out that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with its own academic frameworks and regulation. The team was satisfied that the college has a clear set of criteria for approval to guarantee compliance with its academic regulations and all strategies and policies, and that award aims reflect the FHEQ and learning outcomes align with QAA guidance. The team noted the link the college made to these criteria also being the basis for ensuring that all learning outcomes are met. The following is required by the approval criteria:

- The assessment is inclusive, rigorous and appropriate to the award and target student group
- There are clear assessment criteria for different levels of achievement
- Employability is embedded within programmes; courses are appropriately staffed and resourced
- There is compliance with disability legislation and institutional disability policies.

126. The team considered the report from the stage two meeting and the full approval document for FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies, including qualifications and experience of the programme team. These contained evidence of adherence to the criteria set out within the college's curriculum development and approval: programme aims, academic standards and the curriculum are approved at the stage two meeting. Compliance with internal college regulations, policies and procedures is confirmed within the approval document. This approach is applied to approval of all new programmes as demonstrated in the stage two approval guidance pack and the aide memoir for approval panels.
127. The college's curriculum development and approval also involves external academic advice to ensure programmes' alignment to educational expectations and frameworks. The college has also opted to ensure programmes align with the QAA Quality Code. The college's curriculum development and approval also involves external industry advice. Evidence for application of these processes for approval of FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies is demonstrated. The report from the stage two meeting confirms input to the meeting regarding admissions and the curriculum by an external academic adviser from another university. This report also confirms involvement of advice from external industry: there is input to the curriculum by an industry adviser from Devon and Cornwall police.
128. To test student involvement in practice, the assessment team scrutinised the requirements set out in the procedure document. The college's curriculum development and approval sets out that past and present students are involved in the process. Student representatives are invited to stage two approval meetings as evidenced in the stage two meeting report. The importance of student input at stage two to inform quality issues, such as the creation of an inclusive environment and equal access to educational opportunities, is emphasised in the stage two approval guidance pack. Evidence of student consultation is also demonstrated in the approval document for FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies: learners from Level 3 and Level 5 programmes were invited to provide input to development of the course. In addition to this, student feedback informs the academic developments at the college as evidenced in student consultative forum minutes. The student representative system, as evidenced in the HEAB Student Voice report involves the collation and presentation of feedback from module reviews to the higher education team and personal tutors. Responses to this report are fed back to students by personal tutors.
129. The team concluded that the college's approval arrangements are robust, applied consistently, and ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification, and are in accordance with its own academic frameworks and regulation.

130. The assessment team considered whether the college awarded credit and qualifications only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit, and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body have been satisfied. They noted that the college's curriculum development and approval procedure clearly articulates that programme learning outcomes are appropriate to the aims of the awards and align with UK threshold standards and reflect the FHEQ. The college also additionally has opted to ensure programmes link to the subject area QAA Quality Code and QAA guidance.
131. The team found and reviewed examples of programme learning outcomes that meet the requirements of the curriculum development and approval procedure. For example, the team considered the content of the FdSc Nursing Associate programme quality handbook. The programme learning outcomes are clearly mapped to the module learning outcomes in the course specification and module records contained within the programme quality handbook. These module learning outcomes are also signposted on individual assessment tasks. The team additionally reviewed sample assignment briefs from various programmes, including FdA Education and Childhood, and found these clearly indicated assessed module learning outcomes.
132. The team considered examples of marked student work (marked online via Turnitin) from across five programmes including FdA Education and Childhood, and found these demonstrated that module learning outcomes were being appropriately assessed. Marks were awarded according to clearly defined and weighted criteria appropriate to relevant FHEQ levels. These encourage research, analytical, evaluative and reflective thinking and writing, and adherence to academic protocols including quoting and referencing. Marking was included in text comments, similarity reports and detailed feedback and feedforward. Evidence of robust moderation of module marks was also supplied by the college. The assessment team reviewed and agreed the marks awarded and noted the high quality feedback provided to students and opportunities for students to book tutorials for further one-to-one feedback and guidance (see also paragraph 194).
133. The assessment team undertook a review of assignment briefs to assess whether credit and qualifications are only awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body have been satisfied. The briefs demonstrated that the college has adopted an assessment strategy that is focused on providing a personalised, flexible, socially mobile, responsible, authentic and research-led experience for students, which is in line with the college's assessment policy. The responsible, authentic and research-led experience is evidenced via assessment briefs and marked student work from FdA Education and Childhood. Examples include opportunities to research current legal issues and the creation of reports to promote the understanding of inclusion. Evidence that the college provides a personalised and flexible experience for students is shown in the online assessment guidance for staff which ensures that formative and development feedback is built into delivery and that draft submission opportunities are provided prior to summative deadlines. Students are offered one-to-one tutorials to discuss this formative feedback and to provide guidance for final submissions (see also paragraph 195).

134. The marking criteria sampled across five programmes were considered transparent; the markers were able to show students how their marks were awarded across the nine samples of assessed student work provided. The assessment team found that the college applied its own assessment policy consistently and the marks awarded were appropriate.
135. The assessment team tested the mechanisms outlined in the Marking and Moderation Policy to ensure that the grades awarded were appropriate. The team reviewed a sample of three moderation reports which all used the moderation of marked work template and considered evidence of the second marking of assignments. The team also considered processes in place to resolve discrepancies – this includes escalation to programme leaders, Higher Education Coordinator, Curriculum Head or exceptionally to the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar. Typically, there was agreement on the mark awarded and, where there were discrepancies, this was explained and resolved with an agreed mark. The assessment team also reviewed the external examiners' overview report 2023-2024. The summary document identifying the use of 33 external examiners commended the college for the quality of the feedback received and identified it as an example of good practice consistently across modules. Specific examples include a commendation for the quality of feedback for FdA Law in the review report and comments regarding detailed feedback contained within the external examiner report for FdA Working with Young People, Children and Families.
136. From this review the assessment team was satisfied that the college awards credit and qualifications only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit, and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment, and both the UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant degree awarding body have been satisfied.
137. The assessment team considered whether the college's programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently and explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.
138. The assessment team evaluated the college's curriculum development and approval procedure (see also sub-criterion B2.2). The college has a detailed and robust system for developing, validating and approving programmes. Validation involves external academic advisers to ensure programmes' alignment to educational expectations and frameworks such as FHEQ frameworks and the QAA Quality Code. The assessment team evaluated the college's award design validation and review regulations (see also sub-criterion B2.1). These regulations confirm that all the college's higher education awards are aligned with OfS sector-recognised standards. All programmes are designed to adhere to QAA benchmark statements at the appropriate levels for the awards. The assessment team was satisfied that the college's approval arrangements are robust, applied consistently and explicitly address UK threshold academic standards.
139. The college's monitoring review procedure was evaluated (see also paragraph 115): this demonstrates that academic standards and the frameworks that support them (by this the team includes management, teaching, learning, assessment and student experience) are monitored with input from staff from other higher education providers, contacts from academic

subject associations, Advance HE, external examiners, PSRBs, industry partners, research collaborations and employers.

140. The team considered the college's approach to the application of its monitoring and review procedure by looking at evidence from the curriculum areas of sport, and health professions and nursing. The procedure commences every October with programme-level monitoring; the college's evidence of annual programme monitoring data for sport was examined by the assessment team. Programme monitoring feeds into programme committee meetings and programme plans; these include monitoring and review of continuation, completion, success, student feedback (including NSS responses), and external examiners' feedback. This monitoring results in strategic priorities and actions. During each November, self-evaluation documents are created at section level. The assessment team examined a self-evaluation document for the curriculum area health professions and nursing. This included detailed reviews of curriculum design, resources, student voice, student engagement, student outcomes and assessment strategies. The section-level self-evaluation documents feed into the organisational-level quality assurance plan. The assessment team evaluated the 2023-24 quality assurance plan. This contains a series of initiatives and actions designed to improve student outcomes, increase recruitment, increase impact of research and scholarship, improve student satisfaction and maintain academic standards.
141. The evidence reviewed demonstrates a robust data-driven process that is applied consistently across programmes. The assessment team was satisfied that the format of the college's monitoring and review procedure is applied consistently.
142. Documentation reflecting how programmes are reviewed annually against academic performance data and thresholds, with reference to OfS continuation, completion and progression, was also examined by the assessment team. HEAB minutes for a full academic cycle show monitoring of continuation, completion and progression data. Academic teams are provided with outcomes data and it is collated at department level. Any actions required are formalised and reported to the HEAB. Student outcomes are collated at an institutional level and benchmarked annually against OfS thresholds.
143. The assessment team noted that the external examiners report guidance included a requirement for examiners to confirm that academic standards align with the FHEQ. From the review of the overview report, including a report analysis from 2022-23 reports, it is clear examiners were satisfied with the standards being met and identified no systemic issues within the process.
144. The assessment team was satisfied that the college's programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently and explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree awarding body are being maintained.
145. In establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the assessment team evaluated whether the college makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise. The assessment team evaluated the college's curriculum development and approval procedure. Programme validation involves external academic advisers to ensure programmes' alignment to educational expectations and frameworks such as the FHEQ, and,

as the college has opted to use this, the QAA Quality Code. The assessment team evaluated the college's award design validation and review regulations. All programmes are designed to adhere to QAA benchmark statements at the appropriate levels for the awards. The assessment team reviewed the college's monitoring and review procedure. This demonstrates that academic standards and the frameworks that support them (by this the team includes management, teaching, learning, assessment and student experience) are monitored with input from staff from other higher education providers, contacts from academic subject associations, Advance HE, external examiners, PSRBs, industry partners, research collaborations and employers.

146. The assessment team evaluated the college's External Examiner Policy and Procedure, its external examiner report template, example external examiner report and response and an external examiner overview report sample. These show that monitoring of assessments and awards is robust, makes use of independent and external expertise and aligns with UK academic standards.
147. The assessment team was satisfied that, in establishing, and then maintaining, threshold academic standards and comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level qualifications, the college makes use of appropriate external and independent expertise.
148. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion B2.2 as the evidence demonstrates that the college is able to design and deliver programmes and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in the FHEQ, in line with sector-recognised standards.

Conclusions

149. The assessment team considered the evidence provided by the college and it is their overall view that it meets criterion B2: Academic standards.
150. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence, particularly focused on how the college has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education qualifications, through its award design validation and review procedure, and its monitoring review procedure. The assessment team concluded that the evidence reviewed is consistent with the college having in place appropriate regulatory frameworks and associated policies, procedures and guidance, and effective monitoring mechanisms to meet the requirements of sub-criterion B2.1.
151. The assessment team concluded that the college can design and deliver courses and qualifications that meet the threshold academic standards described in FHEQ. The team scrutinised the college's curriculum development and approval procedure; award design validation and review regulations; monitoring and review procedure; sample programme quality handbook including module records; sample assignment briefs and marked student work; and its external examiner policy and procedure. The assessment team was also satisfied that the college demonstrates that the standards that 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. As such, the assessment team was satisfied that the college meets the requirements of sub-criterion B2.2.

152. Since the awarding of time limited full degree awarding powers in 2019 the college has successfully approved seventeen foundation degrees, four certificates of higher education, one 20-credit short course, and one 5-credit micro credential. The college was awarded TEF Gold in 2023 which confirms the outstanding quality of teaching assessment and feedback and corroborates that threshold academic standards are set and maintained. Therefore, the assessment team concluded that the college meets criterion B2 and has securely exercised its powers since holding DAPs.

Criterion B3: Quality of the academic experience

Advice to the OfS

153. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion B3: Academic standards and quality assurance.
154. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college can demonstrate 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 that learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.
155. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Sub-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

156. The assessment team's view is that the college meets sub-criterion B3.1 as the review of the evidence has demonstrated that it designs and delivers courses and qualifications that provide a high quality academic experience to all students from all backgrounds. Its learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured, and the processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are effective.
157. 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 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

Design and approval of programmes

158. The assessment team considered whether the college operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. The award design validation and review regulations and the curriculum development and approval procedure are considered in full under criteria B2.1 and B2.2 respectively. These demonstrate that the college has a rigorous three-stage programme approval process that involves programme teams, college management, external advisers, employer feedback and student participation. Strict criteria are implemented to ensure alignment with FHEQ frameworks, the OfS sector-recognised standards and the QAA quality code. All programmes are designed to adhere to QAA benchmark statements at the appropriate levels for the awards. Where programmes are

accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies, PSRB regulations are adhered to. Employability is evidenced within all programmes.

159. The assessment team evaluated further evidence relating to processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. This comprised: a detailed aide memoire for approval panels; a new programme proposal example; stage one approval meeting minutes; a stage two approval schedule; stage two meeting minutes; and a full approval document for Youth Justice and Youth Studies including qualifications and experience of the programme team. This evidence demonstrates that the college implements its award design validation and review regulations and the curriculum development and approval procedure in full.
160. The assessment team was satisfied that the college operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.
161. The assessment team considered whether relevant staff are informed of and provided with guidance, and support on, procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to programme design, development and approval at the college. The curriculum development and approval procedure provides detailed information regarding roles and responsibilities for all relevant staff involved in the design, development and approval of programmes. Further guidance is provided in the detailed aide memoire for approval panels. For stage two of the approval schedule, explicit guidance regarding roles and responsibilities of staff involved is provided within the stage two approval guidance pack. This includes step-by-step guides for panel chairs, panel members, programme leaders, programme teams, student representatives and external members involved in programme approval. The team noted good practice at stage two which includes: a tour of the relevant facilities for all panel members, input from students concerning the student experience with reference to the provision of inclusive learning environments, and input from external advisers with a particular focus on employability.
162. The assessment team was satisfied that relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance and support on, procedures and their roles and responsibilities in relation to programme design, development and approval at the college.
163. The assessment team considered 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 curriculum development and approval procedure provides detailed information regarding responsibilities for all relevant staff involved in the approval of new programmes. Stage two meeting minutes reviewed by the team clearly demonstrate that external expertise is involved in the approval process: both academic and industry advisers have input. Stage one approval meeting minutes contained comprehensive conditions for approval to stage two, including detailed actions and recorded evidence of the completion of these actions. Stage two meeting minutes contained monitored recommendations and conditions for programme approval including deadlines for these.
164. The assessment team was satisfied that, at the college, responsibility for approving new programme proposals is clearly assigned, including the involvement of external expertise, where appropriate, and subsequent action is carefully monitored.

165. The assessment team considered whether coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained at the college. There is currently only one programme with multiple elements or alternative pathways: the FdA Contemporary Arts Practice. The programme specification for this course clearly offers detailed mapping of admissions criteria, intended learning outcomes, progression routes, final award criteria and a comprehensive outline of the programme structure showing how optional modules are placed within delivery of the programme.
166. The assessment team was satisfied that the evidence demonstrated that coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained in practice.
167. The assessment team considered whether close links are maintained between learning support services and the college's programme planning and approval arrangements. The assessment team examined the college's learning support and programme design document. The higher education student hub – which covers learning support, wellbeing and academic skills: is represented at a pre-stage one approval meeting; is involved as a critical friend at the stage one approval process; has a member present on the stage two approval panel; and monitors assessments once programmes are implemented. At stage one, the higher education student hub ensures that programmes are scrutinised for areas of concern or clarity for inclusive programme design. At stage two, the hub is involved with assessment strategies including assignment brief design. The links between learning services and the college's programme planning and approval arrangements were demonstrated in practice through the approval of FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies. The team was able to confirm that higher education student hub representatives were present at stage one and stage two approval meetings and that input into assessment strategies was provided by the hub representative at the stage two approval meeting.
168. The assessment team concluded that close links are maintained between learning support services and the college's programme planning and approval arrangements.

Learning and teaching

169. The assessment team considered whether the college articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives. The college sets out a clear vision and rationale for teaching and learning in its teaching and learning strategy and its teaching and learning framework. This vision is formed from five aspirations: evidence informed leaders, staff and students; consistently high standards of teaching and learning; responsive development and improvement; regular review of curriculum design and purpose; and a supportive culture. It has developed a teaching and learning framework based on its inclusive learning culture aligned to its five values: aspiration, inclusion, innovation, support and progress. This framework is also informed by OfS conditions. The college encourages 'evidence informed teachers' and 'confident and employable students'. It supports all students to succeed, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. The college's teaching and learning strategy is monitored annually: key performance indicators include achievement rates, attendance, student progress, progression, retention, student satisfaction and student success.
170. The accessibility and inclusivity of the college's strategic approach to learning and teaching is highlighted in its inclusive learning practices policy. The college aims for inclusive learning

practices across all its programmes. These include: the provision of key resources to learners via the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) at least 48 hours prior to taught sessions; accessible learning materials; inclusive assessment practices; and recording of taught sessions wherever possible. Programmes are designed so that learning outcomes can be achieved through a variety of different ways. Protected characteristics should not impact students' abilities to learn and evidence that learning. Additional support may be provided to disabled students following needs assessments.

171. Implementation of the college's approach to teaching and learning can be evidenced by its module guides. The assessment team evaluated module guides for FdSc Psychology and Criminology and FdA Working with Children, Young People and Families. Very clear guidance is provided on aims, learning outcomes, teaching, learning, assessment (including clear assessment briefs and formative learning activities), module content, and schemes of work; reading lists are provided. The college has a comprehensive moderation procedure for module guides and assessment briefs to ensure uniformity and consistency across programmes.
172. The implementation of the college's teaching and learning is monitored and reviewed three times a year by the Teaching, Learning, Assessment and External Examiner Committee. The terms of reference for this committee provide evidence to support review and improvement of strategies, policies, procedures and data relating to teaching and learning.
173. The assessment team was satisfied that the college articulates and implements a strategic approach to learning and teaching which is consistent with its stated academic objectives.
174. The assessment team considered 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 team considered a comprehensive list of resources linked to courses, and found this list clearly demonstrated that all higher education courses at the college are adequately resourced. FdA Music Performance and Production was omitted from this list; however, specialist resources for this course were summarised in the stage two approval report for the course, confirming appropriate spaces and equipment. Photographs of resources for FdSc Assistant Practitioner, FdSc Nursing Associate, FdSc Hearing Aid Audiology, and FdSc Sports Coaching and Fitness provided evidence of up-to-date and industry standard specialist spaces and equipment.
175. The list of resources linked to courses provides detailed information regarding safe use of the college's spaces and resources. The team saw evidence that teaching spaces and specialist areas undergo regular health and safety reviews, space and resources are staffed by qualified technicians, and students undergo health and safety inductions which include ethical use of resources. Risk assessments are in place for specialist spaces and resources. Evidence of 32 examples of risk assessments were examined by the assessment team; these are highly detailed, regularly reviewed and contain risk control plans. The college has an offsite activities policy which includes details on health and safety, duty of care, risk management, and staff to student ratios (including allowances for disabled participants or those with learning difficulties).
176. The team examined further photographic and documentary evidence of the college's specialist spaces and resources. The team found evidence of dedicated learning and social

spaces for higher education students: an extensive library including e-books and e-journals; a research centre and quiet study space, with access to PCs and space for personal devices; a social study space for group work and collaborative discussions; access to individual study spaces for accessing webinars, tutorial support and academic skills support. The college also offers students a distinct flexible, well equipped space: the student innovation and research centre that provides opportunities for research projects with employers. Photographic evidence of some impressive programme specific spaces and resources included a healthcare simulation suite, a range of audiological devices, a fitness suite, a physiology lab and a sports massage suite.

177. The assessment team evaluated the college's VLE based on the Moodle platform. This is a secure system with multifactor authentication. The assessment team was provided with access to the VLE. All higher education programmes have Moodle landing pages and tabs providing detailed course information and online resources. The accessibility and inclusivity of the college's virtual resources is summarised in its inclusive learning practices policy. The college aims for inclusive learning practices across all its programmes, these include the provision of key resources to learners via the college's VLE at least 48 hours prior to taught sessions. To ensure access to the VLE for all, students are introduced to the VLE during induction and to the e-library during the tutorial programme. Digital literacy information is provided at pre-enrolment (see also paragraph 338). The assessment team concluded that the college's VLE is well managed and resourced.
178. The assessment team evaluated the college's IT Acceptable Use Policy and a Content Capture Policy, which promote the safe use of digital resources and the capture of live and virtual teaching, and recordings of content created to review or demonstrate key concepts or develop procedural knowledge.
179. The college has a campus-wide wireless network, which supports free access to Microsoft 365, and to e-books and e-journals.
180. The assessment team concluded that 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.
181. The assessment team considered whether arrangements exist at the college for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided are effective for students studying at a distance from the organisation. The assessment team evaluated the college's blended learning principles which are applicable to all programmes involving distance learning. These principles were developed with guidance from the QAA, Jisc and the OfS, in conjunction with South Devon College staff and students. They cover distance learning, on-campus delivery and hybrid delivery, and include synchronous and asynchronous learning. These principles state clearly that all delivery methods should 'stimulate, engage, support, and educate students within an inclusive academic community' and 'distance learning should be implemented only where the programme has been developed specifically as a distance learning offer'. Even when students are studying at a distance, there are opportunities to develop relationships with staff and students, and programme leads 'can utilise tutor presence and inclusive practice to develop academic communities which foster student satisfaction and academic success'. The assessment team noted that these principles are clearly implemented by the college's comprehensive tutorial system (for more detail, see paragraph 186).

182. The assessment team evaluated the college's VLE (see also paragraph 177). Comprehensive course materials – including online lectures, learning resources and assessments – are contained within the VLE for every higher education programme and are easily accessible. To support students studying at distance, the induction programme introduces the college's e-library. Further support is provided via Microsoft Sway, which includes the following online guides: Starting in HE, Independent learning, Skills for HE, Digital literacy and Employability.
183. The assessment team evaluated the college's quality assurance and improvement guidance. Online delivery is monitored at least once a year. This monitoring includes short inspections or 'learning walks' lasting 10-15 minutes. The team considered evidence of a learning walk record for an online Level 5 session, the Level 5 Hearing Aid Dispenser Apprenticeship, and found this included strengths such as identifying innovative practice to be shared more widely, and also points to consider for improvement.
184. The assessment team concluded that the college offers robust arrangements for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided are effective for those of its students who may be studying at a distance from the organisation.
185. The assessment team considered whether every South Devon College higher education student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development. The student charter clearly sets out, in general terms, the responsibilities of the college to provide academic guidance and progress on development to all students and for students to make use of this guidance.
186. The assessment team evaluated the college's tutorial curriculum. This is a comprehensive spreadsheet which guides tutors through a week-by-week syllabus of tutorial activities. The tutorial curriculum has a clear focus on students' progress, monitoring and academic development. Academic development begins in the enrolment period before the start of programmes through online 'stepping up to higher education guides', covering areas such as effective study, referencing and literacy. Once programmes commence, academic skills (such as time management, study skills, use of online resources, note taking, reflective writing, referencing, critical thinking, presentation skills, and preparation for exams) are introduced to students; these are discussed in tutorial groups throughout the delivery of the tutorial syllabus. Guidance enabling students to monitor their progress is also introduced, such as understanding and leaning from feedback, and reflection on assessments. As early as week 7 of Level 4 courses, students achieving marks of less than 50 per cent are advised to refer themselves for support. Following this, students are encouraged to set and monitor academic targets and continuously reflect on their studies through assessment feedback, particularly focused on common themes. The assessment team considered the college's tutorial curriculum to be an example of good practice regarding the support for students' progress and academic development.
187. The assessment team evaluated samples of summative feedback from FdA Education and Childhood and FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies. The team found that comprehensive summative feedback is provided to students including annotation on work, what students did well, areas for improvement including targets, and clear marks against the criteria.
188. The college has a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) gold rating. The TEF panel statement shows that the college provided evidence of 'highly effective teaching, assessment,

and feedback practices that support students' learning, progression, and attainment which are embedded across the provider'.

189. The assessment team concluded that every South Devon College higher education student is enabled to monitor their progress and further their academic development.

Assessment

190. The assessment team considered 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 evaluated the college's assessment regulations and moderation and marking policy and procedure. The assessment regulations clearly show how to pass individual modules and programme levels. They provide guidance for extenuating circumstances, late submissions and late arrival for exams or assessments, and referrals and deferrals. The moderation and marking policy and procedure provides guidance on assessment briefs, grading criteria, internal moderation and external examination for all programmes.
191. The assessment team evaluated the FdSc Nursing Associate programme quality handbook. The programme learning outcomes are clearly signposted and are mapped to the module learning outcomes. Ten module records from the FdSc Nursing Associate programme quality handbook and module guides for FdSc Psychology and Criminology and FdA Working with Children, Young People and Families contained learning outcomes which are clearly signposted on assessment briefs. Sample assignment briefs from various programmes, including FdA Education and Childhood, clearly indicated assessed module learning outcomes. Examples of marked student work (marked online via Turnitin) from across five programmes, including FdA Education and Childhood, demonstrated to the team that module learning outcomes were being appropriately assessed. In the view of the team, marks were awarded according to clearly defined and weighted criteria appropriate to relevant FHEQ levels. These encouraged research, analytical, evaluative and reflective thinking and writing, and adherence to academic protocols including quoting and referencing. Marking was included in text comments, similarity reports and detailed feedback and feedforward. The assessment team reviewed and agreed the marks awarded and noted the high quality feedback provided to students and opportunities for students to book tutorials for further one-to-one feedback and guidance. The assessment team also noted evidence of robust application of the college's internal moderation process, after its evaluation of the moderation of module marks for nine psychology and criminology students across two assessments.
192. The assessment team reviewed evidence of the procedures for recognition of prior learning and was satisfied, based on its wider experience of higher education, that the procedures in place at the college are sufficient. The higher education admissions policy and the admissions regulations set out clear guidelines for accreditation of prior learning.
193. The assessment team concluded that 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.

194. The assessment team considered whether staff and students at the college engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made. The assessment team reviewed the college's course documentation – including programme quality handbooks, module guides, assessment briefs, marked work and feedback. These demonstrate that course and module learning outcomes are being appropriately signposted to students, linked to assessment tasks and evaluated by assessors. Marks are reviewed and agreed by the assessment team (for more detail, see paragraph 132).
195. The assessment team evaluated the college's assessment policy, online assessment guidance for staff, online assessment guidance for students and the college's tutorial curriculum (see paragraph 132). The team found that the assessment policy provides clear guidance for feedback and feedforward, to ensure that students can focus on strengths in addition to areas for development. The online assessment guidance for staff ensures that formative and development feedback is built into delivery and that draft submission opportunities are provided prior to summative deadlines. Students are offered one-to-one tutorials to discuss this formative feedback and provide guidance for final submissions; this good practice is highlighted in the college's TEF gold panel statement. Generic marking criteria for all levels are written clearly and precisely, using straightforward language that is easy to interpret, and are provided in the online assessment guidance for students. The tutorial curriculum incorporates clear opportunities for students to reflect on assessments in tutorial time; students are offered opportunities to seek additional support if they feel this is necessary.
196. The assessment team concluded that staff and students at the college engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made.
197. The assessment team considered whether students at the college are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice. The assessment team evaluated the stepping up to higher education guides provided by the college via Microsoft Sway, including the following online guides: Starting in HE, Independent learning, Skills for HE, Digital literacy and Employability. In the view of the team, these provide an excellent starting point for the understanding of higher education academic practice and are introduced to students before programmes commence.
198. Further opportunities for students to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice are introduced through the college's comprehensive tutorial curriculum. Academic skills are introduced in the induction period and include time management and understanding of module guides and assessment briefs. This process continues throughout the tutorial curriculum with sessions focusing on: academic integrity (including use of artificial intelligence); academic writing; referencing; critical thinking; target setting; and analytical skills. The tutorial curriculum also includes one-to-ones that focus on student progress. Students achieving marks of less than 50 per cent are offered support from the college's higher education study team as part of the 'grade boost' programme. The assessment team considered the college's tutorial curriculum and grade boost programme to be examples of good practice.
199. Evidence that the college provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate good academic practice through both formative and summative feedback was evaluated by

the assessment team. Online assessment guidance for staff ensures that formative and development feedback is built into delivery and that draft submission opportunities are provided prior to summative deadlines: students are offered one-to-one tutorials to discuss this formative feedback and provide guidance for final submissions. The team observed that summative feedback provided for student work (see also paragraph 187) included close marked comments on text to facilitate improvements in academic writing, a summary of strengths and feedforward for future improvements.

200. The assessment team concluded that students at the college are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice.
201. The assessment team considered whether the college operates processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.
202. The college begins the process of raising awareness and preventing unacceptable academic practice before programmes commence through study guides in Microsoft Sway. Issues surrounding academic integrity are introduced early in the tutorial system. In the sixth week of courses, a tutorial PowerPoint focuses on referencing, avoiding plagiarism, avoidance of online essay mills, risks associated with artificial intelligence, use of Turnitin to check for similarity. Additional opportunities are provided to help students develop an understanding of academic malpractice – these are evidenced within the online study guide which focuses on avoiding plagiarism and collusion; plagiarism detection and essay mill websites; and the use of the online Turnitin originality checker employed by the college.¹¹ The early introduction of issues surrounding academic malpractice through study guides and the tutorial system was identified by the assessment team as a robust system to promote the prevention of unacceptable academic practice.
203. The assessment team evaluated the college's assessment regulations. These regulations contain clear guidance regarding the identification of unacceptable academic practice including plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating, misrepresentation or fabrication of results, false declarations and submission of material already submitted,
204. The assessment team further evaluated the college's examination and academic offences procedure. This procedure clearly outlines the procedures for assessing, investigating and responding to possible unacceptable academic practices. These range from initial investigations by module leaders through to consideration by the college's academic offences panel.
205. The assessment team reviewed three examples of the implementation of academic misconduct procedures: one for plagiarism and two for collusion. These consisted of: the students' work; Turnitin similarity reports; letters to students regarding academic misconduct; academic offences panel meeting minutes; detailed scoring grids used to judge final outcomes and rate the potential severity of unacceptable academic practices; and letters to students regarding outcomes of academic offences panel meetings. The assessment team concluded that these processes were robust and identified the scoring grids as good practice.

¹¹ See [Academic integrity and plagiarism - University Centre South Devon](#).

206. The assessment team concluded that the college has in place appropriate procedures for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.
207. The assessment team considered whether the college has processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks which are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.
208. The assessment team evaluated the process of assessment brief moderation at the college. To ensure uniformity and consistency, all assessment briefs are moderated as part of the module guide moderation process.
209. The marking criteria sampled across five programmes were considered transparent and the markers were able to show students how their marks were awarded across the nine samples of assessed student work provided. The assessment team found that the college applied its own assessment policy consistently and the marks awarded were appropriate (see also paragraph 132).
210. The assessment team tested the mechanisms outlined in the Marking and Moderation Policy to ensure that the grades awarded were appropriate. The team reviewed a sample of three moderation reports which all used the moderation of marked work template and considered evidence of the second marking of assignments. The team also considered processes in place to resolve discrepancies which include escalation to programme leaders, Higher Education Coordinator, Curriculum Head or exceptionally to the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar. Typically, there was agreement on the mark awarded and, where there were discrepancies, this was explained and resolved with an agreed mark. The assessment team also reviewed the external examiners' overview report 2023-2024. The summary document, identifying the use of 33 external examiners, commended the college for the quality of its feedback and identified it as an example of good practice consistently across modules (for specific examples, see paragraph 135).
211. Student feedback from the 2022-23 NSS confirms higher than benchmark satisfaction with assessment and feedback among higher education students at the college (88 per cent against the national average of 78 per cent).
212. The assessment team concluded that the college has processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks which are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.

External examining

213. The assessment team considered whether the college makes scrupulous use of external examiners, including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work. In the view of the team, the college's external examiners selection, approval and appointment policy and procedure demonstrates a scrupulous procedure for appointing external examiners.¹² Initially they are nominated by relevant academic teams; following this, they are approved by the college's quality office. Criteria for the appointment of external examiners

¹² See [External-Examiners-Selection-Approval-and-Appointment-Procedure-2023.pdf](#) (University Centre South Devon).

aligns with the QAA's UK Quality Code and avoidance of conflicts of interest is ensured. Finally, external examiners are approved by a ratification panel.

214. The assessment team evaluated the college's external examiner policy and procedure and its external examiner guidance document. These documents outline the responsibilities of subject and award external examiners. They confirm that assessment tasks must be scrutinised to ensure appropriate assessment strategies are in place and that samples of module marks and feedback will be reviewed.
215. The assessment team evaluated an external examiner report template and an external examiner report example. These documents show that a comprehensive set of materials including module handbooks, module descriptors, assessment briefs and student work are supplied to external examiners. Clear evidence of review of a sample of students' work including a broad range of marks across eleven modules from two programmes demonstrated detailed feedback from the external examiner and clear dialogue between assessors and the external examiner. The report highlighted good practice and contained recommendations from the external examiner. The report also included a review of internal moderation processes and a record of external examiner meetings with students.
216. The assessment team concluded that the college makes scrupulous use of external examiners, including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work.
217. The assessment team considered whether the college gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.
218. The assessment team evaluated an external examiner report example covering eleven modules over two programmes. The report highlighted good practice and contained recommendations from the external examiner. The final part of the report outlines any issues highlighted by the external examiner and requires a formal written response which must be approved by the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar and supplied within four weeks of submission of the report. The Teaching, Learning, Assessment and External Examiners Committee monitors external examiner activity, reviews external examiner reports on an annual basis and has oversight of training and support for external examiners. The team considered three sets of minutes from this committee and found these demonstrated consideration of external examiner selection, external examiner logistics, external examiner training and external examiners' reports.
219. The assessment team also reviewed the external examiners' overview report 2023-2024. The summary document identifying the use of 33 external examiners commended the college for the quality of their feedback and identified it as an example of good practice consistently across modules (for specific examples, see paragraph 135).
220. The assessment team concluded that the college gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.

Academic appeals and student complaints

221. The assessment team considered whether the college has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.
222. The assessment team evaluated the college's student academic complaints procedure and its academic appeals procedure; these are reviewed every year (see also criterion B1). They are made easily available to students via all programme quality handbooks and in online student handbooks accessed on the college's website, to ensure accessibility and transparency of procedures. In the view of the team, the handbooks contain clear guidance for students regarding raising complaints; they include details of early resolution and formal complaints stages, and the option of external review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for higher education (OIA). The academic appeals procedure also includes a straightforward and easy to understand proforma for making appeals. Complaints procedures are timely: acknowledgements of complaints are provided within 10 days; written responses are provided within 15 days following acknowledgment. The assessment team noted that, through evidence from the complaint reviewed below, a written response was provided well within the 15-day window.
223. The assessment team also noted evidence of data on appeals and complaints being considered and evaluated by the HEAB, which meets three times a year.
224. The college sets out that its complaints procedure is in keeping with the OIA good practice framework and the UK Quality Code for higher education published by the QAA (which gives advice and guidance on concerns, complaints and appeals).
225. The assessment team was satisfied that the college has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of the academic experience; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.
226. The assessment team's review of evidence confirmed that appropriate action is taken following an academic appeal or student complaint. There have been very few complaints: the college experienced only one complaint in the academic year 2023-2024. The assessment team was provided with details of this complaint which was resolved at the early resolution stage of the complaints procedure. A clearly worded response was provided showing how this complaint was resolved in adherence with the procedure.
227. The assessment team was satisfied following this review that appropriate action is being taken following an academic appeal or student complaint.

Conclusions

228. Following the review of evidence the assessment team concluded that the college demonstrated 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. Learning opportunities are consistently and rigorously quality assured.

229. The assessment team found that the college operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. Relevant staff are provided with necessary guidance on support, and all responsibilities are clearly assigned with adequate input of external expertise. The assessment team was satisfied that courses are coherent and learning support services have appropriate involvement throughout stages of course design and approval.
230. Evidence confirmed that learning and teaching are approached strategically. The college maintains physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for all students. The assessment team found that robust arrangements exist at the college for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided are effective for those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the organisation. Every student is also able to monitor their progress and academic development through tutorial programmes and other mechanisms in place.
231. Assessment processes at the college were found to be valid and reliable, including recognition for prior learning. Assessments enabled students to demonstrate their achievement of intended learning outcomes. The assessment team was satisfied that staff and students engage in dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made and that students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice. The college has in place mechanisms to prevent, identify, investigate and respond to academic malpractice. Processes for marking and moderation are clearly articulated and consistently applied at the college.
232. The college makes scrupulous use of external examiners, including in the moderation of assessment tasks and student assessed work. The assessment team found that the college gives full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports and provides external examiners with a considered and timely response to their comments and recommendations.
233. The assessment team was satisfied that the college has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints which are fair, accessible and timely, and was able to demonstrate appropriate actions being taken following an appeal or complaint.
234. Since the awarding of time limited full degree awarding powers in 2019 the college has successfully approved seventeen foundation degrees, four certificates of higher education, one 20-credit short course, and one 5-credit micro credential. The college was awarded TEF Gold in 2023 which confirms the outstanding quality of teaching assessment and feedback. The team's view, as set out above in its assessment of this criterion, corroborates that the college designs and delivers courses and qualifications that provide high quality academic experiences for all students, and has been exercising its powers securely since awarded DAPs.

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

235. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion C1: the role of academic and professional staff.
236. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence which shows in summary that the college assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students and that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level and subject of the qualifications being awarded.
237. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Sub-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

238. The assessment team was satisfied that the college meets sub-criterion C1.1. This is because there was evidence that the provider assures itself that it has appropriate numbers of staff to teach its students and that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, is appropriately qualified, supported and developed to the level and subject of the qualifications being awarded.
239. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows that the college has met the evidence requirements for C1.1 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

240. To inform the assessment team's evaluation of whether the college has relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices that are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship, the assessment team reviewed documents including:
- Teaching and Learning Strategy 2023-2026
 - People Strategy
 - Continuing Professional Development Policy and Procedure

- Collective Agreement
- Quality Assurance and Improvement Guidance
- Coaching and Mentoring Policy.

241. The college was recognised with a gold outcome for outstanding student outcomes and student experience in TEF 2023 which recognises and rewards excellence in teaching and learning.
242. The Teaching and Learning Strategy sets out the college's Teaching and Learning Framework and the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Scholarship Principles. The assessment team found one of its key principles is that the college will promote high quality teaching and learning that is informed by relevant scholarly and research activity; the college has developed a framework within its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy and Procedure to support this. This policy also sets out the expectations for mandatory training and the support available for staff to improve the skills, subject knowledge, sector expertise and performance relevant to their role. This includes college training and development days, mandatory training, academic induction, teacher training, and support with higher level qualifications and apprenticeships. The People Strategy also outlines the college's commitment to the professional development and wellbeing of its staff. Its key aspects include: training, development and scholarly activity; health and wellbeing; staff engagement, reward and recognition; empowering staff, leadership and development; digital focus; and an agile workforce.
243. The Collective Agreement between the college and its academic community states the entitlement for all academic staff to receive 21 working days per year for continuing professional development, including seven days directed by the college, to undertake training, research, scholarly or professional activities. The CPD Policy states that the college provide training and development days for all staff – these take place at scheduled points throughout the year with the focus being strategically linked to developments within the college, external developments, and the enhancement of practice. Training and development day activities include staff workshops and external speakers, presentations and practical sessions, opportunities to share good practice, and college conferences for staff delivering higher education programmes. The content for training and development days is evaluated and ratified by the college's CPD Panel which includes representatives from the college leadership team, practitioners and recognised unions. The college has established a cross-college training and development schedule which aims to complement the wider cross-college CPD offer and initiatives; it aims to provide a flexible mix of delivered sessions and team activities based on the college and sector priorities. The assessment team scrutinised the content of a sample of CPD activities led by the college, including training and development days, a training and development week, and cross-college CPD, and found the activities to be focused on reflection of learning, teaching and assessment practices linked to the college's priorities. For example, a focus on the college strategic improvement priorities of curriculum planning and design; and time scheduled for reflection on curriculum planning, behaviour personal development and student needs.
244. The college's CPD Policy outlines that the allocation of hours to staff for CPD days can be used for scholarship, and industrial placements and engagement. For example, the Academic Staff Training and Development Week included a 'back to industry day' to support teams with

dedicated time to enhance their sector and industry knowledge. The assessment team considered this to be supportive of reflection of academic practice in the professional context.

245. The college provides mandatory training for staff, including training for new starters and academic induction, which includes an introduction to teaching and learning, as well as tailored support through a dedicated mentor scheme for new or inexperienced teachers. The college requires staff on an academic contract to complete a teacher training qualification and provides access to teacher training programmes, which include:
- Level 4 Assessor/Coach Apprenticeship
 - Level 4 Certificate in Education and Training
 - Level 5 Learning and Skills Teacher Apprenticeship
 - Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training
 - Level 7 Academic Professional Apprenticeship.
246. The college's minimum requirement for teaching staff is a qualification at Level 4 for trainer facilitators and Level 5 for lecturers and programme co-ordinators. The overview of HE Teaching Staff Qualifications and Memberships indicates that, in 2023-24, 51 members of staff had a teaching qualification, with 27 of these being a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning, and a further eight members of staff were studying towards a teaching qualification. The assessment team was of the opinion that engagement in the relevant teacher training qualifications provides opportunities for staff to develop evidence-informed academic practice and scholarship.
247. Staff requests for the college's support for CPD activities are submitted for approval and require individuals to reflect on and articulate the potential impact of the opportunity. The college requires activities to be logged through the college's People system central activity log, in which staff are encouraged to reflect on the opportunity and how they will use it to support their ongoing professional practice. The assessment team noted that the requirement to log CPD activity is prompted through the training and development days, and saw evidence of this in an example schedule. Examples of higher qualifications funded in 2023-24 include academic qualifications at bachelor, masters' and doctoral level and specialist courses relating to the subject discipline.
248. The college's Quality Assurance and Improvement Guidance outlines support for professional development including the Coaching Cycle, Learning Walks, Work Scrutiny and Peer Observation. The assessment team found these activities to be supportive of reflection and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment practices.
249. The college's Coaching and Mentoring Policy aims to provide access to a coach or mentor for any member of staff who requests it. Coaching is stated as being a key element of the college's three internal professional development programmes: Evidence-Informed Leaders; Evidence-Informed Teachers and Early Career Teachers. 'Coaching Cycles' have replaced the formal learning observation process at the college. The Coaching Cycle model aims to support teachers to trial, evaluate and develop new evidence-informed approaches, including digital strategies. This process is conducted by trained instructional coaches who may be Quality of Teaching and Learning Co-ordinators or members of the wider Quality and Innovation in Learning team. The process is tailored to individual roles. All coaching

conversations are confidential, with wider emerging themes being shared. The assessment team considered the Coaching Cycles to support reflection, evaluation and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

250. The Quality Assurance and Improvement Guidance sets out the college's requirement for all staff involved in teaching higher education to take part in a minimum of one 'Learning Walk' per year. These are undertaken by the college's Observation team, which comprises the leadership team, programme coordinators and members of the Quality team, including Quality of Teaching and Learning Coordinators. It is the expectation that Learning Walk training is taken prior to conducting any Learning Walks, including a paired visit with an experienced reviewer. The assessment team reviewed an example Learning Walk record and found this supported reflection and evaluation of learning and teaching strategies through reference to strengths and points to consider for development.
251. In addition to the formal Coaching Cycles, staff may elect to undertake peer observation where participants learn from each other to improve their own teaching and work towards team or individual targets. The assessment team considered an example Peer Observation record, completed by the observer, which included sections on 'what went well' and 'ideas I will use in my own teaching'. The assessment team considered this to support reflection on teaching and learning.
252. The Collective Agreement (detailed in paragraph 235) states that unqualified teaching staff are provided time and funding by the college to complete an approved teacher training qualification within three years of commencing employment (as stated in their contract of employment). The assessment team was of the opinion that engagement in the relevant teacher training qualification provides opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practice.
253. The Staff Qualifications and Professional Development document for the UCSD staff shows that 21 members of staff currently have Fellowship of Advance HE: five are Senior Fellows; 14 are Fellows; and two are Associate Fellows. The overview of HE Teaching Staff Qualifications and Memberships indicates that during 2023-24 the college had its first member of staff achieve Principal Fellow and that the college has purchased a new package of credits to support further Advance HE Fellowship applications during 2024-25. This provides the opportunity for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their learning, teaching and assessment practices.
254. The assessment team concluded that the college has relevant learning, teaching and assessment practices that are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship. The team also concluded that the college provides opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and evaluation of their own learning, teaching and assessment practices.
255. To determine whether staff involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, have academic and (where applicable) professional expertise, the assessment team reviewed a summary of staff qualifications for UCSD staff. The document provides an overview of staff qualifications (including teaching qualifications), registration to professional bodies, current external examiner status and any qualifications staff are currently working towards (including Fellowship of Advance HE).

256. The overview of HE Teaching Staff Qualifications and Memberships document summarises the qualifications of higher education teaching staff in 2023-24 as: 37 with a bachelors' degree; 17 with a masters' degree and six with a doctorate. The Staff Qualifications and Professional Development document for UCSD staff shows that all higher education teaching staff have at least a Level 5 qualification and the vast majority of staff have at least a Level 6 qualification. The assessment team was satisfied that staff are qualified at an appropriate level for the courses they are teaching.
257. The assessment team reviewed the college's Collective Agreement between the college and its academic community. This sets out the college's commitment to providing teacher training, subject-specific higher-level study, vocational courses and opportunities for professional development with financial support and allocated time to support development. The assessment team found that the college provides development opportunities aimed at enabling staff to enhance their practice and scholarship. The college supports staff to undertake further study and academic qualifications. For example, during 2023-24, the college funded higher-level study for higher education staff as follows: six Doctorates; eight masters' degrees; two postgraduate certificates in education; one professional Level 5 qualification for industry updating. The college states a commitment to the same allocation of funding for 2024-25 which the assessment team views as being supportive of developing staff academic and professional expertise.
258. The assessment team reviewed the college's Recruitment and Selection Procedure which states that applicants for teaching posts will be asked to undertake an observed micro-teach or lesson observation of a given topic. The assessment team considered this to support assessment of the candidate's professional expertise.
259. The college's course approval process includes an assessment of the skills and expertise of teaching staff. The assessment team scrutinised an example approval process for Youth Justice courses and found that the approval process included consideration of staff skills and expertise relating to academic practice and experience. Staff CVs and an overview of staffing for the course was considered by the approval panel, including qualifications, specialism in subject area, experience of delivery of higher education programmes, professional and industry activity, and scholarly activity and publications.
260. The college curriculum teams are required to undertake a 'Staff Changes Process' to notify the HE Quality team if there is a change in staffing. This process requires a centralised sign-off of the appropriateness of the new staff member before they begin delivery on the relevant programme/s. Assurance that the member of staff is qualified to the appropriate level, and in an appropriate discipline, is sought as part of this process. The assessment team considered the college's Staff Changes Form which along with the staff CV is approved centrally by the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar. The assessment team considered this to be an adequate process to assure continued and appropriate academic and professional expertise.
261. The assessment team reviewed the summary of staff qualifications for the university centre's staff and a sample of seven staff CVs and found that staff had the qualifications and experience expected for the subject and level they were teaching.

262. The assessment team concluded that all staff involved in teaching or supporting student learning, and in the assessment of student work, at the college have academic or professional expertise. The team also concluded that the college provides development opportunities for staff involved in teaching or supporting student learning, enabling them to enhance their practice and scholarship.
263. The assessment team found the college's staff are actively engaged with pedagogic development of their discipline and have an understanding of current research that directly informs and enhances teaching. The assessment team considered whether there is active engagement with research and/or advanced scholarship to a level commensurate with the level of the qualification offered.
264. The college's three internal professional development programmes are based on evidence informed practice: Evidence-Informed Leaders; Evidence-Informed Teachers and Early Career Teachers. The assessment team found these were included in the sample of cross-college CPD schedules and considered this to be supportive of evidence-informed practice for all staff regardless of their role or subject discipline.
265. The college's Student Innovation and Research Centre (SIRC) provides a hub for the advancement of skills, knowledge and behaviours through the collaborative triad of students, staff and organisations. The SIRC assists the aspiration to develop the college's research portfolio, including assisting applications for research and innovation grants. The SIRC also supports the collaboration between curriculum areas and plans for innovation and research to feed into the national evidence base by publishing an annual Student Innovation and Research Journal. The SIRC supports local businesses to develop innovation and research skills by engaging students and apprentices in business-led projects. Each year, the college hosts a Research Showcase in May to celebrate the research and scholarly activity of students and staff. The assessment team reviewed an example Research Showcase timetable and this showed contributions across a range of subject disciplines.
266. Academic staff maintain professional links with their industry in a paid or voluntary capacity: for example, all the programme leaders in the Children and Young People curriculum area are school governors; most of the Allied Health and Nursing team continue to work part-time in the health sector; all Art and Digital Media academic staff take part in exhibitions and private commissions; and the Sports and Exercise Science team are all sports coaches and/or personal trainers. The assessment team found some of this activity was evidenced in the staff overview and staff CVs supporting the currency of their practice.
267. In addition to the pedagogical and subject discipline research and scholarly activity in which all academic staff engage, the college provided examples of research and scholarly activity that have had local and national impact. For example, during the approval process for the FdA Working with Children, Young People and Families in 2019-20, the academic team and employer representative observed that there was no appropriate core textbook. The programme was written in partnership with 45 local employers in response to local children's services being graded 'inadequate' by Ofsted in 2018 and subsequent monitoring reports. Thus, it was imperative students had access to up to date and relevant research and practice to contribute to the wider improvements in children's services. Without an appropriate core textbook, the teaching team decided to write their own (Tarry, 2022). The assessment team has seen this evidenced in staff CVs.

268. The assessment team concluded that those involved in teaching or supporting teaching at the college understand current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline and that such knowledge and understanding directly informs and enhances their teaching. Staff at the college actively engage with research and/or advanced scholarship to a level commensurate with the level of the qualification offered.
269. The assessment team found that the college provides opportunities for staff to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design and to engage with the activities of other higher education providers, for example through becoming external examiners, validation panel members or external reviewers.
270. The assessment team reviewed the college's Academic Development and Teacher Training Programmes and example programmes from development days and cross-college continuing professional development. The team found that these provided the opportunity for staff to engage in curriculum development activities; for example, the college training and development week focused on curriculum development.
271. The college's partnership with the University of Plymouth has supported the sharing of practice and opportunities in curriculum development and assessment design. For example, staff have had the opportunity to be involved in the development, design and approval of Foundation degrees and Honours degrees and to attend the annual teaching and learning conference.
272. The college's Quality team are members of the Jisc external examining mailing list and provide regular updating of opportunities to support staff engagement with other higher education providers. The Staff Qualifications and Professional Development document for UCSD staff tracks external examiner status and lists four members of staff as current external examiners.
273. The HE Teaching Staff Qualifications and Memberships document summarises that staff are members of 31 scholarly societies and professional bodies across a range of relevant subjects and vocations. To further test whether staff engage with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations, the assessment team reviewed the job descriptor for Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar which contained reference to maintaining appropriate networks and national external engagement to develop the college's profile. The assessment team reviewed the profiles of the 'academic team' on the college's university centre website and a sample of seven CVs and found that staff were engaged with the activities of other higher education providers.
274. The assessment team noted that the college does not currently hold a central record of staff members who have engaged external panel members or external reviewers for course approval at other higher education providers; however, they plan to track this information going forward. On balance, the assessment team concluded that the college provides opportunities for its staff to gain experience in curriculum development and assessment design and to engage with the activities of other higher education providers – for example through becoming external examiners, validation panel members or external reviewers.
275. The assessment team found the college to have expertise in providing feedback on assessment that is timely, constructive and developmental.

276. The assessment team considered the college's Marking and Moderation Policy and Procedure and found it provides clear guidance and supports staff expectations for marking and feedback. It is the expectation that module leaders and HE leads use the generic marking criteria to guide marking and feedback, allocating marks according to the marking criteria and giving narrative feedback in the form of what students did well, how they can improve, and targets for future assessment. Feedback and targets should be tailored to individual students, enabling them to learn from the feedback and improve their attainment. The assessment team scrutinised examples of marked student work and found the feedback to be personalised, constructive and developmental. For example, the feedback seen by the team was structured under clear headings outlining strengths, areas for development and next steps.
277. The Assessment Practice guidelines reiterate the importance of students having the opportunity for a draft submission of work two weeks before the summative deadline. Students can receive written and verbal developmental feedback, during a one-to-one appointment, on 500 words or 25 per cent of their work (whichever is greater), so that they can develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential. All summative assessments are marked with annotations and developmental narrative feedback and returned to students within 20 working days so that they can build on that feedback for subsequent assessments.
278. The assessment team tested the mechanisms outlined in the Marking and Moderation Policy regarding feedback on assessment. The team reviewed a sample of three moderation reports which all used the moderation of marked work template and considered evidence of the second marking of assignments. The assessment team also reviewed the external examiners' overview report 2023-24 in which external examiners commended the college for the quality of their feedback and identified it as an example of good practice consistently across modules. Specific examples include a commendation for the quality of feedback for FdA Law in the review report and comments regarding detailed feedback contained within the external examiner report for FdA Working with Young People, Children and Families.
279. The assessment team concluded that the college has expertise in providing feedback on assessment that is timely, constructive and developmental.
280. Staff with key programme management responsibilities at the college have experience of curriculum development and assessment design through working with a partner university and college-based training.
281. The college's HE Curriculum Staff Responsibilities document sets out the roles and responsibilities of those with key programme management responsibilities: HE coordinator, HE lead, personal tutor; and module leader. The HE lead role has primary responsibility for curriculum development and assessment design, working collaboratively with module leaders to support this activity. Teaching staff have had the opportunity to be involved in the development, design and approval of Foundation degrees and Honours degrees with a partnership institution.
282. The assessment team scrutinised the content of a sample of CPD activities led by the college – including training and development days, training and development week, and cross-college CPD – and found the activities to be supportive of curriculum development and assessment

design. For example, a focus on the college strategic improvement priorities of curriculum planning and design; and time scheduled for reflection on curriculum planning.

283. The assessment team concluded that the college has experience of curriculum development and assessment design. The team also concluded that staff are supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of curriculum design, work with stakeholders in curriculum design, and develop the skills to plan curriculum and assessment. When staff who are new to teaching progress to module leaders and programme management responsibilities, they have already received extensive training in curriculum development and assessment design, which they will have then developed in their practice prior to reaching these roles.
284. The assessment team found the college has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and expertise required to teach all students and the appropriate staff to student ratios.
285. The college's course approval process includes an assessment of the skills and expertise of teaching staff. The assessment team scrutinised an example approval process for Youth Justice courses and found that the approval process included consideration of staff skills and expertise relating to academic practice and experience. Staff CVs and an overview of staffing for the course were considered by the approval panel, including qualifications, specialism in subject area, experience of delivery of higher education programmes, professional and industry activity and scholarly activity and publications.
286. The college curriculum teams are required to undertake a 'Staff Changes Process' to notify the Quality team if there is a change in staffing. This process requires a centralised sign-off of the appropriateness of the new staff member before they begin delivery on the relevant programme(s). Assurance that the member of staff is qualified to the appropriate level, and in an appropriate discipline, is sought as part of this process. The assessment team considered the college's Staff Changes Form, which is approved centrally by the Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar, to provide an adequate process to ensure this.
287. Scrutiny of staff expertise continues through Personal Professional Development Reviews and informs reflection within the Resources and Support section of the curriculum HE self-evaluation documents which receives oversight from the HEAB. The assessment team reviewed the self-evaluation documents for the curriculum area of Health Professions and Nursing and found this included a review of staffing under the Resources and Support section. Staff to student ratios are considered as part of the college's stage two programme approval meeting, with a standing agenda item to ask for confirmation regarding staffing arrangements.
288. The assessment team concluded that the college has made a rigorous assessment of the skills and experience required to teach all students and has appropriate staff to student ratios.
289. The assessment team considered the college to have appropriate staff recruitment practices, having reviewed the college's Recruitment and Selection Procedure, Safer Recruitment in Education statement, Safer Recruitment Training, Risk Assessment Form DBS Disclosure and Barring Scheme and the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
290. The college's Recruitment and Selection Procedure outlines the process of staff recruitment. This includes authorising and advertising the role, shortlisting, interview and selection methods, and post-interview employment offers and checks.

291. The assessment team considered the college's Recruitment and Selection Procedure provides transparency of the recruitment process from initial request for the role, to interview and appointment, and ensures the appropriate people are involved in the interview process, and that all appropriate checks are in place.
292. The Recruitment Policy states that all interview panels at the college must comprise at least two members of staff. This must include the recruiting manager, the Assistant Principal or senior leadership team member, and at least one member of staff who has undertaken safer recruitment training within the last 24 months.
293. The college provides training to ensure sufficiently qualified staff in safer recruitment. All members of the college's leadership team undertake online safer recruitment training with an external provider, and this is further enhanced with an annual update by the Head of People. All staff in the People team have undertaken advanced safer recruitment training provided by the NSPCC.
294. The college undertakes mandatory pre-employment checks on prospective staff as part of its safer recruitment and selection process with the expectation that these checks should be satisfied prior to the new employee starting in post.
295. The assessment team concluded that the college has appropriate staff recruitment practices.

Conclusions

296. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion C1.1 as the evidence shows that the college has appropriate numbers of staff to teach the students, and that the staff are appropriately qualified and developed to teach and support the students at the levels of the qualifications being awarded.
297. It was the assessment team's overall view that the college 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 and subjects of the qualifications being awarded. The assessment team considered that job descriptions, staff development, staff resources and staff profiles are appropriate for academic programmes of these levels. The college operates a management structure which ensures accountability for the quality of its courses and has in place processes that support student feedback, course appraisal and staff reflection.
298. The assessment team was satisfied that the college has the organisational and managerial infrastructure necessary to support active engagement with the pedagogic development of knowledge, advanced scholarship and research. The assessment team examined job descriptions, staff profiles and internal events, which demonstrate the active involvement of staff and a clear link between research and scholarship and teaching and learning.
299. The assessment team found that the college takes a strategic approach to ensuring that staff are supported to engage in reflection and the evaluation of learning, teaching and assessment practice. There are opportunities ranging from formal educational programmes to personal development reviews. There are several student feedback mechanisms in place to support evaluation of practice and there are management structures which provide appropriate oversight.

300. The assessment team also noted that many of these processes have been exercised securely during the previous four years as evidenced by the period of time associated with strategic and supporting documents, reports, data, staff profiles and CVs. It therefore concluded that criterion C1 has been met because the college meets sub-criterion C1.1.

Assessment of DAPs criterion D: Environment for supporting students

Criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement

Advice to the OfS

301. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion D1: Enabling student development and achievement.
302. The assessment team's view is based on its review of evidence which shows in summary that the college has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
303. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence requirements for this criterion, alongside any other relevant information.

Sub-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

304. It is the assessment team's view that the college meets assessment sub-criterion D1.1 because it has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
305. 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 and any other relevant evidence requirements.

Reasoning

306. To inform the assessment team's evaluation of 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 assessment team reviewed a range of college documents, including:
 - Strategic Leadership Framework
 - Higher Education Engagement Strategy
 - Student Development Policy
 - Study and Wellbeing Review Policies
 - HE Tutorial Curriculum
 - Team structure
 - Assessment Guidelines for Staff

- Website student support
- Graduate model slides
- Induction checklist for tutors
- Stepping up to HE Toolkit
- Stepping up to HE Guides
- HE Fitness to Practice and Cause for Concern Procedure
- HE Student Services Complaints Procedure
- Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure
- HE Supporting Pregnant Students and Students with Very Young Children Policy
- Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability
- a HEAB report regarding student outcomes.

307. The assessment team reviewed the Student Development Policy to understand how the college enabled student development and achievement for its cohort. The assessment team acknowledge the diverse student cohort in 2022-23 which characterised as follows:

- 62 per cent mature
- 51 per cent from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile 1-2
- 30 per cent with declared learning difficulties or additional needs.

308. Student outcomes and proposals for change and developments are reported to the HEAB for decision making and the governing body for strategic oversight. The assessment team reviewed a sample of HEAB minutes and identified the monitoring of continuation, completion and progression date and the benchmarking at institutional level against OfS thresholds (see paragraph 142 for further detail). The student outcomes and analysis of the access and participation plan report for 2022-23 also demonstrated that the college analyses continuation, attainment and progression rates by demographic group. The assessment team concluded that the college has the strategic mechanisms in place to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students.

309. The college has a range of policies and procedures which are focused on the student journey, including the:

- HE Study and Wellbeing Review Policy
- HE Fitness to Practice and Cause for Concern Procedure
- HE Student Services Complaints Procedure
- Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure
- HE Supporting Pregnant Students and Students with Very Young Children Policy
- Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability.

310. The Higher Education Framework is used to lead the development and review of the college's approach to supporting student development and achievement. The Teaching, Learning, Assessment and External Examiners Committee has an important role in reviewing the

policies and procedures that inform student support, including the review of student outcome and feedback data to inform critical reflection of the effectiveness of the support mechanisms.

311. The college's mission statement is 'inspiring our community through learning' and is underpinned by the five values of aspiration, inclusion, innovation, progress and support. The college has set out its intention to deliver an inclusive and progressive ethos. This includes the curriculum intent to support every student to fulfil their potential through the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours, that lead to strong student outcomes, including positive progression and raised aspirations. The Student Development Policy sets out the college's strategic vision for supporting higher education students and how this support is operationalised. The assessment team reviewed the policy and identified key principles, including:

- All students have access to appropriate support from their personal tutor and the HE Student Support Hub (this signposts to professional services including study skills, wellbeing, disability and employment support).
- Group and one-to-one tutorials are available to all degree students on a regular basis.
- The college will identify and support student needs, help students to target their aspirations, and facilitate personal and professional development.
- The college will give teaching staff the opportunity to feedback to students key issues concerning their own studies and discuss how they can take responsibility for their own progression.

312. The assessment team considered how the college supported students in their development and outcomes and found the college achieved this through its integrated tutorial model. The model is student focused and facilitates tailored support and funded activities related to employability and further enrichment of student experience. The assessment team reviewed the college's access and participation plan and found that the tutorial model was integrated, forming part of the college's student persistence plan aiming to maximise the access, success and progression of students from underrepresented groups. The integrated tutorial model is operationalised through the Student Development Policy and Study and Wellbeing Review Policy. This model involves: personal and pastoral tutoring to monitor students' wellbeing and to support their personal development; an academic tutoring curriculum to support in the development of academic skills and monitor academic progress; and professional services including the Student Support Hub team, library services, and employability services.

313. The college reported that – since the introduction of the Student Development Policy and the redevelopment of the integrated tutorial model in 2020-21, with a centralised curriculum and support from the university centre Student Support Hub team – students' perception of their academic support has been consistently above benchmark in the NSS. The assessment team reviewed the NSS data (paragraph 204) which confirmed above-average student satisfaction. The team concluded that the college's integrated tutorial model demonstrates a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to determine and evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students.

314. In order to determine if students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way and account is taken of different students' choices and needs, the assessment team reviewed evidence including:
- admissions regulations
 - HE Admissions Policy 2024-25
 - Student Development Policy
 - applicant events
 - induction checklist for tutors
 - module guide example
 - HE Tutorial Curriculum
 - website student support.
315. The higher education Admissions Policy provides the framework for admissions practice for all university programmes and has been developed to reflect relevant requirements such as consumer protection law. The policy makes explicit the position in relation to a range of areas of admissions. These areas include fair admissions and widening participation, the processes for handling applications from those with criminal convictions, and the college's commitment to equity and efficiency in dealing with applications. This policy was approved by the college HEAB and is reviewed annually, with the most recent update and approval in May 2024. The Dean of Higher Education Quality and Academic Registrar is responsible for ensuring that this policy and its integrated procedures for the administration of the admissions process are adhered to, and that the college's policy and procedures are in line with regulatory requirements.
316. The policy states that the college is passionate about providing accessible, employment focused and high quality education. The admissions policy details the processing of applications. The admission teams work with the Student Support Hub, which provides academic skills and disability support. In the assessment team's view, the policies are appropriate and relevant to students' needs, particularly within the context of the college. For example, the Admissions Policy specifically references non-traditional learners and returners to study, considering entry to study based on a diverse range of skills and experiences under APL (accreditation to prior learning) or AEL (accreditation of experiential learning).
317. The policy is developed and updated by the Admissions and Enrolment Committee which meets three times a year. The assessment team reviewed the terms of reference for the committee and found that the committee reviews the criteria for student admission, plans and evaluates enrolment and inductions processes, plans applicant cycles and events, plans and evaluates the website user experience for new students, and reviews, monitors and develops enquiry handling approaches. To test the functionality of the committee, the team reviewed a sample of minutes and found that a variety of academic and professional service staff are present, including the HE Student Support and Experience Manager and the HE Admissions, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator. The minutes evidenced how the college considers different students' needs through the update of language to be more accessible in internal application forms, monitoring engagement and barriers to the study skills section on the website and developing the step-up programme with the Student Support Hub team as a

resource for students before they start learning. These sessions are now recorded, to increase accessibility for students who cannot attend in person.

318. The assessment team reviewed the programme of scheduled applicant events, which are used to advise students about their pre-enrolment activity with their programme team. Through reviewing the scheduled events, the team was satisfied that students are appropriately supported through enrolment, specifically with the allocation of a personal tutor from application stage to support with the transition into higher education. Through reviewing the Student Development Policy, the team identified that, where possible, the same personal tutor will remain throughout a student's programme to promote strong tutor-student relationships. The assessment team concluded that through meeting weekly in group tutorials, and at least once a term one-to-ones to review individual progress, tutors could maintain oversight of students' welfare. They are accessible to advise and help students with pastoral and academic issues and may be supported by the Student Support Hub or other services.
319. Induction is coordinated centrally to ensure that all students have the same information, advice and guidance. The college actively engages with applicant information, to direct individualised support and communication to students who have support needs, and to ensure that all students are signposted to the services that are available to support with the breadth of their needs. All applicants are directed to the 'Stepping up to higher education' webpage on the university centre website. The website supports students and staff to understand the services and support available to help them effectively with their studies, and to support with student support and guidance signposting. This includes information on the types of support available from the Student Support Hub (academic, wellbeing, disability and employability) including contact details and self-directed resources.
320. In addition to centralised enrolment, module guides provide detailed information regarding programme delivery and assessment to inform student choice throughout their studies. The assessment team reviewed the module guide template and an example of the Training & Fitness Principles (Sports Coaching) module guide, and found it was a comprehensive overview of what to expect from the module, including welcomes and introductions, and key objective and assessment information. The team also reviewed the Sports Coaching programme plan 2023-2024 which demonstrated that teaching staff were aware of all new students and had details of any additional support needed. The assessment team reviewed the resources and concluded that the induction process, information on the transition to higher education, applicant events, and student support and contact information were clear and effective.
321. From its view of the college's higher education Admissions Policy, induction, pre-enrolment and programme specific resources, the assessment team concluded that students are advised about, and inducted into, their programmes in an effective way, and account is taken of different students' choices and needs.
322. To test whether the college has effective student and staff advisory, support and counselling services which are monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered, the assessment team reviewed:
- the HEAB report regarding student outcomes

- the Student Development Policy
- the Study and Wellbeing Review Policy and Procedure
- the HE Student Support and Experience Manager job description.

323. The assessment team reviewed an example of the Student Support Hub report which is compiled periodically for the HEAB. This report gave an overview of activity and trends that have been identified through student hub analysis. The HEAB maintains oversight of non-academic services with approaches to monitoring set out in relevant policy. For example, regular monitoring of student functions is undertaken for student wellbeing through the Student Wellbeing Review Policy. The team considered a report from February 2024 which identified the current challenges the college is facing, mapped against projects to address these. The report also includes actual numbers for students with open files with the wellbeing team, students engaging or choosing not to engage with disability support, and students engaging with one-to-one support.

324. The report compiled for the HEAB also demonstrated to the team how the college monitors the support available to students with declared disabilities and mental health support needs. This is monitored along with the effectiveness of the services offered through student voice and student outcomes data. The higher education student profile is reported to the HEAB through analysis of access and participation data annually. The assessment team reviewed the college's higher education outcomes and access and participation progress report and formed the view that the analysis was comprehensive and effective in monitoring progress against targets. For example, the college aimed to reduce the disabled and non-disabled students' attainment gap for achieving a grade of 60 per cent or above at Foundation degree level by 2024-25. In 2021-22 and 2022-23, the gap in good degree attainment between disabled students and their peers narrowed, demonstrating progress towards targets. In the assessment team's view, the monitoring processes and reporting structure to the HEAB is effective in providing a strategic oversight of the effectiveness of the support available and also facilitates horizon scanning to identify any future resource needs. The post of a full-time HE Student Support and Experience Manager was developed in 2023-24, in acknowledgment of the need for dedicated and focused management support for the functions of academic skills, wellbeing, disability and employability that sit within the HE Student Support Hub. This demonstrates the benefits of the HEAB's strategic oversight and the active consideration of resource needs arising.

325. The assessment team identified discussions regarding student support as a focus within all student consultative forums, including feedback collected in course surveys, student consultative forum minutes and NSS data. This information is compiled into a student satisfaction report. The assessment team reviewed the 2023-2024 report, which was presented at the HEAB, covering feedback from the induction survey, early module reviews and the student consultative forum. The report demonstrates that the college has seen high levels of student satisfaction regarding the support available. The student feedback presented in the review is positive; comments include reference to a warm welcome received and personal tutors named in positively impacting and inspiring students. The assessment team additionally noted positive student feedback on the quality of student support, which was reflected in 2022-23 NSS scores for student satisfaction with academic support. The assessment team concluded that the college demonstrates a commitment to continually engaging with the student body and reviewing student outcomes to critically evaluate the

impact of the measures taken to support students, and to develop and enhance the support available.

326. The assessment team concluded that the college has effective student and staff advisory, support and counselling services which are monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered.
327. The assessment team considered how the college's administrative support systems enable it to monitor student progression and performance accurately and provide timely, secure and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs. To inform this assessment, the assessment team reviewed the college's HE Assistant Registrar job description, Student Support Hub engagement report and Study and Wellbeing Review Policy.
328. The college advised that data reports are completed using a centralised system which integrates academic and non-academic data. The assessment team identified – through reviewing the February 2024 HEAB Mid-year UCSD support report – that improvements to the system had recently been made increase the transparency of student hub data for the curriculum teams. The team also reviewed the terms of reference for the Data and Information Committee which reports to the HE Strategy Board. This committee monitors and reports on the following data returns:
- Individualised Learner Record (ILR)
 - Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES)
 - Graduate Outcomes record
 - Discover Uni dataset for the NSS
 - Access and participation reports
 - Student outcomes and profile data
 - Other OfS returns.

The committee also:

- provides reports to the HE Strategy Board on pertinent data processes and outcomes
 - collects admissions data and supports the process
 - has oversight of subgroup activity and resource
 - pays due regard to the OfS conditions of registration, aligned to the group through annual updated mapping
 - consults with HE leads on data outcomes.
329. Data is currently disseminated to curriculum teams through a centralised system. Individual student progression and performance are monitored by the personal tutor, with discussions and areas of concern recorded on a central system to support with managerial oversight when needed. Personal tutors and teaching staff can refer students at any time to the Student Support Hub, for academic, disability, wellbeing or employability support, and students can also self-refer. All referrals to the Student Support Hub are logged and levels of engagement are regularly reported through the committee structure, to ensure oversight, and identification

of trends or additional resource needs. Students whose wellbeing or engagement with learning gives cause for concern are supported using the procedures set out in the Study and Wellbeing Review Policy.

330. As set out in the Study and Wellbeing Review Policy, causes for concern are referred for additional tailored support to address the issues that are presenting challenges. The assessment team reviewed the policy and identified that a Study and Wellbeing Review is arranged after three weeks; this includes developing an action plan in conjunction with the student, enabling them to take ownership for their own situation and progress. The personal tutor and wellbeing team monitor students' progress, reviewing support as necessary. A written record of Study and Wellbeing Review meetings, with agreed actions and targets, is noted on a template that is shared with the student. The assessment team concluded that the dissemination of data and transparency across curriculum teams and the Student Support Hub enables the effecting monitoring of student progression and performance, and that the college has in place appropriate policies to support students when necessary.
331. The assessment team noted the appointment to the role of Higher Education Assistant Registrar and reviewed the job description. The role has been created to support the administration of student progression and performance data and the dissemination of data for the new approach in 2024-25. The assessment team concluded that the college is focused on continually improving its collection and monitoring of student data to satisfy academic and non-academic needs.
332. The assessment team concluded that the college has the administrative support systems to enable it to monitor student progression and performance accurately, and to provide timely, secure and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs.
333. The assessment team found that the college provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression, for example academic, employment and future career management skills. To inform this decision, the assessment team reviewed the college's:
- Stepping up to HE guides
 - induction checklist for students
 - HE tutorial curriculum
 - student profile example
 - HE Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability
- and a sample of approval documentation and course specifications.
334. The college reported that applicants are encouraged to undertake the Stepping up to Higher Education programme prior to enrolment to encourage active engagement in and commitment to the learning and development of skills and knowledge. The programme consists of online guides for self-directed activity, face-to-face workshops, personalised welcome phone calls to address any concerns, and an online induction. The assessment team reviewed the college's checklist for online induction. The checklist demonstrated to the team that support is given to students as soon as they join the college through the development of four units:

- video welcomes from key staff introducing important information, including the student charter, tutorial commitment and academic integrity
- a certified course in equality and diversity
- videos and activities related to personal development, including employability, health and wellbeing, safeguarding, citizenship, families and relationships, and online safety
- a final unit with a reminder of how to access all the online software and resources.

The assessment team found that the college has an in-depth, centralised approach to inducting its students which is further built on by the weekly tutorial curriculum. On review of the tutorial curriculum, the team found that it supported academic, personal and professional development with the inclusion of academic writing, referencing, target setting, employability planning and building confidence.

335. To determine if the college provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional development, the assessment team reviewed the template for a student profile which is completed at enrolment. The team was satisfied that the profile enabled reflection on prior experiences and was a useful tool for tutors to support with readiness for university study. The student profile records students' confidence in study skills: time management, organisation, concentration and memory, note taking, taking in information, academic writing, referencing, tests and exams, and presentations; it informs conversations with personal tutors to support students' achievement and preparation for their future careers. The college's integrated tutorial curriculum is designed to address gaps in students' academic reading, writing, and referencing, whilst also extending and stretching the skills to the fullest potential of those who are more secure in these academic skills areas.
336. The assessment team considered the Higher Education Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability and how it aligned with the college's higher education vision statement: 'South Devon College is passionate about providing excellent quality, accessible and employment focused Higher Education'. The team found that the strategy was operationalised through teaching teams liaising with local and regional employers to ensure that the curriculum, learning and assessment meet employers' current and future needs, and to foster South Devon graduates with work-ready knowledge, skills and behaviours. This is evidenced in the sampled course approval documents – for example, the approval document for FdA Youth Justice and Youth Studies and Higher-Level Apprenticeship Youth Justice Practitioner demonstrated that the local police commander for Torbay and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall had been personally consulted. In addition, the college worked closely with the local authority youth justice service to ensure the trauma-informed approach is embedded in the programme, reflecting and complementing the current local authority approach.
337. The assessment team reviewed a sample of programme specifications which provided mapping to illustrate where employability criteria are implemented across programme aims, learning outcomes, assessments and extra activities. The assessment team was satisfied that the college provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression – for example, academic, employment and future career management skills.

338. The assessment team found that the college provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments. To inform this assessment, the assessment team reviewed the following college documents:

- Induction checklist for tutors
- Specialist Facilities and their Safe and Effective Use
- Off-Site Activity Policy
- Content Capture Policy
- IT Acceptable Use Policy
- a wide range of risk assessments relating to specialist facilities and activities.

339. The college provides an online induction course for students, which includes videos and activities related to online safety and how to access online software and resources. Skills development continues post-enrolment, with a schedule of induction activities that focus on supporting students' understanding of access to resources and use of specialist facilities in their first weeks and throughout their study. The assessment team was satisfied that the college provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided.

340. The college provides an overview by subject area of the specialist facilities available and how these are to be used safely and effectively by students and staff. The team tested the college's processes by reviewing a sample of five of the 20 risk assessments provided that related to the use of specialist facilities. The college's Offsite Activity Policy explains the guidelines for offsite activities, including a checklist and instructions for risk assessments. The assessment team considered a sample of five offsite risk assessments relating specifically to the college's outdoor leadership programme. These relate to the specialist facilities and environments that students and staff work in. The assessment team found that the risk assessments were thorough and included relevant risks and ratings. Appropriate precautions and controls were in place, often involving student training which is completed as part of module inductions. The team could also clearly identify the assessor, the date the assessment was conducted and the next review date. All risk assessments were up to date and the team concluded that the college completes thorough risk assessments enabling the safe and effective use of specialist facilities.

341. The assessment team reviewed the college's policies relating to the use of digital and virtual environments. The Content Capture Policy and IT Acceptable Use Policy cover the safe and effective use of online facilities when working in digital and virtual environments.

342. The assessment team was satisfied that the university provides opportunities for all students to develop skills to make effective use of the learning resources provided, including the safe and effective use of specialist facilities, and the use of digital and virtual environments.

343. The assessment team found that the following documents demonstrate that the college's approach is guided by a commitment to equity:

- Strategic Leadership Framework
- Teaching and Learning Strategy

- Teaching and Learning Framework
- Monitoring and Review Procedure
- Induction Activities for Students.

344. The college's mission statement is 'inspiring our community through learning' and is underpinned by the five values of aspiration, inclusion, innovation, progress and support. The college states that these values evoke the behaviours needed to deliver an inclusive and progressive ethos where the intent of the college's curriculum is to support every student to fulfil their potential. This is demonstrated through the college's Teaching and Learning Strategy and Teaching and Learning Framework.
345. In this strategy and framework, the college sets out a clear vision and rationale for teaching and learning. Its vision is formed from five aspirations: evidence-informed leaders, staff and students; consistently high standards of teaching and learning; responsive development and improvement; regular review of curriculum design and purpose; and a supportive culture. It has developed a teaching and learning framework based on its inclusive learning culture aligned to its stated values. This framework is informed by OfS conditions and supports all students to succeed, including those with additional needs and disabilities. The college's monitoring and review procedure involves all higher education programmes being subject to annual monitoring and includes feedback from those involved in programme delivery, and input from disability practitioners, equality and diversity practitioners, and external bodies. The assessment team was satisfied that learning design includes consideration of barriers to accessibility and the college's approach is guided by a commitment to equity.
346. The online induction for students includes a standalone certificated course in equality, diversity and inclusion. The college's access and participation plan 2021-22 to 2024-25 outlines the provision currently available and demonstrates an ongoing commitment to equity. The assessment team concluded that the college's approach is guided by a commitment to equity.

Conclusions

347. The assessment team concluded that the college meets sub-criterion D1.1 as the evidence demonstrates that the college has resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
348. It is the assessment team's overall view that the college has in place monitoring and evaluation arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The evidence sources reviewed by the assessment team confirm that student development is monitored and evaluated. The design of the programmes allows for students to develop their academic, professional and personal potential.
349. The assessment team also concluded that the college has a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to evaluate how it enables student development and achievement for its diverse body of students. Student support has clear processes and ensures students have access to available support. Through scrutiny of the induction process, the assessment team concluded that students are advised about and inducted into their programmes in an effective way. The assessment team is satisfied that the college provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their academic, personal and professional progression.

350. The assessment team formed the overall view that the college has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Many of these processes have been exercised securely during the previous three years as evidenced by the period of time associated with strategic and supporting documents, committee minutes, policy and reports. The assessment team therefore concluded that criterion D1 has been met because sub-criterion D1.1 has been met.

Assessment of DAPs criterion E: Evaluation of performance

Criterion E1: Evaluation of performance

Advice to the OfS

351. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion E1: Evaluation of performance.
352. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that the college takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further its strengths.
353. This view is based on specific consideration of the evidence for this criterion alongside other relevant information.

E.1: 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

354. The assessment team's view is that the college meets criterion E1 because there is evidence that shows that the college takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further strengths.
355. 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

356. The assessment team's view was that the college has embedded critical self-assessment into the operation of its higher education provision and takes action in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review. The team reviewed the minutes of the HEAB (period 2023-2024) and the CQC (November 2023 and March 2024), alongside examples of curriculum self-evaluation documents. The college has three strands of internal monitoring for higher education student outcomes: programme-level monitoring, curriculum department-level monitoring and cross-higher education monitoring. These ensure in-year monitoring, clear reporting lines into relevant committees and escalation where needed. At programme level, any risks and associated actions are included in the programme plan. The assessment team reviewed programme plans for Psychology and Social Science and Childhood, Young People, Family, Education, and Youth Justice. The plans are reviewed in the autumn and spring and identify strategic priorities and risks which are tracked for actions and outcomes. This includes matters raised through external examiners or other external stakeholders. The curriculum self-evaluation document for Health and Sports was reviewed by the assessment team; it demonstrated ongoing critical review of the curriculum areas against key student data, appropriate resourcing (staff, facilities, learning resources, etc.), and any associated risks to the student experience. The self-evaluation document is

presented and discussed at the HEAB. The HEAB minutes for February 2024 noted discussion of the self-evaluation document and associated actions. Minutes from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment External Examiners' Group (2022-24) were reviewed and confirmed that this committee does review higher education student data outcomes, which covers admissions to completion of studies.

357. The assessment team also considered the new HE Periodic Review Procedure which was approved by the HEAB in August 2024. The date of implementation was September 2024 and it will be reviewed in May 2025. Key indicators under consideration will be:

- historical programme data since the point of validation/last revalidation – to include recruitment data, student outcomes (continuation and completion) and student progression
- external examiner feedback (how it has been implemented and what further changes are required)
- student feedback (quantitative and qualitative)
- employer feedback
- programme structure (including currency and coherence)
- external changes (including PSRB requirements and apprenticeship standard changes)
- market position and employer demand
- resourcing (physical and staffing)
- approach to supporting students
- proposals for change in the validated programme.

358. The period of review is over a five-year cycle and includes a two-stage process. Stage one must involve students and has three potential outcomes: the programme to proceed to stage two revalidation with no changes; the programme to proceed to stage two revalidation with changes; the programme should be suspended for a maximum period of one year pending further development and research. The suspension of a programme would apply where specific risks have been identified and cannot be addressed without further investigation. If the programme is not ready for revalidation within 12 months, it should be withdrawn and taught out for any existing students.

359. The assessment team considered the current processes in place for ongoing review of programmes and found that these processes are thorough and demonstrate the principles set out in the Periodic Review Procedure which will be implemented from September 2024.

360. As a result of the existing monitoring and evaluation processes – which are reported at the HEAB, the HE Teaching, Learning, Assessment and External Examiners Committee and the CQC – the college maintains its HE Quality Assurance and Enhancement (HEQAE) Plan. The assessment team reviewed the HEQAE Plan 2023-24 and noted key priority areas linked to monitoring student outcomes and strategic enhancement objectives. This action plan is RAG-rated to confirm progress and completion of objectives. Within the HEQAE Plan 2023-24, the team examined an example of a key objective to establish an evaluation methodology for the college's approach to education gain. This was raised by the Dean of Higher Education

Quality and Academic Registrar. The metrics to be considered were identified and the progress was noted. The commentary illustrated a reflective approach and learning through practice to develop robust measures of evaluation for education gain. Similar commentary was noted for actions taken to improve access and participation for particular groups which related to the college's access and participation plan. The HEQAE Plan is reviewed at the HEAB as evidenced by the minutes of June 2023.

361. In order to determine if the college has clear mechanisms for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny and monitoring of its academic provision, the assessment team reviewed minutes for the HEAB (2023-24), CQC (23-24), and the HEQAE Plan 2023-24. As an example, within the HEAB minutes for November 2023, actions were noted and assigned to particular responsible members of the committee. Updates on these actions were noted in the minutes for the HEAB February 2024 meeting. Similarly, the HEQAE Plan (a key monitoring tracker for higher education academic provision) identifies owners of items who are responsible for taking action, and updates on these actions accordingly. This document is reported at the HEAB and the actions discussed in the meeting. At programme level, the USCD Programme Plan is employed to document the scrutiny and monitoring of academic programmes. Within these plans, actions are assigned to responsible owners who provide updates on actions and progress. At curriculum level, the self-evaluation document is completed by the Head of Curriculum, discussed and reported at the HEAB for progress against actions. This document also assigns actions to responsible individuals and updates on actions are noted. It was the assessment team's view that the college has robust mechanisms in place to meet this requirement.
362. The assessment team considered how the college informs its arrangements for programme design, approval, delivery and review with ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation, and if this contributes to programme design and development, teaching, and on student learning and assessment. Based on the college's Curriculum Strategy 2023, it is clear that its academic provision is informed by the external community environment. This also determines the curriculum clusters: Health; Engineering; Construction and Built Environment; Tourism and Hospitality; and Digital and Creativity. The college therefore aims to offer a provision which addresses the following issues: identifying skills gaps, working with employers, and offering apprenticeships.
363. The college's curriculum development and approval procedure outlines a two-stage process. Stage one focuses on input from the Programme team; stage two emphasises input from external stakeholders, including employers, industry, academic and other professionals. The approval panel must include an external academic and industry professional. There are clear roles and focus areas for the external panel members which are assigned within the procedure. The aide memoire for approval panels includes a question that reflects the college's focus on external input: 'How has employer feedback influenced programme design and feedback?'. Evidence of the college's ongoing consultation with both internal and external expertise can also be seen in the minutes of the Health Professions and Nursing Committee and the HE Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body Committee. The assessment team was satisfied that the college aligns its strategy and procedures to ensure that its programme, design, approval, delivery and review are conducted in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

364. The assessment team concluded that the college meets criterion E1 as the evidence demonstrates that the college takes effective action to assess its own performance. The college identified weaknesses and strengths, and responds to these to develop further.

Conclusion

365. The assessment team concluded that the college takes effective action to assess its own performance, respond to identified weaknesses and develop further strengths. A sample of committee terms of reference, minutes and associated documentation was examined. These demonstrate that critical self-assessment is integral to the college's higher education provision. The assessment team was satisfied that action is taken by the college in response to matters raised through internal and external monitoring. The college also regularly reviews performance of its curriculum and its educators. There is evidence of processes in place for the college to take appropriate action in response to any matters raised through internal or external monitoring or review.

366. Clear mechanisms exist to assign and discharge action – for example, through the college's committee and leadership structure and its annual monitoring review process. The assessment team concluded that ideas and expertise from inside and outside of the college contribute to the assessment of its performance. The contribution of outside expertise is evident in the course development and approval processes, external examiner reports, and responsibilities to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

367. Many of these processes have been exercised securely during the previous three years as evidenced by the period of time associated with strategic and supporting documents, committee minutes, policy and reports. The assessment team therefore concluded that the college meets criterion E1.

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

368. The assessment team's view is that the college meets the overarching criterion for indefinite foundation degree awarding powers.
369. The assessment team's view is based on its review of the evidence, which shows in summary that college develops and encourages a self-critical and cohesive academic community. It has clear commitment to the assurance of standards, supported by effective and robust quality systems.
370. This view is based on consideration of the evidence requirements for the DAPs criteria alongside any other relevant information.

Reasoning

371. The assessment team found that self-criticality is demonstrated through the college's monitoring and evaluation arrangements. For example, processes involved in review of academic regulations, policies and procedures, in the team's view, meet the requirements of the DAPs criteria and are appropriate for the college's context. The college takes effective action to assess its own performance through decisions made by the governing body, the HEAB and supporting committees. Employability is central to the college's purpose, mission and vision, and is embedded in course design and curriculum delivery. This demonstrates the college's commitment to making a positive contribution to the community by supporting skills and economic development in consultation with employers and local, regional and national stakeholders. Student feedback is actively elicited, considered and acted upon to improve the content and delivery of courses, contributing to the overall academic experience provided.
372. The assessment team was satisfied that the college is a self-critical, cohesive academic community which was demonstrated through its strategies and academic frameworks which have supported its growth. For example, these have included a clear governance structure and a mature committee structure, a transparent quality assurance review cycle, teaching and learning strategy, staff development and support, external scrutiny and involvement in review and further development, and a student engagement strategy that ensures that students are a core part of the community.
373. The college is committed to a firm assurance of academic standards which protects the reliability of the college's assessment processes. The use of external examiners also demonstrates that standards have been met.
374. The assessment team considers that the effectiveness of the college's quality systems is apparent. This was tested through examining course design, implementation and review

processes. The team also considered how external expertise is utilised and how the college scrutinises its quality systems. The assessment team concluded that quality systems are effective and robust and have been exercised securely during the previous three years.

Conclusions

375. The assessment team therefore concluded that South Devon 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 as supported by effective quality systems.

Annex A: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AEL	accreditation of experiential learning
APL	accreditation to prior learning
CPD	continuous professional development
CQC	Curriculum and Quality Committee
DAPs	degree awarding powers
FdA	Foundation degree in Arts
FdSc	Foundation degree in Science
FHEQ	Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications
HEAB	Higher Education Academic Board
HEQAE	Higher Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement [Plan]
HERA	Higher Education Research Act 2017
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
NSS	National Student Survey
OfS	Office for Students
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for higher education
PSRB	professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAC	[OfS] Quality Assessment Committee
RAG-rated	rating system of red, amber or green
SIRC	Student Innovation and Research Centre
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
UCSD	University Centre South Devon
VLE	virtual learning environment



© The Office for Students copyright 2025

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0 except where it indicates that the copyright for images or text is owned elsewhere.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/