South Chelsea College

Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

March 2012

Key findings about South Chelsea College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in March 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf the Association of Business Executives and the British Computer Society.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of these awarding organisations.

The team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

The team has not identified any areas of good practice.

Recommendations

The team has identified a number of **recommendations** for the enhancement of the higher education provision.

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- complete the implementation of its quality policy (paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2)
- further develop the Annual Report and Action Plan (paragraph 1.4)
- carefully monitor all progression and completion rates (paragraph 1.7)
- provide more programme information on the College website (paragraph 3.4).

The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the provider to:

- further develop the method for the observation of teaching and the dissemination of good practice (paragraph 2.3)
- formalise and develop its staff development policy (paragraph 2.8)
- continue its development of the emerging virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.11)
- include a formal policy for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information in the Quality Handbook (paragraph 3.5).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the Review for Educational Oversight[1] (REO) conducted by QAA at South Chelsea College (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the Association of Business Executives and the British Computer Society. The review was carried out by Mr Siva Kumar Dinavahi, Mr Paul Monroe and Ms Francine Norris (reviewers), and Mr Philip Markey (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included: the self-evaluation, samples of student work, annual monitoring reports, external examiners' reports, and meetings with staff and students.

The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- Academic Infrastructure
- guidance provided by the Association of Business Executives
- guidance provided by the British Computer Society.

Please note that if you are unfamiliar with any of the terms used in this report you can find them in the Glossary.

South Chelsea College was founded in 1985. It moved to its current premises in Brixton in 1989. It caters mainly for students studying business and computing. Apart from its English language programmes, all its provision is at level 4 and above. It recruits students mainly from the African continent, with a smaller proportion from Asia. There are 11 teaching staff supported by administrative and technical staff. There are 525 full-time students on the higher education programmes.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding organisations:

Association of Business Executives
- Certificate/Diploma in Business Management (194)
- Advanced Diploma in Business Management (31)
- Certificate/Diploma in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality (86)

British Computing Society
- Certificate in IT (167)
- Diploma in IT (28)
- Professional Graduate Diploma in IT (19)

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College's responsibilities in relation to its awarding organisations are outlined in the self-evaluation and the responsibilities checklist. The College was asked to provide two revised checklists because the first did not accurately define its responsibilities. For all awards, the College is responsible for learning and teaching, student support, learning resources, and its public information. The awarding organisations provide the curriculum and some resources on their websites. Assessments are set and marked by the awarding organisations.

Recent developments

The most recent significant developments have been the change of ownership and the appointment of a new Principal of the College. The College closed two sites and now all teaching is concentrated in Tunstall Road, Brixton. Its higher education provision is now with two awarding organisations.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. A submission was provided before the visit. Class meetings and student group meetings were used to alert students about the need for a submission. Information was collected from previous student surveys, a questionnaire, and weblogs. The submission was helpful in setting the agenda for the meetings with staff and students. It was written by student representatives and approved by the students generally. The team was able to discuss the submission during its meeting with students.

Detailed findings about South Chelsea College

1   Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1   The College is relatively effective in its management of academic standards. Responsibility for the internal management of academic standards is delegated by the Principal to the Director of Studies. The College has developed a Quality Procedures Handbook that sets out expectations and information for students, including enrolment, induction, attendance, and a student complaints and appeals procedure. The Handbook also includes information regarding teaching quality and staff development. It includes a Policy for the Management of Academic Standards (Policy 4) which defines a range of policies and provides associated forms, including those for programme specifications, student feedback, teaching observation, and staff development. These policies have been recently reviewed by the Director of Studies, although some have not yet been fully implemented, such as teaching observation and staff development. It is advisable that the College completes the implementation of its quality policies.

1.2   Although the procedures are new, there is a clearly defined committee structure for the management of academic standards. The Academic Board, which meets once a year, has responsibility for oversight of the academic provision. Study boards are responsible for overseeing programmes and meet once each term. Issues identified at study boards are carried forward to the Academic Board and then referred to the Senior Management Team and the Principal. The minutes of the meetings need to be fuller and the Academic Board needs to meet more frequently to ensure there is a more rigorous approach to identifying and addressing appropriate actions.

1.3   There is student representation on study boards and Academic Board, which includes opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences. These meetings are successful in engaging students in the quality process and providing them with feedback. Where appropriate, action is taken to address issues, for example support programmes in information technology and writing skills were introduced.

1.4   There is a new reporting process for managing academic standards. The Director of Studies produces reports on aspects of the provision, including teaching quality and examination performance. Currently, this report covers these aspects well, but the report needs to be developed further. For example, there should be an annual monitoring report, which includes all other aspects of the provision, such as learning resources, student support, and staff development. It is advisable that the College further develops the Annual Report and Action Plan.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.5   The College does not engage directly with the Academic Infrastructure, but staff are aware of the elements of it. The Annual Report (2012) states that subject benchmark statements are not always relevant to the awards. However, programmes are aligned with the awarding organisations' specifications. For example, the College is rigorous in its management of assessments. College staff are well informed about these particular external reference points.

How does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?

1.6   The awarding organisations are responsible for setting and marking assessments. Examinations leading to awards are taken externally and the College is not responsible for summative assessment. The College receives reports which identify examination results. Pass rate statistics enable the College to benchmark the performance of their students in relation to national averages.

1.7   For the graduate diploma level pass rates are high. Certificate level pass rates are significantly lower than national averages. Actions to address low pass rates have been identified and are set out in the Director of Studies' report. Some action has been taken to address low progression and completion rates, for example by amending programme delivery. It is advisable that the College carefully monitors all progression and completion rates.

> The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding organisations.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1   The management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities follows a process described in paragraphs 1.1 to.1.4. A new management has taken over the College and the roles and responsibilities for the managing and enhancement of learning opportunities are clearly defined in the management structure. There is a strategic plan in place that identifies current needs and plans for enhancement of learning opportunities.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

2.2   The College's use of external reference points is described in paragraph 1.5. The College refers to the comprehensive guidelines from the British Computer Society and the Association of Business Executives Accreditation Handbook. The provider effectively uses the external reference points for the management and enhancement of learning opportunities.

How does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.3   The College has an emerging process for assuring itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced. The Quality Procedure Handbook sets out the College's processes in relation to teaching quality. Teaching observation is undertaken by the Director of Studies. It focuses predominantly on issues of classroom management. Formal feedback to staff is provided by the Director. However, there are no mechanisms for the sharing of good practice. It is desirable that the College further develops the method for the observation of teaching and the dissemination of good practice.

2.4   Students expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching, including the learning materials provided, the challenging class sessions and the use of formative assessments.

Formal feedback is obtained from the students after the end of each semester and the inputs are monitored and evaluated by the study boards.

How does the provider assure itself that students are supported effectively?

2.5   Students are well supported by the College at every stage of their studies. They are given adequate support for making an informed decision in choosing their programmes and joining the College. They appreciate the induction they receive on joining the College. The students are provided with information on living in the UK. They are provided with programme information through handbooks. Students feel that they can raise matters with staff, an opportunity which is strengthened by the open-door policy. The College administrative office staff are especially supportive in dealing with enquiries. Staff, mainly the Director of Studies, are readily available for students.

2.6   Students are provided with additional class sessions, for example in academic English, information technology and statistical skills to support their assignments. Regular sessions in formative assessments prepare students for external summative assessments. The Director of Studies, supported by the study boards, monitors the progress of students. The College monitors the quality of student support through the study boards.

What are the provider's arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

2.7   The College has identified a lack of staff expertise in teaching at higher education level, resulting from a change in the focus of the provision from level 3 to level 4 equivalent. Both awarding organisations specify that staff should be appropriately qualified and oversee this by means of the annual reaccreditation application. Teaching staff are not, however, routinely required to have teaching qualifications. The College has a staff development policy that covers induction, the requirements of examining bodies, and developments in teaching and learning.

2.8   The current processes for staff development are being developed. The Director of Studies plays a key role in appraising staff performance and provides formal feedback. Staff are encouraged to update themselves through user access to the websites of awarding organisations, and participate in seminars and learning activities organised by the awarding organisations. There is no indication that staff take part in these. It is desirable that the College formalises and develops its staff development policy.

How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

2.9   The College is aware of problems with learning resources imposed by the limitations of its premises. In particular, it does not provide library resources for students and there are limited study spaces. It does ensure that students are aware of alternative sources, including membership of public libraries. It also has arrangements with local university libraries to ensure that the students have accessible and sufficient resources. Teaching staff provide additional references and learning materials. Students are satisfied with these arrangements.

2.10   The College encourages the students to access the websites of the awarding organisations. These provide students with relevant learning materials, past examination papers and updates related to their subject areas. Students can also access a wide range of

electronic learning resources, such as e-books, which they can download as members of the organisations.

2.11   There are sufficient computers and specialist software to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes. A web-based virtual learning environment has been introduced in response to student requests and is currently undergoing further development. It can be accessed from the website and contains student handbooks, class assignments, previous examination papers, lecture guides, reading lists, and study manuals. There is a College newsletter and links to established social networking sites. The College has recently started to develop its virtual learning environment. This has immense potential for student learning and the College is committed to developing it. It is recommended as desirable that the College continues its development of the emerging virtual learning environment.

> The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

3   Public information

How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?

3.1   The College effectively communicates to students and other stakeholders about its higher education provision. The College relies heavily upon its website to communicate public information. No hard copies of the material available on the website are currently available to potential students, current students, staff, employers or other stakeholders. The prospectus and the information leaflets have not been updated for the current academic year. The College states that this is due to the rate at which government regulations concerning overseas students are currently changing and the probable consequence that the information would be out of date before it was printed. The website is attractive, comprehensive and effective, with internal text links and external links to the Association of Business Executives and British Computer Society websites. There is a user-friendly online application form.

3.2   The information provided on the website is available in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese. However, it is made clear that tuition and assessment will be in English. The website clearly identifies the level of English required by the UK Border Agency for entry to Tier 4 programmes, as being equivalent to level B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference. It also provides a link to the list of approved English language tests.

3.3   The College produces advertising leaflets relating to in-country recruiting events in Nigeria, which is the main area for student recruitment. Current students consider these events were helpful in informing their decisions. The recruiting events are advertised in the Nigerian media, but not in other countries nor on the Internet.

3.4   Information from the awarding organisations is available. But there is no college-specific information. There are no programme specifications or equivalent sources of information on the website or in programme handbooks. The provision of these would provide students with more definitive and comprehensive knowledge of the College's provision, including learning and teaching, resources, assessment, and support. It is advisable that the College provides more programme information on the website.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.5   The College's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information are informal, but effective. The awarding organisations delegate responsibilities to the College for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of information. The College has made its own internal arrangements for achieving this. This generally involves the Director of Studies, Senior Registrar or Principal checking all public information, with the Principal being responsible for signing off all public documents. Given that the public information is restricted to the information found on the website, this is a relatively simple procedure, which is conducted effectively. It is desirable that the College includes a formal policy for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information in the Quality Handbook.

3.6   The College prospectus is clear about information about the College. The Principal reviews the prospectus at least twice a year and after any major change in provision, legislation or guidance. Amendments and corrections are made internally, by the computing staff of the College, after liaison with the Principal.

3.7   Information on fees is clear. The fee structure is decided upon by the College Principal and the owners of the College, based upon commercial business considerations. The fees are published on the website and modified, if necessary, each year.

3.8   Students are not directly involved in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of public information, but their opinions are sought at induction and through study boards. The available student feedback does not indicate any discrepancies between the information published on the website and the student experience. The information contained on the website, including the prospectus and other materials published by the College, is accurate, according to the students, and reflects the current situation regarding their experiences of programmes.

3.9   A College intranet was developed two years ago and all students are given access. The intranet contains study guides, reading lists, course dates, and timetables. The students state that this did improve the exchange of information, the availability of materials and the management of learning and assignments. However, the intranet was underused by the students because it was not web-based. The students stated that they would like to see further developments in access to web portals and a news section to keep abreast of developments within the College.

The team concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Action plan[3]

South Chelsea College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight March 2012						
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:						
• complete the implementation of its quality policy (paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2)	The quality policy is being implemented with the cycle of term study boards followed by academic boards held at the end of each term (an increase from one per year) Full minutes will be taken Regular teacher observations and staff development opportunities are being implemented	23 June 2012	Director of Studies	Completion of study boards and academic boards held in accordance with the stated cycle and the production of comprehensive minutes	Quality Assurance Committee composed of senior management and chaired by the Principal	Study boards and academic boards' reports will be reviewed by the Quality Assurance Committee to ensure they meet QAA and external examining organisation standards and internal College policies
• further develop the Annual Report and Action Plan (paragraph 1.4)	The Annual Report will be developed to include: teaching quality, examination performance, learning resources, student support and staff	29 June 2012	Director of Studies	Completion of report by stated date	Appropriate academic board and senior management committee both chaired by the Principal	Identification of strengths and weaknesses in those areas of the report indicated and remedial action authorised

[3] The provider has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the provider's awarding organisations.

	development					by Principal and senior management committee
• carefully monitor all progression and completion rates (paragraph 1.7)	Progression and completion rates will be monitored at the end of each examination period (normally twice per year) in order to identify trends The College will expand and intensify the support mechanisms already in place (remedial English, numeracy courses)	June 2012 August 2012 December 2012 February 2013	Director of Studies	Inclusion in study board and academic board deliberations at indicated dates and to form part of the Annual Report	Appropriate academic board chaired by the Principal	Formulation of action plan to take remedial action where this is indicated and raising the levels of progression and completion
• provide more programme information on the College website (paragraph 3.4).	The College has taken action in order to increase the range of academic material and student support information on its website Programme information has been expanded both on the public website and on the virtual learning environment together with additional	1 March 2012 and ongoing	Appropriate members of senior management with responsibility for teaching and learning, student support and general administration, that is Director of Studies, Registrar,	Ongoing expansion of information available on the website in order to meet the needs of current students, prospective students and other stakeholders in relation to programme information and	Principal	Provision of evolving and expanding programme and support information on the College website

	supporting information		Director of Student Services	associated financial, administrative and support material		
Desirable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the provider to:						
• further develop the method for the observation of teaching and the dissemination of good practice (paragraph 2.3)	Observation of teaching will take place once per term for existing academic staff and twice per term for new staff in their first term The dissemination of good practice will form part of the deliberations of each study board	8 June 2012	Director of Studies in coordination with Principal	Discussion as a discrete agenda item by the study board and agreement on the adoption of good practice processes	Academic Board chaired by Principal for authorisation	Adoption of good practice processes by academic staff reviewed at succeeding Academic Board
• formalise and develop its staff development policy (paragraph 2.8)	The staff development policy is being formalised to include wider participation by academic staff in the seminars and activities operated by the examining organisations	July 2012	Director of Studies in coordination with Principal	Completion of redrafted staff development policy and increasing attendance of academic staff at examining organisations' events	Principal	Academic Board review of staff development policy and increasing involvement of academic staff with external examining organisations' events
• continue its	The virtual learning	12 March	Principal,	Addition of	Principal	Academic Board

development of the emerging virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.11)	environment is being developed to include a widening range of teaching and learning materials, appropriate student and staff support information, and guidance	2012 and ongoing	Director of Studies	increased teaching and learning and support information available to students and staff		and Senior Management Committee review to ensure that increasing appropriate information is available to staff and students through the virtual learning environment
• include a formal policy for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information in the Quality Handbook (paragraph 3.5).	Produce policy for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information for inclusion in the Quality Handbook	29 May 2012 25 September 2012 24 January 2013	Principal, Director of Studies	Inclusion of policy for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information in the Quality Handbook	Principal	Test information on student groups and external examining organisations Revise public information where necessary

About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the
Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook[4]

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education
community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses
meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a
suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference
points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark
statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway
(2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher
Education.

academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, institutions
manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

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

awarding body A body with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the
framework for higher education qualifications, such as diplomas or degrees.

awarding organisation An organisation with the authority to award academic qualifications
located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (these
qualifications are at levels 1 to 8, with levels 4 and above being classed as 'higher
education').

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards
in higher education*, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for
higher education institutions.

designated body An organisation that has been formally appointed to perform a particular
function.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements
respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

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

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

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education
qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies
a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected
of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education
providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks:

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

highly trusted sponsor An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

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

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

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

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

provider An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

public information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

quality See **academic quality**.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

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

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