



The Central College of London

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

April 2012

Key findings about the Central College of London

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in April 2012 the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **no confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the Association of Business Executives (ABE), the Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality (CTH), the Institute of Administrative Management (IAM), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Association of Computer Professionals (ACP).

The team also considers that there can be **limited 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 cannot** 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 identified the following **good practice**:

- the excellent induction and pastoral support for students (paragraph 2.9)
- the very detailed information to support potential international students, including information about living and studying in London (paragraph 3.2).

Recommendations

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

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

- fully implement the management structures, policies and procedures to secure the academic standards and quality of opportunities of its programmes (paragraphs 1.2 and 2.1)
- develop and implement a clearly defined and documented process for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraph 3.6).

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

- review its current committee structure below the Academic Board to create a system that is more appropriate and manageable for the existing staffing model (paragraph 1.3)
- keep a clear audit trail of evidence of accreditation visits and any resulting action plans; and build this within an annual quality improvement cycle (paragraph 1.4)
- fully implement all aspects of the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy (paragraph 2.4)
- fully implement the stated policies in respect of the observation of teaching consistently and ensure that the lessons emerging are used in staff development activities and appraisal as well as feeding into the quality improvement process (paragraph 2.5)
- present all staff roles in an appropriate, accurate and transparent manner within all forms of public information (paragraph 3.7).

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

- implement an appropriate internal verification policy to ensure that all courses carry out a minimum level of internal verification (paragraph 1.7)
- contextualise the curriculum information provided by the awarding body within the College's own learning and teaching documents (paragraph 3.4).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at The Central College of London (the provider). 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 (ABE), the Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality (CTH), the Institute of Administrative Management (IAM), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Association of Computer Professionals (ACP). The review was carried out by Mr Andrew Bates, Professor David Eastwood, and Mrs Viki Faulkner (reviewers) and Mr Alan Nisbett (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 documentation supplied by the provider, meetings with staff, students, employers, reports of reviews by QAA and Ofsted reports.

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

- The Academic Infrastructure
- Professional Institutions' Curricular Frameworks and Regulations.

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

The Central College of London (the College) is a general higher education college serving the needs of students coming from many different parts of the world. Currently, students are from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nigeria and from some European countries. The College was established in 2002 with very small premises in Brick Lane, London E1. Due to the increase of the demand for UK qualifications among students from overseas, the College expanded its capacity by hiring a new campus located in Adler Street, London E1. In 2010, the College moved to a larger campus in the East End of London, where it is currently located.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding organisations (student numbers in brackets):

Association of Business Executives (ABE)

- Postgraduate Diploma in Business Management (4)
- Graduate Diploma in Business Management (7)
- Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management (3)

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

- Certified Accounting Technician (4)

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

Association of Computer Professionals (ACP)

- Diploma in Information Systems, Analysis and Design (5)

The Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality (CTH)

- Diploma in Tourism Management (3)
- Advanced Diploma in Tourism Management (9)

Institute of Administrative Management (IAM)

- Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management (31)

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College is responsible for the recruitment and admission of students, programme delivery, formative assessment and internal moderation, the quality of teaching and learning, the provision of appropriate staffing and physical resources, application of the awarding institutions' standards and preparation of students for the summative examinations of these institutions, regular internal monitoring of quality and compliance with awarding body requirements for annual evaluation and review.

Recent developments

In 2002 the College started with 36 students. There were 445 students studying on different courses in the College during the 2010-11 session but, because of the revocation of the College's licence by the UKBA, the number of students dropped to around 190 at the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year and to around 66 students at the time of the review visit.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. However, due to the reduction in student numbers as a result of the withdrawal of the College's UKBA licence, the production of a submission was not possible. The team met with a group of remaining students and their contribution was very valuable.

Detailed findings about The Central College of London

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The College is not currently fulfilling its responsibilities for the management of standards effectively. In practice, quality assurance is managed to comply with the requirements of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the awarding organisations and not through a robust quality assurance cycle linked to academic standards. The self-evaluation describes an aspirational structure for the overall management of higher education which is not yet operational. For example, course monitoring reports should feed through to the Academic Board, chaired by the Director of Studies who should hold ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality of higher education within the College. However, the Director of Studies stated that he had never played a formal part in the development of higher education in the College, nor had he ever exercised any responsibility for the quality assurance of higher education. Course coordinators are able to describe the system they should be undertaking in the creation of course monitoring reports at the end of each semester. However, the College was unable to provide any examples of completed course monitoring reports. There was also no reliable evidence that any meetings of the Academic Board or related quality committees had taken place and the Director of Studies confirmed that he had not yet chaired an Academic Board - despite claims that it had been in place since 2010.

1.2 Most of the committees referred to in the self-evaluation are not yet operational and most of the policies cited are not being implemented or monitored. For example, the Teaching and Learning Strategy states that students have an entitlement to 'full and clear feedback on assessments/assignments with written guidance on how the student can improve'. Yet marked work from the IAM courses at levels 4, 5 and 6 showed only a percentage grade with no written feedback offered to the students. The Quality Assurance Policy describes a process for auditing course documentation and documentation relating to meetings, and the Assessment Policy states that Assessors must maintain accurate and up-to-date records of assessment and contribute to standardisation arrangements. However, the College was not able to provide any evidence of these activities taking place. It is essential that the College fully implements the policies and procedures that it has formulated to secure the academic standards of its programmes and that the Academic Board is properly established as a matter of urgency with full, accurate and reliable records kept to record its activities.

1.3 The College has planned a comprehensive system of committees to oversee the management of academic standards. In practice, due to the small scale of the College staff base, most of these committees replicate membership and on the evidence of the documentation supplied in support of the self-evaluation, the relationships between them lack clarity. The College is starting to formalise processes and procedures that have previously happened only informally but current systems are not operating effectively. It is advisable that the College reviews its current committee structure below the Academic Board to create a system that is more appropriate and manageable for the existing staffing model.

1.4 Current agreements are in place between the College and each of its awarding organisations, which are clearly displayed and regularly updated in a timely fashion. Awarding organisation agreements recognise the College as an accredited teaching centre for each of the courses delivered at the time of the visit. Additionally, the College is an authorised examination centre for the ACCA awards. Documentation from awarding

organisations states that there will be annual monitoring visits and staff confirm that these do take place. However, at the time of the visit the College was not able to produce any evidence of these visits having taken place, or of any recommendations or commendations that had been noted as a result of such monitoring visits. It is advisable that the College keeps a clear audit trail of evidence for these visits and any resulting action plans; and that this is built within an annual quality improvement cycle.

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

1.5 The College has begun to use external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, in its management of academic standards, though not yet in a completely effective or comprehensive way. The College demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the Academic Infrastructure. The College is responsible for providing tuition for the named awards and is not responsible for producing summative assessments or the design of new curricula. Learning outcomes and programme specifications are the responsibility of the individual awarding organisations and the College uses these to inform their teaching and ensure that students are studying at appropriate levels.

1.6 The College is responsible for student recruitment and has clear systems in place for the allocation of students to appropriate course levels. Recruitment policies are informed by the requirements of the awarding organisations and the UKBA.

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

1.7 The College does not currently conduct summative assessments, and therefore does not currently need to use moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards. The College currently has no courses for which it receives external examiner reports. It judges success on students passing the awarding organisation's final exams. The College has, however, a comprehensive internal verification policy which was created in response to a requirement of approval provided by the Association of Business Practitioners (ABP). Although advertised, no ABP courses recruited and the policy has not been implemented, nor has it been extended to cover other courses offered. Internal verification is variable and not formalised. Staff teaching on tourism and hospitality and some business and management courses were able to give examples of 'double checking' the work set and marked by less experienced colleagues. However, no formal records of these activities are kept. On other courses there is no evidence of internal verification being applied. It is desirable that the College implements an appropriate internal verification policy to ensure that all courses carry out a minimum level of internal verification and that an audit trail of this activity is maintained and reported to the Quality Assurance Committee and Academic Board.

The review team has **no 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 College is not currently fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities effectively. The College has accreditation agreements

with eight awarding organisations, though at the time of the review visit only five were functioning. Compliance with the awarding organisations should be assured by the College Academic Board, which should be chaired by the Director of Studies. The Board should validate key documents and annual reporting and monitoring. However, as noted in paragraph 1.1, the review team found no reliable evidence of the Academic Board having met, and Board minutes provided were fabricated specifically for the review. It is essential that the College fully implements the policies and procedures that it has formulated to secure the quality of learning opportunities for all students.

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

2.2 As noted in paragraph 1.5, the College is beginning to use external reference points in its 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 is not currently able to assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced. The College has a comprehensive Quality Assurance Policy which covers all major aspects of quality assuring teaching and learning opportunities. However, there is minimal documentary evidence of this policy being effectively applied in practice.

2.4 The College has a Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy which feeds upwards into a College Strategic Action Plan, in which the College's effectiveness is judged primarily by student performance indicators. However, there is no documentary evidence that this Strategy is applied in practice, nor of an action plan being produced. It is advisable that the College fully implement all aspects of the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy.

2.5 The College has a peer observation of teaching system for all higher education teaching staff, which should identify good practice, inform College policy and staff development needs. Course coordinators stated that observation of teaching does take place at an informal level, but there was no formal evidence that such observations are used to inform either College policy or staff development needs. It is advisable that the College fully implements the stated policies in respect of the observation of teaching consistently and ensures that the lessons emerging are used in staff development activities and appraisal as well as feeding into the quality improvement process.

2.6 Student feedback surveys are used to inform an annual staff appraisal procedure. However, the extent to which this procedure leads to actions in practice could not be verified by any documentary evidence.

2.7 Students have been leaving the College in response to the UKBA's decision to revoke the College licence. The minutes of the Administrative Committee Meeting confirm that this is impacting on day-to-day operations. The rapid decrease in student numbers is making it difficult for the College to retain staff and, at the time of the visit, it was unclear if the College would be able to restart teaching at the beginning of the next semester.

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

2.8 The College is able to assure itself that students are supported effectively. Student support is split between academic administration and general administration, with the general administrative support covering areas such as help with accommodation, careers, CVs and interviews advice.

2.9 The College provides enrolment and induction support. A student induction week involves time spent with a relevant programme coordinator, together with the provision of an induction pack which includes comprehensive course and module handbooks detailing, for example, course structures, timetables, assessments, email login and study skills. Students were appreciative of, and complementary about, this induction support. In general, students were very complementary about both the academic and the pastoral support which they receive. They commented on the availability, the flexibility and the helpfulness of the teaching staff, which was strongly appreciated and is a feature of good practice.

2.10 A personal tutor system provides for academic and pastoral support. Course coordinators confirmed that all tutorial responsibilities, including pastoral support, reside with them. In addition to the guaranteed 15 hours per week of classroom provision - the Higher Education Guaranteed Tutorial Entitlement - tutorial assistance is also provided on request. Students confirmed that these requests are both met and appreciated.

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

2.11 The College has a Staff Development Policy, which prescribes staff development as compulsory for all higher education staff, and in which the Director of Studies is responsible for the annual appraisal and review of staff performance. Additional staff development training may be provided 'as necessary' by the awarding organisations. However, consistent operation of this Policy is unclear and there was little documentary evidence of any staff development outcomes being actioned effectively, either by the Director of Studies or by anyone else in the College.

2.12 The review team found no evidence of any College support for staff development through, for example, remuneration of staff time, or financial contributions to up-skilling scholarly activities. The College has a standard policy for the induction of new staff, including mentoring and observation on a semester basis by an appropriate course coordinator. However, in practice, the operation of this policy remains informal, and no documentary evidence supporting was seen.

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

2.13 The College ensures that learning resources are accessible and sufficient to enable students to achieve learning outcomes. The College's learning resources meet the awarding organisations' expectations for delivery. Resourcing is based on the College Strategic Plan, which, in turn, is informed annually in terms of necessary resourcing by the Director of Studies and the course coordinators. However, annual resourcing reports could not be made available to the review team and it would be desirable for such reports to be properly compiled as part of the course monitoring process and quality assurance cycle.

2.14 Students expressed relatively minor complaints about the College's library provisions. However, they were also keen to point out that other institutional libraries, such as the British Library, were available to them, as were additional resources through the awarding organisations and the internet. The students were also keen to highlight the helpfulness of the teaching staff in assisting them to access any necessary additional resources.

The review team has **limited 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 is mostly effective in its communication of public information to its stakeholders but there is scope for further improvement. The College website is the primary means by which key information is provided about the College, including the courses it offers, fees, the application process and key policies. Information about individual courses is reproduced from the public information provided by the awarding organisations and links to the awarding organisations' websites are provided for prospective students to obtain more detailed information. The College prospectus is available to download from the website and reproduces much of the key information that is on the website. Students met during the review visit expressed general satisfaction with the amount and quality of information given to them.

3.2 The College provides detailed information to support potential international students, including information on how to apply for a visa and a range of cultural and economic information about living and studying in London. This is good practice.

3.3 The College does not have a virtual learning environment or intranet to support student learning. However, individual tutors make additional learning materials available through email and/or an electronic drop-box facility. Email is the primary form of communication between the College and students. Handbooks are made available to student in hard copy and by email. The Student Handbook provides comprehensive information about studying at the College and includes key policies and procedures, including the College's obligations to report non-attending international students to the UKBA.

3.4 Students are provided with a Course Handbook which replicates information provided by the awarding organisations. The examples seen by reviewers did place this information within the context of the College's learning and teaching environment. It is **desirable** for the College to enhance the value of the course handbooks by contextualising the curriculum information provided by the awarding organisation by appropriate referencing to the College's learning and teaching environment.

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

3.5 The College does not have a clearly defined process for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has the responsibility for publishing. The Prospectus is developed by a number of key stakeholders. The Principal approves all promotional materials for publication but this process is not documented. Course coordinators are responsible for providing information about individual courses; however, reviewers could find no evidence that an annual audit takes place to ensure the accuracy of the information. The College's Marketing Committee, which has responsibility for overseeing the production of all publicity materials, does not meet formally and there were no minutes available.

3.6 Inaccurate, conflicting and misleading information regarding the International English Language Testing System scores required for entry to higher education programmes was found in published information on the website and in documentation made available to students. Although some of the inaccuracies were corrected during the visit, it was clear that there had been insufficient checking of this information prior to its publication. It is essential that the College develops and implements a clearly defined and documented process for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of information that it has the responsibility for producing.

3.7 Public information provided about the role of a senior member of staff is presented in a misleading way. The introductory welcome from the Director of Studies in the prospectus and on the College website, claims that this is a major role in the management of higher education in the College. However, up until the time of the review visit the Director of Studies had played no formal senior role in the management of higher education at the College. Given the stated importance of this role in the management of academic standards, the misinformation that is in the public domain is of some concern. It is advisable that all staff roles are described and presented in accurate manner.

The team concludes that **reliance cannot 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

The provider was required to develop an action plan to follow up on good practice and address recommendations arising from the review. However, an action plan was not submitted to QAA and the report is therefore published without one.

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](#)³

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 one to eight, with levels four 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:

³ 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 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.

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