



Appeal to Review for Educational Oversight

Midlands International College, August 2012

Introduction

Midlands International College (the College) underwent a Review for Educational Oversight in March 2012. The Review resulted in the following judgements:

- **limited confidence** in how the College manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the award it offers on behalf of the Chartered Management Institute
- **confidence** in how the College manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers
- **reliance cannot** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

The College was advised that it could appeal the judgements of no confidence and no reliance.

Under QAA's appeal procedure, the provider is required to set out in its appeal the ways in which it considers the review to be flawed on the following grounds.

- **Procedure:** That the review team failed to carry out agreed procedures, or exceeded its powers, in such a way that the legitimacy of the decisions reached are called into question.
- **Perversity:** That the review team's conclusions were unreasonable or disproportionate in the light of the available evidence. This may be due to irrelevant matters being taken into account or relevant matters not being taken into account.
- **New material:** There is material that was in existence at the time the review team made its decision which, had it been made available before the review had been completed, would have influenced the judgements of the team, and in relation to which, there is good reason for it not having been provided to the review team.

The College submitted an appeal in June 2012.

Under the QAA appeals process, the appeal was referred to an Independent Reviewer. The Independent Reviewer may reject an appeal only where he/she decides there is no realistic prospect of the appeal being upheld. In all other cases, the Independent Reviewer will refer the appeal to an Appeals Panel.

The decision

The Independent Reviewer concluded that there is no realistic prospect of the appeal being upheld in relation to the review team's judgement of **limited confidence** in the College's management of academic standards for which it is responsible. As such, the appeal was not referred to an Appeal Panel for further consideration with respect to this aspect of the appeal.

In relation to the review team's judgement that **reliance cannot** be placed on the

accuracy and/or completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers, the Independent Reviewer referred this aspect of the appeal to an Appeal Panel for further consideration.

Reasons for rejecting the appeal against the limited confidence judgement

The Independent Reviewer considered the review team's recommendation that it is essential that 'the College ensures that staff receive appropriate training and guidance to enable them to effectively identify and address instances of plagiarism' (paragraph 1.9 of the review team's report) which formed the basis of the review team coming to a limited confidence judgement with respect to the College's management of academic standards. The Independent Reviewer noted that the review team considered a sample of assessed work, where first marking and internal verification had taken place and written feedback had been provided to the students. The review team had identified evidence of extensive unacknowledged copying by students of easily identifiable internet sources, which had not been identified in the first markers' comments, reflected in suggested grades, or identified by the internal verifier.

The Independent Reviewer noted that the provider had stated in its appeal that 'these assessments were submitted by students under a short notice request and well within the final date for submission of coursework'. The Independent Reviewer considered that by marking and internally verifying the submissions, and arriving at a summative grade that was included on the feedback to students (and through not identifying the work a draft and the feedback and grades as 'formative'), the review team had fairly identified the work as finished submissions. Furthermore, on the scripts, in written feedback, or through other means made available to students and the review team, the provider should have identified these cases of plagiarism and dealt with these according to their published policy. In the view of the Independent Reviewer, irrespective of the status of the samples of work submitted to the team at the time of the review, plagiarism should have been noted by the provider and actions taken, or at least identified as to be taken after the review, and this made clear to the review team.

The Independent Reviewer noted that in its appeal the provider cited examples of reviews undertaken at other providers where allegedly similar issues had been identified by review teams, but different judgements reached. The Independent Reviewer considered that the full context of the other reports was not available to the provider or himself, and only the context of the report in question could be scrutinised. Furthermore, review reports are written by different individuals with different styles of expression, making direct comparisons between reports difficult. In the view of the Independent Reviewer, the evidence regarding plagiarism and the provider's ineffective approach, as identified by the review team, was significant and of itself reasonably and proportionately led to the conclusion reached by the review team. Therefore, the Independent Reviewer considered that there was nothing in the material in the appeal to suggest that the review team's conclusions were unreasonable or disproportionate, and hence concluded that there was no realistic prospect of the appeal being upheld by an Appeal Panel.

Reasons for rejecting the no reliance judgement

Following the Independent Reviewer's decision to refer the 'no reliance' judgement to an Appeal Panel for consideration, the Appeal Panel decided that the review team's judgement that **reliance cannot** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes

it delivers be confirmed. As such, the provider's appeal against this judgement was rejected by the Appeal Panel.

The Appeal Panel considered all the documentation relevant to the appeal, including:

- the self-evaluation
- the finalised review team report
- the appeal from the provider
- responses from the review team on the appeal
- responses from the provider to the review team's response.

The Appeal Panel concluded from the documentation that the review team applied the review methodology appropriately and that judgements were made in line with the guidance contained in the method handbook and after careful consideration of the evidence.

The Appeal Panel noted that the provider claimed in its appeal that the accuracy of documents was not seriously questioned by the review team. The Panel concluded that this was not the case. It is clear from the report and the reviewer's comments on the provider's appeal that, at the time of the review, there were multiple and differing versions of some documents which were publicly available on the provider's website, raising issues of accuracy and version control. The Appeal Panel noted that public information is widely defined in Annex F of the Handbook for the Review for Educational Oversight. The report singled out two examples (the Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy, and Appeals and Complaints) where students, teaching staff, and other users could be confused by the guidance on offer at the time of the visit. The Appeal Panel agreed with the conclusions of the review team on this matter. The Appeal Panel also noted the close connection between the judgement of the review team that reliance could not be placed on the accuracy and completeness of information, and the limited confidence judgement in how the provider manages its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers. The Appeal Panel felt that it was this linkage which placed significant weight on the issue of the accuracy and completeness of information, and which justified a 'no reliance' judgement as a proportionate conclusion.

Although the purpose of the appeal was to review the judgements reached by the review team, the Appeal Panel noted that the provider, in its letter of 23 July 2012, had stated that it accepted the criticisms of the review team, and that the substantive judgements were not an issue. The provider highlighted apparent inconsistencies with other published reports, but the Appeal Panel considered that the review team's conclusions were evidence-based and sound as required by the review methodology. Therefore, the Appeal Panel concluded there was no evidence of perversity, as defined in the appeal procedure.