Severn Business College

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

November 2012

Key findings about Severn Business College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in November 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 London Centre of Marketing (LCM) and the Association of Business Practitioners (ABP).

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 can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the courses it delivers.

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:

- clarify the award and level of study that each student is registered on (paragraph 1.2)
- review its course planning processes at strategic and operational level (paragraph 1.3)
- ensure that students who were transferred from NCFE to LCM are able to complete their award (paragraph 1.4)
- review and develop its policies and procedures relating to annual monitoring to ensure they are effective and operationally fit for purpose (paragraph 1.6)
- implement action points specified by the awarding organisations within the specified deadline (paragraph 1.8)
- deliver appropriate and developmental examination preparation (paragraph 2.8).

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

- align its policies and procedures with the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 1.9)
- further develop the policy on internal verification to reflect the awarding organisations' requirements and promote transparency (paragraph 1.10)
- develop comprehensive course handbooks to detail how all the course units are to be delivered and assessed and the award achieved (paragraph 2.1)
- develop a policy on the regular peer observation of tutors by appropriately trained staff (paragraph 2.3)
- develop processes to enhance learning opportunities, for example, by utilising the results of annual monitoring, student surveys and other feedback (paragraph 2.4)
- review and improve academic induction for new students (paragraph 2.6)
- review and improve its use of candidate learning plans, in particular its approach to target setting and action monitoring (paragraph 2.7)
- develop a robust approach to staff development that includes staff appraisals (paragraph 2.9).

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

- develop formal mechanisms to provide student support (paragraph 2.5)
- further develop the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.11)
- develop a policy on the publication and review of its public information including input from students (paragraph 3.4)
- review claims made on its website so that they are properly contextualised (paragraph 3.5).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at Severn Business 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 courses of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the London Centre of Marketing (LCM), and the Association of Business Practitioners (ABP). The review was carried out by Mrs Heather Miller and Mr Brian Sullivan (reviewers) and Mr Alan Soutter (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 a range of documentation supplied by the provider and its awarding organisations and meetings with staff and students.

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

- syllabuses of the awarding organisations
- Academic Infrastructure
- Qualifications and Credit Framework

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

The College was established in 2009 and was initially located in premises in Romford Road, Stratford, London. In early 2012, due to the expiry of the lease on the Romford Road premises, the College relocated to 806 High Road, Leyton. The College comprises a number of rooms in a shared building and includes teaching rooms, an administrative office, an IT room with 14 workstations and a small library. Since its inception, the College has constantly changed its portfolio of courses in each year of operation. Its first intake was in May 2010 offering courses awarded by the Institute of Commercial Management (ICM), NCFE and the Association of Business Practitioners (ABP). By 2011, the College ceased offering courses awarded by ICM due to poor student achievement (no students had achieved an award on the Level 5 Diploma in Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations only three out of an intake of 13 achieved the Level 6 award in Project Management). In 2012, the NCFE suspended the accreditation of its courses offered by the College until it was satisfied that the courses were fit for purpose and NCFE was satisfied that everything was in place to properly assess the candidates (see paragraph 1.3). As a result, the College ceased its relationship with NCFE and transferred the students to courses awarded by the London Centre of Marketing (LCM).

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

London Centre of Marketing

- Diploma in Business Management & Marketing (Level 5)
- Diploma in Business Management & Marketing (Level 6)
- Diploma in Business Management & Marketing (Integrated) Level 6

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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.

Association of Business Practitioners

- Extended Diploma in Marketing Management

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College's responsibilities are set out in agreements with the awarding organisations. For the Association of Business Practitioners, the College is responsible for setting and first marking of assignments and the provision of feedback, student recruitment and quality assurance matters. For the London Centre of Marketing, the awarding organisation retains the responsibilities for curriculum development, setting and marking assignments. The College is responsible for matters including student recruitment, admissions, annual monitoring, progression, staff development and resources.

Recent developments

The College intends to increase recruitment from home and European Union (HEU) students. Although not part of the review, the College has recently ceased the teaching of English courses. Therefore, no courses will be offered in future with pre-sessional English. The College is intending to seek approval from Edexcel to award its courses.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education courses at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. A student submission comprising a series of responses to a questionnaire issued by the College was submitted and a number of students met the review team and engaged in useful discussion.

Detailed findings about Severn Business College

1   Academic standards

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

1.1   The formal structure for the management of academic standards is underdeveloped. The Principal and Registrar jointly share responsibility for academic standards with interchangeable roles in many areas as is common within a small organisation. The Principal and Registrar form the Management Board which is responsible for the overall management of the College. There is no underlying formal committee structure. There are frequent meetings of the Management Board but the minutes are brief and lack accountability for the formal oversight of academic standards.

1.2   The student record system does not effectively support the management of academic standards. The College Information Management System (CIMS) currently cannot generate management reports. Basic management information including accurate student enrolment against courses, cohort size, and pass rates cannot be supplied in a clear reliable format. The College relies on manual registers which contain a wide range of data at individual student level. However, no coherent systematic method of data analysis at course or College level exists. For example, two students were on the current list of students despite one not attending from May 2012 and one student having been refused a visa. Originally, the students were recorded as being registered on the Level 6 Diploma in Business Management & Marketing (Integrated). Later, this was changed for most of the students to the Level 6 Diploma in Business Management & Marketing. It is essential that the College clarifies the award and level of study that each student is registered on.

1.3   The planning of courses is short-term. The portfolio has constantly changed since the College commenced in 2009 with a range of different awards from four awarding organisations being offered. Course plans lack detail and clarity for the progression of students to achieve an award.There are no curriculum plans for the delivery of a complete award. Decisions on the sequence of units are made for the following semester rather than for the duration of the award. There is no detailed planning at cohort or individual student basis to ensure that an award can be achieved within the timescale. It is essential that the College reviews its course planning processes at strategic and operational level.

1.4   The arrangements for the transfer of a group of students from one awarding organisation (NCFE) to another (LCM) mid-course was not properly managed. NCFE suspended the College's customised courses and as a result the College decided to transfer all registered students to LCM courses. There was no evidence of detailed planning by the management for the transfer of the students to the LCM qualification. It is unclear which LCM award the transferred students will achieve in the time available. The College intends to offer additional free study to students beyond their registration period where visa requirements allow. It is essential that the College ensures that students transferred from NCFE to LCM are able to complete their award.

1.5   The self-evaluation monitoring processes used by the College are informal and vague. The College states that monitoring is a primary quality assurance process and that courses and services are reviewed annually. The process of managing annual reviews, quality indicators or method of collecting information is not detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook. An annual monitoring report template for courses has been created but it has not been systematically implemented. The process is owned by management and the contribution of staff and students is limited. Review of data is incomplete with no meaningful

analysis of student or course performance. The team saw no evidence of any completed course reviews, action plans or monitoring of issues at course level.

1.6   The formal recording of issues relating to the management of academic standards is limited. An annual meeting is held by the Management Board to review all courses and services. The minutes of these meetings address areas of college-wide concern and issues of student resources. The actions arising lack rigour and the majority do not have a specific timeframe for implementation. It is essential that the College reviews and develops its policies and procedures relating to annual monitoring to ensure they are effective and operationally fit for purpose.

1.7   The content and implementation of policies and procedures for the management of academic standards is imprecise and fragmented. Information is spread across the Quality Assurance Manual, policy documents and student handbooks with limited cross-referencing. For example, the student appeals process is cumbersome and grounds for appeal including roles and responsibilities are poorly defined. The forms necessary to undertake an appeal are not included in the student handbook. The academic misconduct policy is inconsistently implemented by staff and students who show little common understanding of its use.

1.8   The College's response to requests for implementation of action points from the awarding organisations lacks a sense of urgency. Following an external verifier re-approval visit from the Association of Business Practitioners (ABP), a series of action points were identified with a response due from the College by 31 July 2012. Following a reminder in September from the awarding organisation that failure to complete the action points could result in the withdrawal of ABP accreditation, the College sent a response at the end of October, the outcome of which is not yet known. Similarly, the NCFE (see paragraph 1.4) had communicated 14 action points in March 2012 for the continuation of the customised awards. The College did not respond until September 2012. It is essential that the College implements action points specified by the awarding organisations within the specified deadline.

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

1.9   There is limited awareness of the Academic Infrastructure or the guidance available in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). Policies and processes have not been mapped or referenced to the Code of practice. However, the College demonstrated awareness of the Qualifications and Credit Framework. It is advisable that the College aligns its policies and procedures with the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure.

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

1.10   The newly implemented policy on internal verification is lengthy and requires further development to provide clarity to ensure that it reflects the processes used by the College. Currently there is only one course requiring internal verification (Level 7 Extended Diploma in Marketing Management) for which the Registrar acts as internal verifier. Some progress has been made in implementing the internal verification processes but there was no evidence documenting corrective practices or scheduling of verification. It is advisable that the policy on internal verification be further developed to reflect the awarding organisations' requirements and promote transparency.

> 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 formal structure for the management of learning opportunities is underdeveloped. While there is a College timetable and academic calendar there is no overall course delivery plan documented. Teaching staff translate awarding organisation syllabus and learning outcomes into a course planner/scheme of work. These are week-by- week lists of learning outcomes to be delivered and are submitted to the Registrar for approval in advance of commencement of the unit. The Registrar undertakes an informal quality assurance review of courses delivery plans, but the team found no evidence of the formal recording of this process. It is advisable that the College develops comprehensive course handbooks to detail how all the course units are to be delivered and assessed and the award achieved.

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

2.2 The use of external reference points is limited. The Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) is the major external reference point. The College only offers qualifications that are QCF accredited. As stated in paragraph 1.9, the College has limited awareness of the Academic Infrastructure.

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

2.3 Annual observations of tutors and teaching practices is undertaken with limited impact. The Registrar is responsible for this although he has not received any formal training in observing. The observation is recorded on a detailed form that highlights the criteria against which the observation is undertaken and includes the observer's comments in relation to lesson planning, presentation and student participation. It also highlights strengths and aspects to improve. There is limited connection between observer findings and action taken. Recorded tutor actions do not reflect the aspects to improve identified by the observer. However, tutors are encouraged to reflect on their practice and to determine actions for improvement. It is advisable that a policy be developed on the regular peer observation of tutors by appropriately trained staff. Peer observation, however, takes place with positive outcomes, staff reporting that they had found it useful in identifying areas for improving their lessons.

2.4 The annual monitoring process is underdeveloped. The outcomes of teaching observation do not inform annual monitoring reports or continuing professional development plans. There is a termly student survey but few questions relate to teaching quality and student feedback is not utilised. Feedback from students regarding teaching and learning is limited. There is no regular discussion between students and the College. The annual monitoring reports include a section that reviews performance information but as yet this data has not been reviewed. It is advisable that the College develops processes to enhance learning opportunities, for example, by utilising the results of annual monitoring, student surveys and other feedback.

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

2.5   Student support processes are informal. The College does not have formal mechanisms for support and there is no student welfare officer. Teaching staff provide limited in-class academic support. The Principal and Registrar supported by the Administrator have an open-door policy and offer a degree of pastoral support when approached by students. It is desirable that the College develop mechanisms to provide student support.

2.6   Induction for new students is underdeveloped. The College provides, at the commencement of each cohort, a short induction meeting which includes health and safety arrangements, attendance, facilities and a limited introduction to the course. There is no formal academic induction and students are not offered study skills sessions. It is advisable that the College reviews and improves its academic induction for new students.

2.7   Candidate learning plans are ineffectual. The Registrar completes the learning plan, listing the course and the units the student is going to undertake. A one-to-one meeting with each student takes place to review progress. This is informed by attendance data and the input from teaching staff. Resultant actions are vague and do not include SMART targets. The students with whom the team met had little knowledge of the learning plans. It is advisable that the College reviews and improves its use of candidate learning plans, in particular its approach to target setting and action monitoring.

2.8   There is little structured examination preparation. While there are some sparing attempts at examination practice, this is not delivered or structured efficiently. The pass rate for examinations is low, evidenced by the cohort analysis undertaken by the team. While the College has recently recognised that it needs to take action in relation to weak student performance and has made contact with the relevant awarding organisations for feedback, immediate action is required by management to support student performance. It is essential that the College delivers appropriate and developmental examination preparation.

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

2.9.   Teaching staff are well qualified. They hold master's degrees in relevant business or management disciplines. The College lacks a systematic approach to staff development. It does not have a staff development plan but has made recent attempts to upskill staff. The College has hosted two awarding organisations who delivered training events in relation to assessment practice. The Registrar is undertaking an internal verification qualification and one member of staff has completed PTLLS (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector), another will undertake this qualification shortly. There is no formal system of staff appraisal. It is advisable that the College develops a robust approach to staff development that includes staff appraisals. Such a plan should be informed by quality assurance processes including annual monitoring and teaching observation.

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

2.10   Library resources are adequate although its usage is questionable. There is a small library that holds a selection of relevant texts, including all the books recommended by the awarding organisation for the units delivered to date, although the students reported that they did not often use the texts. Students are also referred to the local public libraries as

additional library resources but the College was not aware of whether relevant texts were actually available in those libraries.

2.11 IT resources are sufficient for the number of current students with 14 internet-ready computers. The virtual learning environment site contains useful information with lecture slides, lecture handouts, awarding organisation unit handbooks and the College policy on assessment. There are links to awarding organisation websites, as well as other resource websites. The College plans to develop the site further. Students reported limited use of the virtual learning environment as the handouts from classes were emailed to them after lessons. It is desirable that the College further develops the virtual learning environment.

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.

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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 For prospective students, the College is responsible for all of its public information within the agreements with its awarding organisations. A prospectus, student handbook and limited course information is produced but the College website is the main source of information which is attractive and easy to negotiate. There is detailed information on admissions and course descriptors are closely based on awarding organisation websites. There is no guidance on assessment for any course offered or on the implementation of the work placement element for the LCM Level 6 Business Management & Marketing (integrated).

3.2 For enrolled students, the College communicates through a variety of media, including the virtual learning environment, individual student e-mail accounts, noticeboards and text messages.

3.3 The information on courses is not standardised and therefore inconsistent. Course and unit-specific handbooks are limited to the course syllabuses provided by the awarding organisations. This has not been contextualised to provide college-specific guidance on the delivery and assessment of the course. There is a general student handbook used across all levels of courses which provides general College rules and regulations, policy and procedure information.

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

3.4 The College processes for publishing information are largely effective although informal. The attractive website and the prospectus are the key sources of public information and are well laid out and easy to navigate. Much of the information published is taken directly from awarding organisation material. The Principal and Registrar take joint managerial responsibility for publication with administrative staff providing an additional accuracy check. Informal reviews are undertaken on a regular basis by the management team. It is desirable that the College develops a policy on the publication and review of its public information, including input from students.

3.5   Some College claims on the website are insufficiently contextualised and may, hence, be misleading to prospective students. For example, the College omits to indicate that it is one of the top 500 emerging business schools and not the top 500 business schools. It is desirable that the College reviews claims made on its website so that they are properly contextualised.

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 courses 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 complete at the time of publishing 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 **course 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 organisations.

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: *The*

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

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 **courses 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.

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

course specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **courses 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.