Review of College Higher Education of City and Islington College

April 2013

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Review of College Higher Education conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at City and Islington College. The review took place in April 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Peter Bush
- Ann Hill
- Sarah Crook (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by City and Islington College, and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on:
    - whether the college fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards of its awarding bodies
    - the quality of learning opportunities
    - the quality of information
    - the enhancement of learning opportunities.
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing City and Islington College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[1] Background information about City and Islington College is given at the start of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains more about this review method and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.[2]

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/default.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about City and Islington College.

QAA's judgements about City and Islington College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at City and Islington College (the College).

- Academic standards of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation at the College **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meet UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced by the College about its learning opportunities **meet UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meet UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at City and Islington College.

- The annual summary of comments from external examiner reports presented to the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee (paragraph 1.8).
- The introduction of internal college panels to consider documentation for the validation and periodic review of programmes prior to their formal consideration by the awarding university (paragraph 1.20).
- The effective involvement of employers in programme development, approval monitoring, delivery and assessment design (paragraph 2.25).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to City and Islington College. The review team recommends that by the start of the 2013-14 academic year, the College:

- establishes and embeds robust arrangements for the communication of consistent information to students in relation to assessment (paragraph 1.12)
- work with awarding bodies and organisations to ensure that all Memoranda of Agreement and Memoranda of Understanding are signed and dated before the start of the academic year to which they relate (paragraph 1.17)
- amend its arrangements for the consideration of new courses to ensure that learning resource implications are taken into account (paragraph 1.19)
- revise the Staff Quality Handbook for Higher Education Courses to incorporate the internal processes of programme validation and review (paragraph 1.20)
- make sure all students can access the virtual learning environment from the start of their course (paragraph 2.24)
- develop an action plan to implement the recently developed e-learning strategy (paragraph 2.24)
- ensure that all action plans include deadlines (paragraph 2.24)
- review the quality assurance processes for the annual updating of course handbooks so that information is complete and up to date (paragraph 3.2).

The review team recommends that by the start of the 2014-15 academic year, the College:

- further embed its higher education quality assurance arrangements against the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.5)
- support the partnership between student representatives and the college, and the implementation of the student engagement strategy through timely training (paragraph 2.5).

The First Year Student Experience

The College manages the first year student experience carefully, supporting students through admissions and induction through effective support from personal tutors and module leaders. While these arrangements are appreciated, students reported frustration with initial information technology access, access to some library resources and bureaucracy at registration.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook for Review of College Higher Education, available on the QAA website.[3]

About City and Islington College

City and Islington College is a large general further education college situated in Inner London with over 11,000 full and part-time students of all ages, 528 of which are higher education students. The College's mission is to deliver outstanding education and training and its vision is to be London's leading college. The values that the College champions are: learning, excellence, aspiration, diversity and equality, employability results and social justice.

The College was formed in 1993 through a merger of four institutions, which had operated from over 13 sites across Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets. The College now operates over four main sites with five centres (Sixth Form, Business, Arts and Technology, Lifelong Learning and Health, Social and Childcare, and Applied Science). All centres deliver Higher education apart from the Sixth Form.

Since the last QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2007, the College has adjusted its management structure to reinforce the academic leadership of its growing higher education provision. Committees formed as part of this new management structure include external members from the College's university partners, and these oversee higher education centre quality panels at individual centres. The College manages quality assurance across its higher education provision through its Teaching and Learning Unit, which plays a key role across the College in improving teaching and learning and sharing good practice. This builds on the good practice identified at the IQER in 2007. The College has developed initiatives around student engagement, its virtual learning environment, and has developed higher education hubs in two centres, which provide higher education students with bespoke spaces and facilities. The College is ambitious to gain Foundation Degree-awarding powers as a further development of its provision. Key challenges for the College orientate around its position in a competitive and price-driven market.

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

The majority of higher education students are full-time. The College has three awarding bodies for its higher education courses: London Metropolitan University, City University and Pearson (formerly Edexcel).

The College has a Higher Education Strategy that describes the critical role the College can play in widening access to higher education and driving employability. The key strategic objectives include the development of new programmes at a range of levels to improve access to higher education in the area and meet student needs, to meet the higher education requirements of employers and professional bodies, and to gain Foundation Degree-awarding powers.

Explanation of the findings about City and Islington College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[4]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[5] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[6]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards of the awards that City and Islington College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   Each qualification is aligned to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) through the College course development process, and confirmed by the awarding body and organisation through validation panels, whose membership includes at least two external subject specialists.

1.2   The College's Foundation Degrees are awarded by either City University (London) (CU) or London Metropolitan University (LMU). The relationships between the College and these two awarding bodies are governed by individual institutional Memoranda of Agreement. The College also offers some Higher National (HN) Pearson-awarded programmes.

1.3   The relative roles of the college and the partner universities are laid out in the institutional Memoranda of Agreement and additionally in individual Programme Memoranda. The Memoranda clearly identify that each university has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and quality. Programme Memoranda detail the operational responsibilities of the partners.

1.4   The higher education awards offered by the College are fully aligned with the FHEQ, levels 4 or 5 as appropriate, and the programme specifications clearly indicate the levels of the awards.

Use of external examiners

1.5   The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners, who are appointed and trained by each partner university. The College considers external examiner reports carefully and responds to the examiners comprehensively and on time, and monitors the implementation of the recommendations. The partner university and the College take joint responsibility for the consideration of the reports and the monitoring of consequential

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[4] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection: please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[5] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[6] See note 4.

actions. Procedures correspond with UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) requirements. College teaching staff and curriculum managers the review team met were largely unaware of the Quality Code chapter relating to appointments criteria for external examiners, although both partner universities have detailed guidance on the role of external examiners and associated appointment criteria that correspond with the Quality Code. Similarly, College teaching staff and curriculum managers the review team met showed little awareness of the requirements of the Quality Code in proposing external nominations to the partner university. The review team **recommends** that the College further embed its higher education quality assurance arrangements against the expectations of the Quality Code.

1.6   External examiners submit their reports to the relevant partner university using the relevant template. Each partner university then directs the report to the College for comment. The Course Manager responds directly to either the examiner for LMU programmes, or jointly with the university for the CU courses.

1.7   Actions required by the College are monitored at programme team level, at the Course Board for City University courses, or at the Academic Quality Management Group (AQMG) for London Metropolitan University courses, and by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee (HEQSC) for Pearson courses. Examiner reports are monitored at the programme management team and by HEQSC.

1.8   The college produces a comprehensive annual summary of all the external examiner reports received. The team regard this annual summary of comments from external examiner reports presented to HEQSC as **good practice.** This report also presents a detailed summary of the key points raised for each course. External examiner reports are available to students through the virtual learning environment, and are discussed at Programme Management Team meetings to which students are invited to attend. Some of the students the team met had viewed reports although they were largely unaware of the roles of external examiners.

Assessment and standards

1.9   The design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective in ensuring students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards. The college's assessment strategies are largely defined by the awarding body or organisation, are approved at validation and are clearly articulated in course handbooks. Students the review team met confirmed the availability of this information, and were aware of guidance about grade enhancement and grading criteria. However, there is inconsistency in the communication of assignment dates, the submission of assignment drafts and the timing of feedback.

1.10   The College has developed its courses to enable learners to acquire a broad range of knowledge and skills appropriate for work and further study, and it offers a wide range of formative and summative assessment methods. The assessment strategies operated by the College are those of the awarding universities or Pearson and are approved at validation. Any changes to the assessment strategies required approval through the formal university processes. In delivering the assessment strategies, the College refers to the comprehensive assessment guidance produced by the two universities and Pearson. The university documents include sections on the design, review, marking and moderation of assessments; the City University and Pearson guidance include sections on assessment criteria and grade related criteria. Staff found these documents clear and helpful.

1.11   In accordance with partner university requirements assessment procedures are explained fully in the module specifications, which are approved at validation. Students the

review team met were broadly aware of assessment procedures and also confirmed their awareness of plagiarism policies and penalties and confirmed that these were explained by staff during module/course inductions and were in the course handbooks.

1.12   The team learned that some courses permitted the submission of draft assignments. Students reported varied experiences in this regard, some being permitted one draft, others an unspecified number of drafts, while one programme did not permit draft coursework submissions. The team **recommends** that the College establishes and embeds robust arrangements for the communication of consistent information to students in relation to assessment.

1.13   Students the review team met commented that coursework submission dates were not always listed in course handbooks, citing year planners, module lists and the virtual learning environment as providing such information, although others relied on tutor-based information. Students reported that they were generally content with the feedback arrangements and found the comments on returned work informative and helpful.

1.14   University regulations prescribe arrangements for the management of assessment boards or subject standards boards, which are chaired by university representatives and are governed by the regulations and protocols of the awarding universities. The College is responsible for the conduct of assessment boards leading to Pearson awards and these are clearly described in the College's Staff Quality Handbook.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.15   The design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enable standards to be set and maintained and allow students to demonstrate learning outcomes of the awards. The responsibilities of the College and its university awarding partners are clearly described in legal Memoranda of Agreement, although these were not signed in advance of those agreements formally coming into force. The College has in place a robust process for the approval of new course proposals and adheres to the arrangements for the validation, monitoring and periodic review of courses in line with the specifications in the quality handbooks of the awarding bodies and organisation.

1.16   While responsibility for the academic standards of a programme ultimately rests with the partner university, responsibility for the programme and student experience is shared between each partner university and the College. Detailed statements of responsibilities are listed in the individual course Memoranda of Agreement, which clarify for course managers and other college staff their particular responsibilities.

1.17   The review team saw signed copies of the various institutional and programme specific Memoranda of Agreement. However, each of these agreements for the period from 2011-12 was signed by the College and the partner university in January 2013. The team also noted that the memorandum with Arsenal Football Club remained unsigned. The team **recommends** that the College should work with awarding bodies and organisations to ensure that all Memoranda of Agreement are signed and dated before the start of the academic year to which they relate.

1.18   The College Academic Board has oversight of the strategic direction and the quality of higher education provision and reports to the Senior Management team. It is advised by the Higher Education Business and Financial Planning Committee (HEBPFC) and the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee (HEQSC). The college adopts the partner universities' processes for programme approval and monitoring and review, and senior college staff are cognisant of the respective partner university handbooks and manuals that describe the arrangements.

1.19   Each of the partner universities' partnership handbooks explain the validation processes clearly and emphasise the important role of external members of validation panels. The same processes are enacted for the revalidation or periodic review of courses. The reports from these processes seen by the review team reflect the formal arrangements as described, with the higher education quality panels and HESQC signing off on behalf of the college the programme team's responses to the various conditions and recommendations of the panels. As part of the formal course approval process following initial discussion at their relevant higher education centre quality panel, the rationale, market analysis, funding, resource issues and course outline are agreed. This process allows for comment on teaching staff, resources and capital matters but there is no opportunity for comment on learning support resources, particularly in the absence of learning support staff on the committee. The review team **recommends** that the College amend its arrangements for the consideration of new courses to ensure that learning resource implications are taken into account.

1.20   The team learned that the college operates an additional informal stage in the validation, re-validation and review process in which a group of senior college staff and external members consider with the course manager and programme staff the draft documentation ahead of its submission to the partner university Course Board or the Academic Quality and Monitoring Group (AQMG) in preparation for formal consideration. The team view this introduction of internal college panels to consider documentation for the validation and periodic review of programmes prior to their formal consideration by the awarding university as **good practice**. However, as the Staff Quality Handbook does not reflect this stage of the process, the review team also **recommends** that the College should revise the Staff Quality Handbook for Higher Education Courses to incorporate the internal processes of programme validation and review.

1.21   Annual monitoring follows the partner university arrangements, the Course Manager prepares the annual monitoring return which is presented to the relevant Higher Education Quality Centre Panel which highlights issues for HEQSC and the partnership Course Board and AQMG as appropriate. The College has retained the Self Assessment Report (SAR), which was established for its further education programmes, for use in the monitoring of Pearson programmes. This wide-ranging document presents data on student numbers, National Student Survey (NSS) results, validation/review activities and key points from external examiner reports.

Subject benchmarks

1.22   Subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of awards. College staff are cognisant of the relevant QAA subject benchmarks and other external indicators of academic standards derived from their professional and industrial experience. Along with the FHEQ these were applied to the development, validation and review of programmes and the ongoing maintenance of standards.

1.23   The College reported that programme teams take account of subject benchmark statements during programme development, and that these are referred to in programme specifications. External panel members contributed to outcomes of validating panels that confirmed the matching of programmes against the relevant subject benchmark statement, and the validating bodies and organisation confirmed the positive recommendations of the validation panels. The review team noted examples of validation and review documents prepared by the College which demonstrated its own mapping of programmes against relevant benchmark statements. External examiners commented favourably on the links with employers reflected in a number of the Foundation Degree programmes, and their reports confirmed that standards continue to remain appropriate.

1.24   Additionally, staff developing programmes took account of professional, statutory and regulatory body reports (for instance in FdSc Ophthalmic Dispensing), sector skills guidance, and their own professional/relevant industry experiences. College staff the review team met also acknowledged the value of informal discussions with partner university colleagues prior to the completion of validation or periodic review documentation. University representatives whom the team met confirmed the mutual value of these meetings.

1.25   In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. While the team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations accordingly, none were judged to threaten the management of the area. The team also identified some areas of good proactive. All expectations were met.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at City and Islington College **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   Professional standards for teaching and learning are upheld. The Staff Quality Handbook for higher education courses 2013-14 sets out the Quality Code as a document against which College quality assurance is judged, and outlines the College's commitment to supporting the ongoing professional development of its staff that are engaged in higher education teaching. The College has shown awareness of the need for a means of measuring the impact of higher education staff development. In this the College has been proactive in developing a culture of scholarly activity. The review team found that the College both sets aside time and facilitates further skills enhancement in order to encourage involvement in this, and staff members the review team met were both aware and appreciative of the College's support. Some staff development activities are devolved to individual centres. These may need to be more closely aligned with the aims of the College as a whole to better enable the measurement of the impact of higher education staff development. Students the review team met commented on their positive experience of teaching and in particular of the industry experience and expertise of their teachers.

Learning resources

2.2   Learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. The College is responsive to the needs of higher education students regarding learning resources. Library staff are engaged with academic provision, working with teaching staff and participating in the processes of developing and organising new courses. Students the review team met reported a disparity in arrangements for taking books out of partner university libraries, and some were concerned about the breadth of material available to them to assist them with their specific programmes, and about their access to an appropriate learning environment. However, the College has recently established higher education 'Hubs' which attempt to address these concerns by increasing access to exclusive well-resourced Higher education facilities. These were well received by students.

2.3   The online learning environment has been a cause of some disruption throughout the academic year for higher education students, but the College strategy indicates that steps are being taken to address this.

Student voice

2.4   The College understands the importance of engaging students in the processes of quality assurance, and is seeking to embed this through enhanced support in the coming academic year. NSS data is used within annual reports by partner universities and is now embedded in the College learner voice strategy. NSS data is also considered by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The College has implemented strategies to enhance the student voice; however, participation by students in committees and meetings is inconsistent.

2.5   The Annual Higher Education Review 2012-13 restates the importance of meaningful engagement with student representation in supporting the College quality assurance processes. This commitment to greater student engagement with quality assurance processes is demonstrated by the development of a Student Engagement Strategy. This strategy details a variety of ways in which student views are accessed and canvassed, including a range of imaginative initiatives. The Student Engagement Strategy for 2013 details the committees at which students are entitled to be represented, including College Corporation, Equality and Diversity, and Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The student submission reported that student representatives are invited to attend programme team meetings. However, the student representatives the team met had limited knowledge or experience of this. They had limited understanding of the formal processes of quality assurance to which they might fruitfully contribute at the College. Student representatives the review team met reported that training for their representative role was inconsistent and the level of their engagement is patchy. The review team **recommends** that the College support the partnership between student representatives and the College, and the implementation of the student strategy through timely training.

2.6   Focus groups are held by members of the Teaching and Learning Unit and the Curriculum Management Team and reported to the Senior Management Team. These focus groups incorporate students from a range of courses. The Students' Union has two higher education representatives on the executive committees. This enables student representatives to advocate the needs of higher education students at the highest levels. The importance of student representation, opportunities to participate in it, and the expectations and responsibilities of student representatives is included within course handbooks, however there is discrepancy between these aims and the extent that students are engaged in practice.

Management information

2.7   There is effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities. The College collects, collates and examines management information and discusses it at committee level. The data is disaggregated by student group and by centre. This happens with regard to student satisfaction levels and student attainment and retention. The College is responsive to this data and the relevant centres are charged with formulating action plans to address any concerns that arise out of this analysis.

Admission to the College

2.8   The College's admissions procedures are fair, explicit and consistently applied. The external website is clear about admissions criteria and processes. This website is the primary resource used by students seeking information and guidance about courses on offer and admissions.

2.9   The draft admissions policy 2012-13 acknowledges that entry requirements will vary between programmes, but states that all programmes will have a clear statement about requirements and this will be clearly displayed. Entry criteria are varied at the discretion of the relevant Curriculum Manager. This draft admission policy is clear and lays out what the students may expect of the College. Students the review team met were largely satisfied with the admissions process, although many reported frustration with the registration and enrolment process, which they regarded as repetitive and over bureaucratic.

2.10   The College interviews applicants to all vocational or creative courses. The information sent to students regarding what they might expect from these interviews and the requirements of them at this stage is appropriate. Students are informed pre-enrolment of what preparatory activities and reading lists they should undertake to complete, along with the contact details of their course leader.

Complaints and appeals

2.11   The College has an effective complaints and appeals procedure that is both clear and publicised. Although some students the team met were unaware of the processes of registering a complaint, they were confident that, should they require it, they would be able to find information and guidance on this topic. The College's complaints procedure is not specifically articulated within the programme handbooks for either awarding body or organisation, and students are signposted to the College intranet within some handbooks.

2.12   The College issues a complaints procedure for modules taught at the College, with the prior approval of its respective university partners. This is consonant with the universities' own complaints procedures. Complaints regarding non-academic matters are subject to the College's own complaints procedures.

Career advice and guidance

2.13   The College has effective career advice and guidance. Higher education students at the College benefit from strong links with employers which are embedded in courses and modules, and the emphasis placed on employability skills within specific courses. This complements the College careers service, which is developing a more comprehensive service to meet the needs of higher education students. The careers team iterated the emphasis placed on transferable skills and the service was promoted at induction.

Supporting disabled students

2.14   The College is committed to supporting disabled students. The College disaggregates the intake, progression, retention and achievement of disabled students by course and by centre. Learning materials are appropriate for disabled students and are embedded within teaching practice. However, there is no consistently applied assessment at the start of a course.

2.15   The College Learning and Behaviour Agreement 2012-13 clearly outlines the College's equality and diversity policies. The destination of disabled students and those with learning difficulties is considered within the annual reporting process and additional learning support and disability support is discussed at the highest level of the College. There is adequate provision of additional support and this support is detailed in handbooks. The College Additional Learning Support Policy lays out the framework of support to which students are entitled, and is informed by a range of external references. The College also has an additional support policy in place for higher education.

2.16   Students the review team met reported a spectrum of experiences in accessing disability services. This is recognised within course performance evaluation logs and its perpetuation has been incorporated into the Student Engagement Strategic Plan and the Student Engagement Strategy.

Supporting international students

2.17   The College has no international higher education students.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.18   The College has no postgraduate research students.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.19   The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.20   Memoranda of Agreement with partner universities are coherent and are mapped against the Quality Code. Partnerships with other organisations are covered by Memoranda of Understanding, for instance with Islington Music Workshop and Arsenal Football Club. These clearly describe arrangements regarding access to resources, course development support, and work place activity. However, some of the written agreements with the College's partners are not dated, or not signed or have been signed but are post-dated, as previously mentioned in paragraph 1.17.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.21   The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, is not managed effectively. The College has identified that an area for improvement is its use of information and communications technology by teaching staff, and that the virtual learning environment is underused by some course teams. In response to this the College has produced an e-learning strategy, but few staff the review team met were aware of it. The draft strategy does not identify timescales for implementation and there is no accompanying action plan to identify priorities, staff responsibilities, outcomes, impact or deadlines.

2.22   Although project funds have been made available for the development of a blended learning module for each Foundation Degree programme, no systematic monitoring of the impact has taken place and staff the review team met were unclear about progress on the development of learning materials or the existence and role of e-learning champions. The e-learning team is responsible for assisting staff in developing e-learning content, but the overall approach is hampered by a lack of clarity about the location of responsibility for e-learning teaching and learning strategies and operational planning and monitoring.

2.23   Academic staff the review team met were unaware of the monthly audits monitoring the use of the e-learning environment cited by the e-learning team. There is no audit for accuracy and consistency, nor is there guidance on the uploading of minimum specified content. The review team found that use of the virtual learning environment as a learning and teaching tool by programme teams is inconsistent, with some using it primarily as a tool for communication.

2.24   Students the review team met were unclear about which online platform utilised by partner universities is best suited to their overall learning needs. Students reported that

access to the College's virtual learning environment is problematic, that many were unable to access it at the start of their course, and that at times they were unable to access it remotely. The review team noted that there is a decrease in the use of the College virtual learning environment. The review team **recommends** that the College make sure that all students can access the virtual learning environment from the start of their course. They also **recommend** that the College develop an action plan to implement the recently developed e-learning strategy. Additionally, the review team **recommends** that all action plans include deadlines.

Work-based and placement learning

2.25   The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is managed effectively by the College, and due regard is paid to the defining characteristics of Foundation Degree provision as articulated in the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark. The effective involvement of employers in programme development, approval, monitoring, delivery and assessment design is a feature of **good practice**. There is extensive use of work-based learning and placement learning which complies with the specific requirements set out in the QAA Foundation Degree benchmark statement.

2.26   Employers contribute to formative assessment in the workplace and both formal and informal communication between the College and employers is very good. There is clear understanding regarding the responsibilities of partners. The College is responsible for the grading of students' work and employers' comments are considered, for example, regarding the FdSc Crime Scene and Forensic Investigation, and also in respect of the FdA Working with Children and Young People, and FdA Dance. Here employers are responsible for delivery, they are subject to the same expectations as college staff and are enabled by the College to take teaching qualifications. A good example of the College's employer engagement is the collaborative arrangement with Arsenal Football Club in the Community. Here the course team has ensured employer involvement in all aspects of the course design, approval and delivery of the programme.

2.27   There are some good examples of the integration of work-based learning within the curriculum which provide valuable vocational opportunities for students. For instance, FdA Dance students work in partnership with IRIE! professional dance theatre, which provides a range of opportunities to develop Afro-Caribbean specialisms, and the General Optics Council accredits the FdSc Ophthalmic Dispensing course, which includes a 32-day placement. For the FdA Photography, the Association of Photographers delivers the legal content of the programme and students are given specialist briefs. The programme is recognised by Skillset and a wide variety of work placements is provided, including the Wellcome Trust and the Science Museum. London Metropolitan Police provides workshops and lectures for the FdSc Forensics. For the FdA Fashion and Textiles, employers provide master class workshops and assess students' work as part of an integrated assignment.

2.28   Students the review team met knew what was expected of them by both the College and employers, and they valued work placements and the employability focus of their programmes.

Student charter

2.29   The College has a Learning and Behaviour agreement in place which sets out the mutual expectations of the College and its students. Most students the review team met were aware of the agreement.

2.30   The College is meeting most of the commitments that it makes in the Learning and Behaviour agreement, however it is not specifically articulated in course handbooks and does not include specific signposting to the appeals and complaints procedure. Students are referred to the College's student learning portal where they can locate the agreement; however, access to the portal can be inconsistent.

2.31   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. While the review team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations accordingly, none were judged to threaten the management of the area. The team also identified some areas of good practice.

3   Public information

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by City and Islington College **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1   The College produces information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The production of course handbooks is the responsibility of course managers, and they are considered and approved at programme management team meetings. Course handbooks are also monitored for accuracy and consistency by the partner universities. Students the review team met, confirmed that the pre-course information is accurate, but some were concerned that progression opportunities are not articulated in all course handbooks.

3.2   There are clear and comprehensive guidelines which clarify brand strategy and publicity guidelines for all college marketing and communication materials and activity, and these are understood by staff. Formal arrangements are in place to assure the quality and accuracy of information in all media, and take account of version control. The College and the partner universities understand their respective responsibilities. However, despite these arrangements, there is inconsistency between the content of the Learning and Behaviour agreement and the course handbooks regarding the time limit for the return of assessed work. Additionally, reading lists in several course handbooks were out of date. The review team **recommends** that the College review the quality assurance processes for the annual updating of course handbooks so that information is complete and up to date.

3.3   The College's website is easy to navigate, is uncluttered and is accessible. The College's higher education prospectus contains accurate and up to date information. It is well designed and attractively produced to a high standard. There is sufficient detail relating to programme content, employability and progression to top-up provision. However, there is no information relating to assessment criteria.

3.4   Students are aware that external examiner reports are available on the virtual learning environment but they do not routinely read them.

3.5   In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. While the team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations accordingly, none were judged to threaten the management of the area.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at City and Islington College
meets UK expectations. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   Deliberate steps are being taken by the College to improve the quality of students'
learning opportunities. This is informed, to an extent, by the expectations of the Quality Code
and is reflected in the development of strategies, processes and cultures. A new higher
education infrastructure has been introduced, including two higher education committees
and quality panels, There is a commitment to scholarly and research activity and the College
is seeking accreditation by the Higher education Academy to develop the higher education
expertise of staff for the benefit of students. Additionally, the College's website is used to
enhance learning opportunities by showcasing innovative practice such as employer case
studies. Employers the review team met were keen to participate in enhancement initiatives.

4.2   Enhancement of learning opportunities is embedded in the College's strategic plan
and includes plans to create a new higher education centre. Students the review team met
enjoy their time at the College and confirm that their chosen programmes of study have
increased their self-confidence.

4.3   In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the
criteria specified. No issues were identified that threatened the management of the area.

5   Theme: The First Year Student Experience

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and
Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Review of College Higher
Education teams. In 2012-13, the themes are the **First Year Student Experience** or
Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The review team investigated the First Year Student Experience at City and Islington
College. The College manages the first year student experience carefully, supporting
students through admissions and induction through effective support from personal tutors
and module leaders. While these arrangements are appreciated, students reported
frustration with initial information technology access, access to some library resources and
bureaucracy at registration.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   The College recognises the importance of supporting all higher education students,
but particularly in their first year, and effectively supports students in their transition to
level 4. Transition activities include the preparation of a range of promotional materials jointly
developed by the College and the partner universities. The College assumes responsibility
for communicating with students once they have accepted an offer of a place on the course,
and advising them on induction arrangements. Induction involves an intensive week's
programme outlining College arrangements, but particularly offering detailed advice about
the course. Study skills form an important component of the week's activities, and these are
complemented by a linked virtual learning environment course, which is ideally paced over
15 weeks, and is aimed at developing study skills.

5.2   Students the review team met were appreciative of assistance from the personal
tutors and were complimentary about the development of the higher education hubs. At the

start of their course, many students reported frustration with the registration and enrolment process, which they regarded as repetitive and over bureaucratic. Some students reported initial difficulties in logging onto the College virtual learning environment, and others reported ongoing difficulties in accessing some library facilities at a partner university. Despite these initial difficulties, all students the review team met would recommend the College and were complimentary about the quality of teaching. They were positive about their learning experience and the way that it has increased their employability skills.

Information for first year students

5.3   Students were satisfied with the amount and quality of information before and during their first year's study at the College. They found induction week helpful though intensive. Some felt that there should be a greater emphasis on course induction rather than the apparent emphasis on the wider College. Representatives of the partner universities contribute to the induction session and visit the students towards the end of the first year of their course.

Assessment and feedback

5.4   The College prioritises assessment and feedback as key supports for first year students and has designed a range of types of formative assignments to meet student needs. Students confirmed the value of the feedback, which was usually comprehensive and prompt, and was supplemented by helpful one-to-one tutor guidance. Individual student progress is monitored by the course manager who additionally acts as the personal tutor for the course. Personal tutorial sessions are timetabled and are additionally available on request.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.5   The College routinely collects and uses information about success, retention and achievement of first year students across both centres and courses. Student satisfaction surveys are similarly used within the annual programme evaluation process, which feeds through committees and influences strategic development and direction.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions; for example, pages 17-20 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities and enhancement.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

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

credit(s): A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

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

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.

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

Quality Code: Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

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 standards**.

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