Higher Education Review of Calderdale College

March 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Calderdale College. The review took place on 3-4 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor J Bradshaw
- Mrs P Skinner
- Miss C Dangerfield (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Calderdale College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These Expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the 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 Calderdale 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 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Higher Education Review of higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland[4] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Calderdale College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Calderdale College.

- The maintenance of threshold academic standards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at Calderdale College.

- The carefully tailored support for its student population, which the College further strengthens by integrating the Academic Skills Team into mainstream teaching (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to Calderdale College.

By the start of academic year 2014-15:

- complete the institutional response to the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review of 2009 by producing a Work-Based Placement Handbook (Expectations A4 and B10).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that Calderdale College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The establishment of an Academic Board, a Higher Education Management Group and a Peer Review Panel (with associated strategies and policies) to achieve a coherent approach to the management, teaching, assessment and enhancement of higher education by July 2014 (Expectations A4 and A6).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a strong commitment to student employability, and students value the currency and relevance of teaching and assessment; there is, however, scope for greater systematisation of institutional engagement with employers.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Higher Education Review.

About Calderdale College

Calderdale College is a multi-campus further education college offering programmes to a diverse community centred largely on Halifax, which is also the locus of its higher education provision. Of its 5,200-strong student population, some 300 (250 full-time equivalent) students are following higher education programmes leading currently to awards of the University of Bradford, the University of Huddersfield, Leeds Metropolitan University, or Pearson; around 45 per cent of such students are from widening participation postcode areas. The College's approach to higher education involves reflecting the needs of its local community by raising aspirations and achievement, thereby contributing to strengthening the local, regional and national economies by providing a skilled and flexible workforce.

With these aims in mind, the College facility the Inspire Centre has educational, sporting and recreational facilities for all students, while the Higher Education Centre aims to develop and reinforce the collective identity of those taking higher education programmes.

Higher education provision falls under the remit of the Higher Education Development and Partnership Manager, a role aligned with institutional strategic priorities. The post holder, who reports to the Assistant Principal Partnerships, Performance and Employability, manages the members of the Academic Skills Team, who are responsible for student-facing forums; for overseeing the collection, analysis and use of evaluative feedback; and, with other support staff, for contributing significantly and more broadly to learning support. Responsibility for the teaching of higher education students rests with an academic workforce of 26 (some of them part-time).

The College's Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review of 2009 had positive outcomes. Its responses to the six features of good practice and five recommendations (which related largely to the provision of comprehensive, current and accurate information for students) was, with one exception discussed in paragraph 1.7 of this report, satisfactory.

Explanation of the findings about Calderdale College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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 is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)*.*

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1   Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of programmes offered by Calderdale College lies with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation: in all cases appropriate formal agreements are in place. The review team examined the evidential basis of institutional claims by documentary study, supported, where appropriate, by discussion with students, institutional representatives and/or external stakeholders. The College states that *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* is a reference point in all programme design and review activities, and the review team, noting that external examiners are asked to comment on this point, found corroboration in recent documentation, including that from one awarding body's refocusing exercise, which makes explicit reference to it.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.2   Subject benchmark statements are included in programme specifications and considered at approval and review, where external confirmation is required that account has been taken of them, including, in the case of foundation degrees, all aspects of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Due consideration is also given to requirements associated with programmes subject to professional or statutory regulation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.3   Programme specifications, which are available on the College website, are prepared in line with the Quality Code and in all cases they specify the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme concerned. All programmes and, where applicable, modules, have a handbook containing the necessary information. Students confirmed the review panel's view of the satisfactory nature of such handbooks.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.4   The College's programme approval, monitoring, amendment and review procedures align with relevant external reference points, include appropriate external representation, identify and address student perspectives, and are collectively fit for purpose.

1.5   Within this context the review team found that because the responsibilities of relevant College bodies have yet to be fully developed and their respective responsibilities clearly expressed, the College's current approach to higher education is not optimally coherent. The College is addressing this both by establishing formal bodies with a clear accountability structure and complementary membership and terms of reference, and by restructuring its overall approach to learning and teaching and assessment in higher education. The team **affirms** the establishment of an Academic Board, a Higher Education Management Group and a Peer Review Panel (with associated strategies and policies) in order to achieve a coherent approach to the management, teaching, assessment and enhancement of higher education by July 2014.

1.6   The College emphasises employability and external engagement, and employers who met the review team valued their involvement in programme review and would willingly extend their contributions. Nevertheless, while some programmes make extensive use of such contributors, its use is subject to only limited institutional-level systematisation or development. The extent to which good practice is shared is similarly variable.

1.7   Most higher education students, being already in work, have current knowledge of their sector; the minority who are not have the opportunity to undertake work placements, and all students are provided with work-related learning outcomes. While these activities appear fit for purpose, the review team found the College's explanation of why it has yet to implement a five-year-old recommendation from its previous QAA review unconvincing, and **recommends** that the College complete the institutional response to the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review of 2009 by producing a Work-Based Placement Handbook.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.8   Institutional procedures for monitoring and responding to external examiners' and awarding bodies' reports, though necessarily variable given these bodies' different requirements, are clear and detailed, involving the preparation of robust action plans and follow-up as necessary. External examiners' reports confirm that programmes consistently align with external reference points, and the College meets the challenge of harmonising reports prepared on different templates by adopting a common internal schedule covering all relevant points.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.9　　The College's Higher Education Assessment Policy is currently under review by a Project Group developing a Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy which will form the basis of a Higher Education Policy (see paragraph 1.5). As part of this development the College is developing or updating higher education-specific policies to meet its responsibilities in full, including ensuring the consistent employment relevance of teaching and assessment.

1.10　　The College achieves generally strong retention and completion rates: some year-on-year volatility among programmes is unavoidable given the small numbers, and the most recently available overall rates of 96 per cent and 91 per cent respectively exist within a five-year range of 73-97 per cent. Most higher education provision has been validated or revalidated in the last three years; the provision of one degree-awarding body recently underwent an extensive refocusing exercise which involved rewriting all modules from a 15 to a 20-credit base. The College supplements awarding body handbook materials with institutional information. Students find this material helpful, and state that they understand the learning outcomes involved. They value small group learning opportunities, the helpfulness of teaching staff and the supportive and egalitarian atmosphere engendered, and believe that the formative, timely and individual nature of feedback provided contributes significantly to their academic achievement.

Expectation:　　Met
Level of risk:　　Low

The maintenance of threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.11   At the time of the review the College's higher education provision, which accounts for around six per cent of student numbers, was undergoing a strategic realignment progress which the review team **affirms**. The team also **recommends** that the College complete its response to the recommendations of its previous QAA review by producing a Work-Based Placement Handbook. From a student perspective, current provision is highly valued, in particular the support of teaching staff, the opportunity to study in unthreatening yet stimulating small groups, and the constructive advice provided on written work.

1.12   In reaching its judgement about academic standards the review team, noting that ultimate responsibility rests with the degree-awarding bodies, finds that the College discharges its responsibilities in respect of maintaining threshold academic standards competently and professionally. The academic standards of the awards on programmes offered by Calderdale College are secure, and the College **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: Quality of learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1   New programme proposals are subject to College scrutiny before progressing to the awarding body in a process currently overseen by the Quality Management Group. The aims and methods of the process are clear: the information flow is coherent, culminating in annual review and evaluation. External representation is satisfactory; there are examples of meticulous and inclusive programme planning; due consideration is afforded the views of staff, students, employers and other external advisers; programme specifications are routinely scrutinised and recommendations are reliably addressed within a specified timescale.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.2   The College website's higher education section provides, or is a gateway to, all information potential applicants are likely to need. Programme specifications, available in full, provide details of admissions requirements, student obligations and programme structure. Following interview, successful applicants are provided with enrolment and funding advice, while unsuccessful ones are informed of the outcome and referred to the College's Information, Advice and Guidance Service. Students say that they are satisfied with both the procedures and the information provided.

2.3   In the absence of a formal admissions policy (such a policy currently exists in draft form), the College largely follows the procedures specified by the awarding body concerned. It acknowledges that implementation, while satisfactory overall, has been subject to some local variation, and believes its decision to join UCAS (the universities and colleges admission service), combined with the implementation of its new Admissions Policy with associated training arrangements, will ensure that, from the next academic year, practice is aligned with relevant external reference points.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.4   Institutional pedagogy is currently based on separate Learning and Teaching and Higher Education Strategies. These will be consolidated into a Higher Education Learning and Teaching and Assessment Strategy as part of the structural changes described elsewhere (see paragraph 1.5) for the start of academic year 2014-15.

2.5   Higher education teaching staff are appropriately qualified, and the College supports staff development, including study for higher degrees. The College is a recent subscriber to the Higher Education Academy, and its range of internal developmental activities is welcomed by staff. The review team found evidence of these activities facilitating beneficial engagement with higher education learning and teaching issues. The College has recently addressed what it considers the limited effectiveness of its previous approach to teaching observations by launching an institution-wide Teaching Squares initiative, a system involving staff meeting to identify and share good practice, and taking part in developmental classroom observations which will be systematically monitored through the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.6   The College has developed and is sustaining industrial links. These are welcomed by students, though those not in employment would appreciate more support in finding suitable work placements. Students welcome the recent inclusion of a higher education section in the College's virtual learning environment as fostering a sense of community and facilitating collaborative learning. As with other recent initiatives, however, it is too early to assess its effectiveness.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*

Findings

2.7   There are clear college-level procedures for the strategic allocation of resources to support and enable students to develop their potential. At College level, significant investment has been made in the estate: the Inspire Centre is open to all students, mainly for sports-related activities; the Learning Resource Centre comprises three integrated areas and a Skills Zone; and the Higher Education Centre offers higher education students study and social space. Students spoke positively about these developments, the establishment of which was a strategic initiative heavily influenced by student comments and requests.

2.8   Higher education staff, students and external examiners speak overwhelmingly positively about academic support. Of particular note is the focused collaboration between the college-level Academic Skills Team and teaching staff to develop students' academic skills. The carefully tailored support for its diverse student population, which the College further strengthens by integrating the Academic Skills Team into mainstream learning and teaching, is **good practice**.

2.9   While students appear aware of the range of academic supports available, they singled out for particular mention the ready availability of tutors and their speedy responses to queries. Formative assessment is available prior to submitting the first assessment: while there is evidence of some students feeling underprepared, those who met the review team were content with their support, explaining that small class sizes facilitate close working relationships with tutors, and that the provision of continuing and constructive informal feedback contributes to improved academic performance.

2.10   The College provides wide-ranging study support for students with special learning needs, and its Single Equality Scheme promotes equality, diversity and inclusion in all activities, including the academic curriculum (for which staff development is provided and in some cases mandatory). New students are offered extended induction at College level, supplemented by local arrangements: the programme includes information sharing, acclimatisation and introductory study skills sessions. Personal student support, which falls under the remit of Student Services, includes the careers and financial expertise of the Advice and Guidance Team (recently strengthened by the appointment of an Adult Careers Adviser mainly for higher education students) and a Counselling Service.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.11   The College is committed to gathering and using students' evaluations of their learning opportunities. While it has a broad preference for direct engagement over surveys it makes appropriate use of the latter, as it does of a 'You Said We Did' feedback system. As well as involving students in validation and review activities, the College makes use of higher education focus groups, the minutes of which are distributed to course representatives and programme teams prior to formal discussion. Students provided the review team with examples of their comments leading to beneficial change.

2.12   The representative system, while used largely residually by higher education students, is supported by training and a clear and comprehensive handbook, and representatives consider themselves equipped to discharge their duties. The Students' Union is mainly further education-focused, though the College is endeavouring to strengthen the structural role of higher education students and to promote the benefits of membership.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.13   The respective responsibilities of College and awarding bodies are clear and detailed: they include the accreditation of prior learning, requests for which are, however, rare. The College discharges its approval, monitoring and review responsibilities in a manner designed to ensure that its higher education programmes are current, employment-relevant and aligned with external reference points..

2.14   Assessment is mapped against specified learning outcomes and adjusted in the light of feedback and experience. The review team found examples of the use of innovative techniques appropriate to small group sizes to confirm and reinforce learning outcomes. Assignments are, generally, vocationally appropriate. External examiners' reports confirm that students have opportunities to achieve their intended learning outcomes through the work-based nature of most programmes and by participating in live or simulated industry-related assessment arrangements.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.15 Clear internal procedures exist for responding to external examiners' reports, including the drawing up, approving and monitoring of any corrective action plans. The awarding organisation undertakes an annual quality review and development activity, so obviating the need for external examiners to evaluate these areas in depth.

2.16 The College meets all responsibilities delegated to it, supplementing them with its own expectations over attendance at examination boards, signing-off results and reporting arrangements. Most external examiners attend the College at least annually, when, in addition to attending boards and meeting staff and students, they discuss and engage with relevant College procedures. In the last academic year, all external examiners confirmed that they had received sufficient evidence and information to enable them to perform their role.

2.17 Other than where it is contractually prevented from doing so the College intends to publish all external examiners' reports on its virtual learning environment. It does not as yet do so, however, and the student submission for this review stated that such reports are not generally available. Since reports are provided to student representatives, the College meets external expectations. It may consider, however, that this area offers scope for development.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.18   The College tailors its thorough and effective annual monitoring system to awarding body requirements. Annual monitoring reports appear comprehensive in scope and well presented. The procedure for programme closure is appropriate, and allows students to achieve their intended award.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals*

Findings

2.19   The College has well publicised complaints and appeals procedures. Academic appeals by higher education students is an awarding body responsibility, and the College provides readily available links to the various (and variously described) procedures. While students who met the review team had given little thought to the issue (formal complaints and appeals being rare occurrences), they were confident of being able to find the necessary information.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*

Findings

2.20   The College is responsible for overseeing the quality of learning opportunities for students undertaking work-based internships. While the review team has no concerns about this, it again **recommends** the completion of the institutional response to the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review of 2009 by producing a Work-Based Placement Handbook (see paragraph 1.7).

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.21   The College offers no postgraduate provision.

Quality of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.22   The College sets out its requirements and expectations of students in a clear but non-intimidatory manner, explaining also that high levels of support are available. While the organisation of higher education is currently under review, the student-facing aspects of quality management are characterised by high levels of both academic support and student satisfaction.

2.23   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team notes that the College's higher education students receive a level of support that enables them to fulfil their potential, and that the College is skilled in meeting the needs of a diverse and predominantly part-time student population. This section of the report repeats one **recommendation** from the previous section (to produce a Work-Based Placement Handbook) and one **feature of good practice** (concerning the integration of student learning support into the academic curriculum). The College **meets** UK expectations in relation to the quality of learning opportunities.

3 Judgement: Information about higher education provision

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*

Findings

3.1 In reaching its judgement about the information the College provides about its higher education provision, the review team discussed the matter with staff and students, checked the College website and prospectus, and sampled a range of documents. The College plans to develop a comprehensive information strategy following the implementation of its consolidated Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The comprehensive website offers a clear account of the rationale for, and main characteristics of, higher education provision. It meets all obligations to link to external data sources and ensure that, where necessary, content is approved by awarding bodies. Information for potential applicants is fit for purpose, and all relevant information is available, though in some cases on programme pages, not higher education ones. As noted in paragraph 2.17, external examiners' reports are provided to student representatives, but other students' awareness of them is limited.

3.2 Current procedures for ensuring the currency and accuracy of materials for students are sound. All programme materials are readily available both electronically and as hard copy, and feature in discussions with external examiners. Students reported themselves satisfied with the clarity and reliability of information provided at all stages of their academic journey.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Information about higher education provision: Summary of findings

3.3   In reaching its judgement about the information the College provides about its higher education provision, the review team discussed the matter with staff and students, checked the College website and prospectus, and sampled a range of documents provided for students. The team concludes that the College **meets** UK expectations for the quality of information it provides about its higher education provision.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1 To meet UK expectations in respect of enhancement the College must demonstrate not only that the quality of student learning is both sound and improving, but also that this substantially derives from deliberate institutional-level steps having been taken. The establishment and work thus far undertaken by the Higher Education Project Group (see paragraph 1.5) constitute such a step. While this work is currently in progress, the review team heard sufficient evidence to be cautiously confident that it will complete in time to ensure that a resilient quality management structure is in place for academic year 2014-15. As part of this process the College is establishing a cross-curriculum Higher Education Peer Panel to receive programme-level reports and contribute to the identification and dissemination of good practice. This Panel, which will become operational in September, has been the subject of detailed institutional-level planning and discussion.

4.2 The College has invested heavily in the creation of its Higher Education Centre; it has implemented an awarding body's Enhancement and Development Committee across most of its higher education provision with a view to increasing parity; its Higher Education Forum meets monthly, is attended by all staff with relevant responsibilities, and is charged with facilitating the sharing of good practice across awarding bodies and keeping staff abreast of national developments. Its college-wide staff development days constitute a further means of sharing good practice across further and higher education: the most recent such day was attended by over 60 per cent of higher education staff. These initiatives, while they stand to benefit from future systematisation plans, collectively constitute the structural embodiments of an enhancement ethos.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.3   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team found that the College's commitment to strengthening students' learning opportunities is well developed, and that this commitment is embodied in a range of institutional-level initiatives which are deliberate, planned and increasingly systematic. The College **meets** UK expectations for the enhancement of student learning.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Student employability is an institutional strategic priority, though achieving it by working systematically with employers to develop flexible and work-related higher education does not feature in its current Learning and Teaching Strategy or Assessment Policy. It is, therefore, afforded variable priority: some programmes use employers extensively to help ensure currency and relevance, but the fact that some do not does not necessarily result from conscious planning. The College acknowledges that employer involvement is a developing activity. The small number of employers who met the review team spoke warmly of their involvement with the College and of the possibility of closer future engagement (see also paragraph 1.6). The College also has yet fully to encompass and address its contribution to the promotion or developmental motivations of students already in employment.

5.2   Students confirm that employability is integral to most programmes; that assignments are generally vocationally appropriate; and that the College's engagement with local employers, in combination with a broad curriculum, enables them to explore familiar vocational possibilities as well as identify hitherto unconsidered ones. Students reported themselves well supported generally, but, consistently with a point made in the student submission, would like more help in sourcing work placements.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27-29 of the Higher Education Review handbook

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

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.

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

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.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.
See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

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* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

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

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

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that 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.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

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.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **subject benchmark statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

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