



Higher Education Review: Information for Governors

Higher education in colleges

Colleges are the primary providers of vocational education in England, and also have a crucial role in providing higher education (HE): (a) technical and professional education; (b) developing the higher skills base of local economies and (c) an access to HE role, often for adult 'second chancers'.

Of the 2.3 million higher education students in the UK, approximately 200,000 are studying in further education colleges. The higher education courses on offer in colleges range from higher national certificates and diplomas (HNCs and HNDs), to foundation degrees, bachelor's degrees and postgraduate qualifications.

Most of these courses are delivered in partnership between colleges and universities or Pearson, which awards most HNCs and HNDs. Some colleges have also gained the power to award their own foundation degrees.

External quality assurance of higher education

Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards and quality of UK higher education lies with those universities and other bodies who make the awards. To make sure these bodies discharge their responsibilities properly, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carries out reviews of awarding bodies against the Expectations described in a set of documents known as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

The purpose of the Quality Code is to:

- safeguard the academic standards of UK higher education
- assure the academic quality of learning opportunities that UK higher education offers
- promote continuous and systematic improvement in UK higher education
- ensure that information about UK higher education is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

You can more information about the Quality Code on QAA's website:

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

Quality assurance in further education colleges

As well as reviewing the bodies which make higher education awards, QAA also reviews further education colleges which deliver higher education courses. This review process is called Higher Education Review (HER). More information about HER can be found on QAA's website:

www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education.

HER is significantly different from some of the other external reviews which colleges take part in, such as those conducted by Ofsted. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that HER is a peer review process led by staff and students from other colleges and universities who are trained by QAA. HER also tends to focus on the management of educational provision, rather than delivery, on the principle that it is colleges themselves who are responsible, in partnership

with their awarding bodies, for the quality of what they provide to their higher education students. In contrast to Ofsted review, colleges receive several months' notice of a HER review visit to allow them to make suitable preparations.

Because awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for the awards they offer, reviews of colleges without foundation degree awarding powers focus on the responsibilities which awarding bodies delegate to colleges. In validation partnerships where the college has written - and will teach - the course, the majority of these responsibilities will lay with college. This means the Expectations in the Quality Code apply to all UK higher education regardless of where it is being delivered or who is delivering it.

Students are involved in HER throughout the build-up to the review and during the review visit. They have the opportunity to make a written submission to the review team alongside the self-evaluation presented by the college, and may nominate a lead student representative to help organise the visit.

How are HE quality matters reported to the Governing Body?

It is the responsibility of each college to organise its own reporting and accountability structures. To ensure strategic governor scrutiny of a college's HE provision, it may make sense to nominate a governor to have oversight of HE, working with the executive and college manager of HE. The governing body may also expect regular reports and updates on the college's HE provision - such as updates on strategic direction, enrolments, retention (non-continuation) and success rates. It is important that the governing body demonstrates a strategic approach to the college's HE provision.

Questions for governors to consider

Although college governors tend not to be directly involved in HER, there are lots of ways in which governors can support their colleges' preparations for review. An obvious place to start is to identify what mechanisms the corporation has to assure itself about the quality of the college's higher education provision, and then to consider whether these mechanisms are fit-for-purpose.

More specific questions for governors to consider may include:

- Does the college understand its responsibilities for standards, quality, information and enhancement of higher education?
- How are the Expectations in the Quality Code addressed by both higher education staff and senior leaders?
- How does the senior management at the college maintain effective oversight of its higher education?
- How does the senior management at the college act to enhance the quality of higher education?
- How is the higher education student experience monitored and evaluated?
- How are students involved in discussion around the quality assurance of their own higher education?

Further information and support

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): www.qaa.ac.uk
Association of Colleges (AoC): www.aoc.co.uk