



Quality Review Visit of Bournemouth and Poole College

March 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Bournemouth and Poole College

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at Bournemouth and Poole College.

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

Areas for development

The review team identified the following **areas for development** that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards. The review team advises Bournemouth and Poole College to:

- further clarify and identify to students the various policies which constitute the terms and conditions of their enrolment (Consumer Protection)
- ensure that College policies on complaints and appeals include explicit reference to awarding body and organisation processes in order to improve student understanding (Student Protection)
- clearly articulate to prospective and current students the College processes for course change or closure (Student Protection).

Specified improvements

The review team did not identify any **specified improvements**.

About this review

The review visit took place from 1 to 2 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Mike Ridout
- Mrs India-Chloe Woof (student reviewer).

The overall aim of Quality Review Visit is to:

- provide the relevant funding body with an expert judgement about the readiness of a provider to enter, or continue to operate within, the higher education sector.

Quality Review Visit is designed to:

- ensure that the student interest is protected
- provide expert advice to ensure that the reputation of the UK higher education system is protected, including the protection of degree standards
- identify development areas that will help a provider to progress through a developmental period and be considered 'established'.

Each review visit considers a provider's arrangements against relevant aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements, and in particular:

- the reliability of degree standards and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers
- the quality of the student academic experience, including student outcomes where the provider has a track record of delivery of higher education.

About Bournemouth and Poole College

Bournemouth and Poole College (the College) has delivered higher education provision for over 20 years and currently does so across two out of its three campuses. At the time of the review visit the College had 577 higher education students, of whom 306 were full-time and 271 part-time, and programmes include 10 full-time and 10 part-time courses across 14 subject areas.

The College's higher education provision is delivered on behalf of the following awarding bodies and one awarding organisation: Arts University Bournemouth, Bournemouth University, Southampton Solent University, University of Wolverhampton, and Pearson Education. The provision includes full honours undergraduate degrees, as well as levels 4 and 5 Higher National Certificates and Diplomas and foundation degrees. The College facilities available to higher education students include a STEM centre opened in 2013, a contemporary 136-seat Performing Arts Theatre, purpose-built dance studios and performance venue, a Digital Media Centre and new laboratories for health and medical sciences. The College has also recently created other new facilities such as a Financial Services Centre, Marine Technology Centre, the Enterprise Academy and the North Light Art and Design Centre.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)

1 The review team found that the College has in place arrangements that meet its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's requirements to ensure that the academic standards of the programmes offered meets or exceeds the UK threshold standard for the qualifications offered, as set out by the FHEQ.

2 Awarding bodies confirm that their course approval and validation processes and procedures are adhered to, and College academic staff explained clearly their understanding and use of the FHEQ. External examiners' reports confirm that programmes are comparable with those of other UK higher education providers.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

3 The review team found that the College has in place robust governance arrangements, which include a thorough and considered approach to risk management at all levels, and effective structures that enable clear oversight of academic governance.

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

4 The College operates within the arrangements of the memoranda of agreement with its awarding bodies and requirements of its awarding organisation. Partner institutions monitor and review compliance by the College through the link staff arrangements and reporting structures.

5 Academic standards are assured through external examiner arrangements and assessment and award boards. Reporting structures and processes are in place to review and monitor programme and student performance, including retention and achievement, and College staff demonstrated their understanding of these processes. The team found that the processes are effective and address any issues which might arise in a timely manner.

Rounded judgement

6 Through its governance structures, various internal processes and procedures, adherence to its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's regulations, and College staff demonstration of engagement with the FHEQ, the College has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards. The team has not identified any areas for development or specified improvements in this area.

7 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

8 The student academic experience is underpinned by close linkages with employers in both programme design and delivery, together with high levels of academic and pastoral support from academic and professional staff.

9 In addition, robust processes are in place to ensure the appropriateness of assessment and timely feedback of assignments. Processes are in place for students to feed back informally and formally on their experience and students cited examples of improvements that resulted from raising matters with the College. Students met by the review team confirmed the value of employer engagement, academic and pastoral support, and assessment within their studies. They also spoke positively of the opportunities for engaging with the College.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

10 The review team found that the College actively engages with its students across various levels of governance, from student representatives on the Board of Governors to Governors inputting to the student-led conference, alongside strategic consideration of student feedback data. The College governance structures also ensure effective oversight of student complaints.

Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met (Competition and Markets Authority guidance)

11 The College has a clear approach to admissions, with a dedicated policy and a range of detailed and informative literature which is provided to prospective students. Students at the College spoke positively about the information and guidance they received when considering study at the College, and felt well equipped to make an informed decision about their studies.

12 The review team examined information about terms and conditions, which are provided to students by the College at application and admission stages. The College's terms and conditions are constituted by the various higher education policies, which are made available to students via the College website. These policy documents include the bursary policy; complaints policy; equality, diversity and inclusion policy; and tuition fee payment policy, among other documents. The policies are not held together in a single document: there are currently several downloadable documents in PDF format, including policies that are specific to certain awarding bodies and therefore do not apply to all students, for example Bournemouth University student complaints procedure.

13 At admission stage, arrangements for informing students of the relevant terms and conditions are in place; however, there exists potential for confusion to arise. Prospective part-time students are asked to signal in writing that they have understood the relevant terms and conditions at application stage but no link is then made to the relevant policies pages of the College website. The link to the policies webpage is also made available to full-time students via the UCAS dashboard; however, no definitive list of which policies constitute the terms and conditions is provided.

14 At offer letter stage, information about the terms and conditions is provided to prospective students about the policies page of the College website and mention is made of awarding organisation regulations. At interview stage, staff verbally inform students of the terms and conditions; however, no training or explicit guidance is provided to staff about what should be covered within the interview regarding the explanation of terms and conditions of enrolment.

15 Students who met with the review team were unsure about what the terms and conditions of enrolment constituted or where they could be found, and while they did refer to the policy pages of the College website they were not certain which of the policies included there applied to them. Therefore, the review team found that there is potential for confusion on behalf of prospective and current students, in particular relating to which policies apply to which students.

16 The College is already undertaking work in this area, and has produced guidance that includes reference to work that is ongoing within the institution to ensure that terms and conditions are 'fair, accessible and unambiguous'. Further work in this area to collate the various policies to avoid ambiguity may be helpful for ensuring student understanding and avoiding confusion. Therefore, the review team identifies an **area for development** and advises the College to further clarify and identify to students the various policies that constitute the terms and conditions of their enrolment.

Student protection measures as expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) Principles of Good Administration, and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures

17 The College has received only four formal complaints from higher education students in the last three years, and both students and staff spoke positively of the open door policy that staff have in place, and the routes through which informal complaints can be resolved. Students are confident that they could talk to staff across all levels of the institution about any issues that may arise, including the Principal, who is available via direct text message; however, students were unaware of a formal complaints policy.

18 There is effective oversight of complaints when they do occur, through the College's Senior Leadership Team and governing body. This monitoring of complaints helps to ensure that the College uses the outcomes to improve the student experience.

19 The College has a single complaints policy with a clear process and timescales for complaints handling. The relevant awarding organisation and awarding body's policies are clearly outlined for students within student handbooks. Within the various responsibilities checklists, awarding bodies all state that they are responsible for complaints. The only reference within College documentation to an awarding body process is the Bournemouth University complaints policy, which is available on the policy webpage. The College policy makes no reference to awarding body or organisation arrangements, including Arts University Bournemouth, for which the College takes responsibility for student complaints.

20 To date, the College has never experienced an academic appeal and does not have a dedicated appeals policy. Students spoke positively of the work that the College undertakes to ensure that assessment criteria are clearly articulated and explained to students, alongside the informal resolution of any concerns students may have relating to an academic judgement. As the College does not have its own academic appeals policy, it endeavours to make its students aware of the processes they should follow by including detailed information within student handbooks about the relevant awarding body or awarding

organisation policy and how the process should be followed. Students are aware of the location of the appeals guidance; however, the lack of a central College policy and the differing partner requirements may have the potential to cause confusion for students.

21 The review team found that the College's current processes do not hinder students in making formal complaints or academic appeals; however, there is the potential for confusion among the student body. The approach to appeals, where there is no single policy in place and students are referred only to partner policies, differs greatly from the approach to complaints, for which the College has a dedicated policy that makes no reference within it to partner policies. This sets different expectations for students about how these matters are approached by the College and may hinder student understanding of the processes they should follow. The review team identifies an **area for development** and advises the College to ensure that College policies on complaints and appeals include explicit reference to awarding body and organisation processes in order to improve student understanding.

22 The College has experience of closing higher education courses, and provided evidence to show that there is a robust institutional approach to this process which involves extensive consultation and liaison with students. The College has a comprehensive Higher Education Course Closure Flow Chart, which College staff confirmed is put into practice when necessary, in liaison with the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation. This document includes reference to how students are consulted and kept informed as part of the closure process, and College staff and students clearly articulated their commitment to maintaining the high quality student experience and offering extensive support to students affected by closures. The flowchart document is made available internally to staff but not to prospective or current students. The College also made available the Bournemouth University programme approval, review and course closure policy; however, the College does not have an equivalent policy of its own.

23 The College liaises with students regarding material changes to courses, for example module changes or changes to teaching staff, and students spoke positively about how the College has liaised with them in instances where changes have occurred. Staff are also aware of the need to make students aware of such changes and were able to offer examples of how students are informed when changes to teaching staff and module choices do happen.

24 The College makes explicit reference within the offer letter that it supplies to prospective students to its right to alter programmes and programme units; however, no further detail is provided about how the College would approach this process or how students are involved. There is no specific reference made to what would happen in the eventuality of a course change or closure in the information provided to prospective students. Processes around course changes and closure are in place and have been used effectively but the information about these are currently only available to College staff. Students are made aware of these policies and procedures in advance of such changes but they are not made available at the time of the course offer. Therefore, the review team found that prospective and current students are unable to access information about what would happen in the event of a course closure. The review team identifies an **area for development** and advises the College to articulate clearly to prospective and current students the College processes for course change or closure.

Rounded judgement

25 The College has demonstrated through its various governance structures and internal policies and procedures that it meets all the baseline regulatory requirements in this area effectively. There are three areas for development in this area where either activity is

underway or there are minor omissions or inconsistencies. There are no specified improvements in this area.

26 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

QAA1921 - R9410 - Aug 17

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