Gateway Quality Review: Wales

Cardiff and Vale College

March 2019

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Cardiff and Vale College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Cardiff and Vale 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 at Cardiff and Vale College. The review team advises Cardiff and Vale College to:

- more clearly signpost the admission appeals procedure to prospective students (Consumer Protection)
- ensure additional costs for relevant courses are more clearly signposted for prospective students (Consumer Protection)
- further clarify to students the specific responsibilities of the College and those of the awarding bodies with regards to academic appeals (Student Protection).

Specified improvements

The review team did not identify any specified improvements.

About this review

The review visit took place from 11 to 13 March 2019 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Alan Howard
- Mr Conor Murray-Gauld
- Ms Elizabeth Shackels.

The overall aim of Gateway Quality Review: Wales 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.

Gateway Quality Review: Wales 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 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 Cardiff and Vale College

Cardiff and Vale College (the College) delivers further and higher education, and training across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. The College emphasises that it meets the needs of the communities it delivers to, as well as bridging the social mobility gap and raising aspirations by providing opportunities to learners from all backgrounds. Its mission includes delivering high quality education and training, outstanding results and excellent customer experience which is supported by the College values: inspirational, inclusive and influential.

The College's higher education provision is delivered on behalf of five awarding bodies: University of South Wales, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University College Birmingham, Kingston University and the University of West London. The College has an agreement with Swansea University but it is not delivering courses on behalf of this university. The programmes cover a broad range of subject areas including business, aviation and culinary arts and is delivered at two sites in Cardiff and Barry. The College had 528 higher education students.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1   The College has in place arrangements that meet its degree-awarding bodies requirements to ensure that the academic standards of the programmes offered meet or exceed the UK threshold standard set out by the FHEQ.

2   The College delivers programmes validated by five of its awarding bodies, which retain ultimate responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards. While most programmes are designed and franchised by its awarding bodies, the College is involved in review of existing awards leading up to revalidation and can make proposals for modifications to programmes. Programme specifications reflect the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. College staff articulate a sound understanding of their application and importance.

3   The College recognises its responsibility to maintain standards through assessment, including testing whether students have achieved the learning outcomes of modules contributing to an award. External examiners appointed to each programme by the awarding bodies provide assurance that academic standards meet the threshold standard, are appropriate for the level of study, and are comparable with similar programmes of other higher education providers. The award of credit is ultimately governed by the awarding bodies and their regulations.

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

4   The main reference point for the College in terms of academic standards frameworks is the FHEQ. However, all Welsh universities and colleges are also required to use the CQFW in aligning qualifications and allocating credit. Appropriate references to the CQFW are contained in programme specifications, module descriptors and handbooks, and staff were able to articulate its application in the maintaining of standards.

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' Code of Good Governance for English Colleges (AoC)

5   The College has effective governance arrangements, which allow it to have oversight of academic governance. The College's committee structure outlines the key higher education committees which include: the Quality and Academic Standards Committee (QASC), Quality Standards Board (QSB), Curriculum, Quality and Student Affairs Committee (CQSA), Learning and Teaching Committee, Senior Executive Team, and the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB). The membership of each committee will vary according to the term of reference but includes Programme Leaders, Heads of Department, Senior Managers, specific Governors and the Clerk to the Governing Body who has a specific role in monitoring committee work and keeping Governors appraised of key issues.

6   Following a review of the College's governance structures, four governors were recruited with higher education backgrounds, which provides the Governing Body a better understanding of higher education academic risk. The Vice Principal and Deputy Vice Principal for Curriculum and Academic Standards have strategic oversight of higher education provision. The Dean for Higher Education provides effective operational support including for the monitoring and delivery of provision in conjunction with Heads of Department.

7   The College has clear terms of reference for its higher education committees. Minutes and action of QASC flow into the HEAB committee, which meets five times a year, and the Chair of which is on the membership of the governing body, ensuring oversight of operational and strategic work relating to academic risk. This link determines the monthly conversation Governors have around curriculum and quality, for example the performance monitoring reports from QASC. The Chair of the Higher Education Academic Board also sits on the Audit Committee to ensure oversight of academic risk.

8   The College's governance arrangements are supportive in respecting academic freedom. The College recently appointed a Scholarship Leader who is responsible for higher education scholarly activity and reports directly to the Dean of Higher Education and sits on other higher education sub-committees. The appointment has been welcomed by staff in ensuring opportunities to develop staff, which include QAA training and Advance HE (previously Higher Education Academy) Fellows. Their responsibilities also include highlighting scholarly opportunities and organising the College's annual higher education conference to share best practice, where students and staff present.

9   The College has appropriate and effective arrangements to manage academic risk. It has a risk register, which is regularly reviewed and updated to include academic risk within higher education. The Governors and senior management consider and review the register throughout the academic year to inform action plans in their relevant areas. Academic risk is also considered through the higher education committee framework at the College where feedback from external examiner reports, monitoring key data sets such as NSS results and consideration of course and modular feedback, and the College's higher education survey provide opportunities for risk to be identified. The College acknowledges smaller numbers of students on certain courses pose unique risks around course viability and as such takes a proactive role in continuously monitoring student retention and progression.

10   The College embeds the Welsh Language Standards throughout the College. The approach has been driven from their Bilingual Language Strategy implemented and supported by the Governors and senior management and made aware to all staff.

11   The College confirmed that five Governors are Welsh speakers and highlighted its commitment to increasing incidental Welsh speaking. Governors also confirmed that they have been actively promoting Welsh speaking across the institution, mapping the College against the Welsh Language Commissioner's Welsh Language Standards guidance.

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

12   The College's higher education provision functions according to the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies, thus promoting the academic standards of awards and qualifications of each higher education institution.

13   There is a clear process for the approval and re-approval of programmes delivered by the College that follow the frameworks, regulations and procedures of its awarding bodies. Where changes to programmes are requested or new programmes proposed, the College has an internal process that is completed in collaboration with the Link Tutor of the relevant awarding body. Managerial oversight of any proposed changes rests with the Quality and Academic Standards Committee/HEAB.

14   The College carries out all assessments in accordance with assessment policies, regulations and processes of the awarding bodies and is informed by UK threshold standards, the FHEQ and the academic standards of the relevant awarding body.

15   College staff work effectively with the University Link Officers to ensure that the assessment and feedback strategies for its awarding bodies are implemented in accordance with the respective academic frameworks and regulations.

16   Formal approval is also sought from the external examiners on all assessments designed by the College. The College has an internal moderation process that verifies assessment decisions and Programme Boards are held to ratify marks. On completion of marking and feedback processes, samples of work are sent to the relevant awarding body for additional moderation. All assessments are ratified by the external examiner as outlined in the regulations of each awarding body. Programme Leaders together with the Dean for Higher Education attend annual exam board meetings with the respective university in attendance.

17   Staff provide developmental feedback on marked work and students were very positive about the information provided on assessments and the feedback offered to inform future learning. Students clearly articulated that work is marked in a timely manner and that they are effectively supported in their learning and development.

18   The College has developed its own Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) policy and procedure that aligns to the requirements of each awarding body. Students are effectively supported through the process. An Internal APEL Board is convened where all applications are discussed and ratified, and the relevant awarding body is informed of all decisions as appropriate. In future, the College will be producing an annual report on APEL candidates for the Governing Body.

19   The College makes good use of external examiner reports. Actions arising from the reports are incorporated into annual monitoring reports for awarding bodies and for College committee purposes. Students confirmed that external examiner reports are available for them to access on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and are discussed at Student Representative Meetings.

20   College Heads of Department provide the Senior Executive Team and Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee with a statistical analysis of performance for their respective area. Common themes emerging from these reports are incorporated into a College action plan which is then monitored by the Dean of Quality Improvement. This report is presented to the Higher Education Academic Board and the Quality Standards Board, a subcommittee of the Governing Body.

21   Departmental reports focus on academic standards and use key data such as retention, attendance, teaching and learning profiles, and NSS data. Annual monitoring reports also feed into these department reports that are received by the Executive Team, the Higher Education Academic Board and the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee. Annual monitoring reports are submitted to the awarding bodies for their scrutiny. This is evident through higher education self-evaluations that also take account of NSS data.

Judgement

22   The College's quality assurance arrangements are appropriate in enabling it to fulfil its responsibilities to its awarding bodies and organisations, and to align with the baseline regulatory requirements in the maintenance of academic standards.

23   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)

24 Arrangements for managing and monitoring the quality of the student academic experience through validation and course review processes are well embedded. Strategic aims are operationalised within the College's Higher Education Strategy action plan with clear objectives, timescales and key performance indicators. The College has a distinct higher education committee structure with defined terms of reference and clear reporting lines to senior management and the Governing Body. An annual monitoring procedure, developed by the College for its higher education courses, successfully interlinks with the requirements of its awarding bodies.

25 Effective use is made of data to monitor and improve the student academic experience. Student feedback is systematically sought through module evaluation questionnaires and the College's annual higher education survey. NSS data is analysed and an action plan produced. Reports, which include student feedback, retention and attendance data are considered at relevant committees. External input from industry is obtained and reflected upon in annual monitoring reports, alongside statistical data, external examiner reports and student feedback. Strong links with regional employers and industry are formalised through College employer boards.

26 The student voice is represented in committees, including at Governing Body level. Elected student representatives receive training and an online resource booklet providing information to support their role. Feedback and responses to issues raised are provided to the student body, including through posting 'You Said, We Did' announcements on the College's plasma screens and its VLE. Students may also participate in focus groups led by the Learner Voice and Inclusivity Coordinator and attend informal termly meetings with senior staff and governors. The Learner Charter outlines the College's commitment to involving students in decision-making processes.

27 The College's Admissions Policy outlines a fair, transparent and equitable approach to the recruitment of students. A linked Higher Education Admissions procedure sets out how both UCAS and direct online applications are processed by trained staff. Upon admission, students complete an induction, incorporating access to university regulations, the various College resources and information on student finance. All information is presented in Welsh and English. Mature students returning to education after many years praised the support and advice available to help them adjust to becoming learners again.

28 Suitably detailed information about their courses and the College is accessible to students on the VLE and in course handbooks, with content management of these overseen by Heads of Department. The College website has a dedicated higher education section, including course information sheets. Policies and procedures are accessible from the website and those relevant to higher education are available to students on the VLE.

29 Individual learner agreements and progress targets for each student are monitored and regularly updated by the course/personal tutor in discussion with the student. Class sizes are generally small, and students appreciate the opportunities this allows for interaction and tailored support. Students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning and assessment process and are well supported if they choose to study and complete work in the Welsh language. Additional academic support, such as sessions on the correct way to reference academic work, is provided by the College skills centre. The Well-being Team supports students with issues or situations affecting their engagement

or ability to study. Students may disclose support or additional learning needs, and arrangements are agreed and implemented in liaison between student services and course teams. Careers information and guidance is provided by employability advisers within the College. Students praise the range of support available and the easy access to tutors for advice and formative feedback.

30   Appropriate arrangements exist for the organisation and management of work-based learning, including compliance with health and safety requirements and support for students while away on placement. Responsibilities are well understood, and the processes involved are supported by the Employability and Progression Officer. Other work-related activities, such as performance workshops led by invited industry experts, and real work assignments, linking students with employers working on client briefs, enrich the student experience.

31   Current students express satisfaction with the quality of learning resources provided. A dedicated higher education hub provides space for interaction and private study. Higher education specific resources are provided in the library and students have access to a resource centre including IT facilities. Learning resources supporting module delivery are provided on the VLE. Students have access to the library at their awarding body university and, in some cases, the university's online resources. Resource matters are discussed at programme boards and the College is implementing a new Annual Higher Education Resources Plan, which is intended to further strengthen resource planning. Results of the latest (2019) annual student survey indicates good levels of student satisfaction with the provision of learning resources.

32   Teaching staff engage with a range of training opportunities, including higher education-specific activities such as subject-specific seminars and conferences. A number of staff are working towards, or have achieved, fellowship of Advance HE (previously the Higher Education Academy). Teaching staff may apply for internal funding to support activities and are well supported by the Higher Education Scholarship Leader. Regular Scholarship Committee meetings are held and staff are encouraged to contribute to the College's Higher Education Journal and annual Higher Education Conference. A recent periodic review report praised the genuine desire to develop and facilitate scholarly activity within the College.

The relevant code of governance

33   The College has effective governance arrangements in encouraging student involvement in academic governance. The College demonstrated its commitment to ensuring accurate representation of student voice and involvement in its governance structure through establishing a Higher Education Sabbatical Officer who is elected annually by students, sits on key College committees and is a member of the Governing Body. Additionally, there is a Learner Voice Coordinator whose role is to ensure student voice is reported at all levels of the College and act as a bridge communicating with students and staff. Students were positive about how staff encourage all students to feedback at appropriate times throughout the academic year, both formally and informally. The Learner Voice Coordinator also works with class representatives, including training on how to be an effective class representative supported by a Class Representative Role guide, which provides clear information about the role. The College uses qualitative and quantitative student feedback, such as NSS data, to form action plans which are ultimately considered at the Governing Body.

34   The College's governance arrangements ensure effective oversight of complaints and the security of students. Governors have an appropriate level of oversight of the College's Higher Education Complaints Log, which is managed by the Dean of Quality Improvement. The Log is reported at the Audit and Risk Committee on a regular basis, which is then reported by exception to the Governors if necessary.

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

35   Information regarding the College's higher education provision can be accessed electronically and in hard copy from the College higher education prospectus and from higher education programme leaflets. In addition, students can develop a personalised prospectus using an online tool, which is then sent to the student in hard copy the following week. The College also organises specific cross-campus events, such as Open Days, Progressions Week and designated Open Evenings to market its higher education provision, enabling prospective students to make face-to-face contact with Programme Leaders and admission staff.

36   The College admission process to higher education programmes is explained in the College Admission Policy and Procedure and in accordance with its agreements with its awarding bodies. The application process is consistent and clear regarding where responsibilities lie, as articulated by College staff. Oversight of the application and enrolment process rests with the Higher Education Recruitment and Marketing Group. Both academic and professional staff undertake regular training and are advised of their role to ensure that prospective students are provided with accurate and up-to date information such as changes to UCAS Tariff. Information is also provided to prospective students regarding application stages by the College admission staff.

37   Applications for both full and part-time programmes are either by direct entry or UCAS through the relevant awarding body. All admissions decisions are the responsibility of the relevant Programme Leaders assisted by recommendations from the admissions staff. Both full and part-time prospective students are guided via the website to complete an online application, which is received by the admissions staff and forwarded to the relevant Programme Leader. The Head of Higher Education Recruitment and Marketing Group is responsible for ensuring an efficient admissions process and works closely with Programme Leaders and higher education staff to ensure an effective admissions process is achieved. For example, the admissions staff respond to all internal and external queries within 48 hours.

38   Each Programme Leader is responsible for agreeing with the Admissions Team the entry criteria for their own programmes. The Dean of Learner Journey and the admissions staff will contact prospective students to discuss their eligibility for their programme. Staff confirmed that all applications are dealt with fairly and equitably in accordance with College procedures and guidelines relating to the admissions policy. Successful students are invited for interview with the Programme Team and will subsequently receive a conditional offer. Non-eligible or 'referred' students are counselled onto other appropriate programmes with an email indicating that they can appeal the decision through the College Complaints Procedure.

39   The College Admissions Appeals procedure is located within the College's Complaints and Compliments Policy. The College confirmed that 'referred students' could appeal admissions decisions once they receive a referral email. However, there is no explicit link or guidance taking students to the admissions appeals information contained in the Complaints and Compliments Policy. The review team consider as an **area for development** that the College more clearly signposts the admission appeals procedure to prospective students.

40   The sign off and approval for all marketing material rests with the Heads of Department. The online course information and Higher Education Guide contain a section with information about fees for different programmes. Both the Higher Education Recruitment and Marketing Group and Higher Education Registrar regularly monitor this information to ensure it is consistent and accurate and that the terms and conditions are

available. The review team identified inconsistencies regarding the accessibility of information around additional course costs on some programmes. College senior staff acknowledged some differences in where students could locate material information such as additional costs, however, they emphasised that prospective students were regularly communicated with during all stages of the admission process to ensure that they had been provided with relevant and up-to-date information. The College is close to launching its new website and increased scrutiny of the information published would ensure information is more consistent. The review team consider as an **area for development** that the College ensures additional costs for relevant courses are more clearly signposted for prospective students.

Student protection measures

41   The College provides students with a confirmation letter as part of its offer of a place to study, which states clearly its terms and conditions. This includes its policy on course closures, or information in the event that it may not run some courses. The policy also outlines its commitment to inform students of any changes to course viability as soon as possible. Any changes to courses are communicated to students via a letter. There is also a letter sent to students if a course does not run and it offers further opportunities to discuss this with the College.

42   The College confirmed that it has not failed to run a course and that it has abided by its commitment to the sector by receiving students from another course at another provider that failed to run. Senior staff also confirmed that they have a commitment to ensuring appropriate teach-out processes with its awarding bodies, as reinforced by their partnership agreements.

43   The College outlined its use of differing communication tools including letters and emails to students on any material changes to their courses. Students gave examples of when they had been consulted on changes to their course with opportunities for feedback and options on how to move forward with their studies. Students confirmed that the College's approach was appropriate and timely.

44   The College has a Complaints and Compliments Policy. This policy is communicated to students at induction and referenced by academic staff. It is located on the VLE, the College website, and is included in course handbooks. The timeline for appeals is outlined clearly within the documentation and is in-line with accepted standards across the sector. There are appropriate levels of escalation and staff confirmed that at the end of the process if a student was not satisfied, they could take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The Dean of Quality Improvement has overall responsibility for complaints and maintains a Complaints Log. The log records key information and outcomes of all complaints, both formal and informal, and also contains detailed case files. The Dean is also responsible for reporting the Complaints Log to QASC and to the Audit Committee, which provides appropriate assurance to governors.

45   The College encourages students to resolve complaints informally, first at the course level. However, if resolution is not found at this stage students are signposted to the Complaints and Compliments Policy, which outlines a clear process for staff to follow with appropriate levels of escalation. Staff confirmed that at the end of the process students would be given a final letter which they could present to the OIA if they were unsatisfied with the College's response. However, staff and students confirmed that to date this has not happened. Staff outside of course teams can also be consulted for further levels of scrutiny and independence if complaints are not resolved at the first stage. Governors are made aware of complaints but maintain their independence and impartiality from the original complaint should a student wish to pursue an appeal**.**

46   The College demonstrated outcomes of complaints, as well as student feedback more generally being used by staff to shape action plans and modify courses. This was demonstrated in the additional information in the Complaints Log and confirmed by staff, echoed by Governors and students who could identify clear changes to course content based on feedback and concerns raised.

47   The review team found that while the Complaints and Compliments Policy includes the process for appeals on admissions, the information could be made clearer to students at the time of which an offer was made, and this is advised as an area for development. The Complaints and Compliments Policy and student handbooks inform students that they should resolve any academic appeals with their relevant awarding body. While the College does explain the academic appeals process at student induction delivered by senior staff, students could not confidently explain the grounds for an academic appeal or what support they would receive from the College. Students were also not clear about where they would find the information regarding the awarding body's process and this is not clearly documented in the Complaints and Compliments Policy or easily found on the VLE. While the review team found the arrangements in place for handling academic appeals are sufficient and responsibilities are understood by staff, the review team considers an **area for development** for the College to further clarify to students the specific responsibilities of the College and those of the awarding bodies with regards to academic appeals.

Judgement

48   There are three areas for development in this judgement area around consumer protection and student protection, and they focus on the College making information more available and clearer to students. Greater accessibility to admissions appeals information and more clarity of additional costs is required within consumer protection, and further clarification to students of the College's responsibilities is needed regarding the academic appeals process. The areas for development address minor omissions or oversights, or updates to approaches which do not require major operational changes.

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

Commentary: Welsh Language Standards

50   Welsh Language Standards have been effectively promoted within the College through a Bilingual Strategy that demonstrates a high-level commitment to promotion of the Welsh language and has the commitment of Governors and the Senior Executive Team.

51   Thirty two Welsh speaking students were enrolled on higher education programmes in 2018-19 and students and staff commented positively on the commitment of Governors and senior management to provide opportunities to study in Welsh. Communications with prospective and current students are routinely provided bilingually in English and Welsh. The Welsh Language Standards are advertised around the College and students are informed of their rights in respect of studying in Welsh during their induction. The College has delivered continuing professional development sessions to staff focusing on how they can implement Welsh in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment, including lesson planning. All students have individual learning plans where targets are generated and monitored, and these plans are made available in Welsh. Students can submit assessed work in Welsh and the same process of academic integrity testing through plagiarism-detection software is followed.

52   Academic staff highlighted how the College's Bilingual Planning Group had been recently praised and rewarded for its efforts in promoting the Welsh Language with additional funding and a commendation from the Welsh Government.

53   Other examples of embedding the strategy include the College's appointment of a Welsh Language Coordinator and an annual schedule of student events with a Welsh language focus including a 'points mean prizes' activity.

54   The Governors are proud of their commitment to the Welsh Language Standards and confirmed that five of the Governors speak Welsh, which was a deliberate part of the recruitment strategy when the College restructured the Governing Body. It was explained how the Governors have prioritised at the strategic level, parity of the Welsh language across the College and noted that the Welsh Language Commissioner for Welsh Language Standards had written personally to the Chair of Governors to commend him and the College for its progress in embedding Welsh Language Standards at the College. The Governors also highlighted how the Bilingual Strategy has been a key underpinning document, which has influenced and shaped operational delivery of Welsh Language Standards across the College and ensured parity on signage, website, documents and learning resources.

55   The College's approach to Welsh Language Standards has been effectively embedded across all aspects of its provision and there exists a strong ethos and culture to promote the Welsh language that exceeds the compliance statement.