



# Quality Review Visit of Chesterfield College

October 2017

## Key findings

### QAA's rounded judgements about Chesterfield College

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **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 Chesterfield College. The review team advises Chesterfield College to:

- fully embed and evaluate the initiatives pertaining to its new higher education strategies to ensure that there is clear and distinguishable management and governance of higher education provision (Code of Governance).
- further develop and embed the culture and practice of higher education scholarship and pedagogy among staff who teach higher education (Quality Code).
- review its terminology related to all higher education so that it is consistent and clearly indicates that it is higher education (Quality Code).
- further develop its new strategies to ensure that the higher education student body is being represented by elected higher education students on the College's deliberative committees and governance bodies (Code of Governance).
- review its processes for checking the alignment of all of its policies and procedures with practice to ensure that they are cohesive and clear (Consumer Protection Obligations).
- review its webpages to ensure that the information thereon is well signposted and more easily accessible (Consumer Protection Obligations).
- improve the ways in which the College and its staff signpost students to the College's appeals and complaints procedures (Student Protection Measures).

### Specified improvements

The review team identified no **specified improvements**.

## About this review

The review visit took place from 17 to 18 October 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Gary Hargreaves
- Dr Clare Milsom
- Mr Conor Murray-Gauld (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 Chesterfield College

Chesterfield College (the College) is part of the Chesterfield College Group (CCG). The College offers provision in higher education, further education and apprenticeships. The College has 520 full-time equivalent higher education students, with the College's higher education provision taught at the College's main campus in Chesterfield or at the CCG Learning Unlimited campus in Derby.

The College's provision falling under the remit of the QRV consists of 29 higher education programmes delivered under validation and franchise agreements with the University of Derby, Sheffield Hallam University and Staffordshire University (the awarding bodies), and with Pearson (the awarding organisation). The provision is as follows: five foundation degrees, two bachelor's degrees and two taught postgraduate degrees awarded by the University of Derby; four foundation degrees and two bachelor's degrees awarded by Sheffield Hallam University; three foundation degrees and three bachelor's degrees awarded by Staffordshire University; and eight HNC/HND awarded by Pearson.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College works with three awarding bodies and one awarding organisation, who are responsible for assuring the quality and maintaining the standards of the College's awards. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation set the standards of the College's higher education programmes through the application of their own academic frameworks and regulations, to which the College adheres; the frameworks and regulations ensure that the academic standards of the programmes offered meet the UK threshold set out by the FHEQ.

2 The College's Agreements with its awarding bodies and annual contract with its awarding organisation outline the mechanisms by which the College ensures that standards are upheld and that the awarding bodies' and organisation's requirements are met. For the awarding bodies these include regular meetings with partnership managers, validation visits, periodic review and annual monitoring; in addition, the awarding bodies' Responsibilities Checklists for partners without degree-awarding powers outline assigned responsibilities for areas such as external examining, appeals and complaints and student engagement. The awarding organisation undertakes an annual redeclaration of its contracts with the College, with programme development and approval being the responsibility of the awarding organisation.

### 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 College's governing body (the CCG Corporation Board) works within the principles of good governance as outlined in the AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges 2015. The College's higher education provision is scrutinised by the Directorate Higher Skills Quality Meeting, the Research and Ethics Committee and by the Academic Progression Boards, all of which report to the Higher Skills Governance Board. The CCG Quality Calendar sets out the schedule and processes for reporting.

4 The College has in place effective arrangements for maintaining oversight of academic governance and risk, and for respecting academic freedom and collegiality. A comprehensive risk management policy operates at CCG level. While there is no specific register for higher education, higher education level risks appear in the Strategic Risk Register and in the Higher Skills Business Plan. Oversight of the Strategic Risk Register is by the Corporation Board and for higher education specifically by the College Higher Skills Governance Board, which is responsible for monitoring and alerting the College to risk at this level and for reporting to the Corporation Board.

5 The College has a new Higher Skills Strategy for Education, which is aligned with its Strategic Plan and which sets out the ambitions and ethos of the College. Expectations relating to academic freedom and collegiality are set out in the Higher Education Code of Conduct. The Code sets out the College's commitment to provide opportunities 'to discuss, demonstrate and undertake scholarly reflection in higher education'. Engagement in the Higher Education Code of Conduct is facilitated through staff development opportunities that focus on practice and professionalism. In meetings with the review team, staff demonstrated a clear commitment to meeting the expectations of the Higher Education Code of Conduct.

6 The CCG has recently put in place new strategies to facilitate governance and management of the College's higher education provision, including restructuring senior management, reorganising the College's curriculum and consolidating the College's higher education provision. Staff who met the review team reported that this has already begun to strengthen collegiality for staff and strengthen the higher education identity for staff and for students. These strategies are new for academic year 2017-18 and the review team therefore identifies this as an **area for development**. The review team advises the College to fully embed and evaluate the initiatives pertaining to the new higher education strategies to ensure that there is clear and distinguishable management and governance of higher education provision.

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

7 The College has effective arrangements in place with its awarding bodies and organisation to discharge its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. Across the College's higher education provision, the awarding bodies and organisation take primary responsibility for quality assurance. The respective responsibilities of the College and of the awarding bodies and organisation are outlined in the Agreements and in the awarding bodies' and organisation's Responsibilities Checklists for partners without degree-awarding powers. Oversight of programmes by the awarding bodies and organisation is by way of the Annual or Continual Monitoring Reports of the awarding bodies and organisation that the College is required to complete. Additional monitoring includes periodic review by the awarding bodies, the next of which is scheduled for 2019.

8 The College has its own internal procedures to assure the quality of its higher education provision. Processes include the use of student feedback and external reference points in both the creation and maintenance of programmes, and a 10-stage Course Approval and Validation process which takes place before the external validation of the awarding bodies. As part of the College's Higher Skills Strategy for Education, the College has introduced an annual monitoring cycle which consists of Annual Programme Review and Performance Management Review for all higher education programmes. The student voice is captured in Annual Programme Review through course evaluations.

9 Programme handbooks, which follow the templates of the awarding bodies, provide information on teaching, learning and assessment, including grading criteria and feedback, and signpost to the relevant awarding body's academic regulations, assessment regulations, and appeal procedures.

10 The College has suitable arrangements in place to test student achievement of the academic standards, including through the use of external examiners as stipulated by the awarding bodies. Assessments are written against learning outcomes, and appropriate criteria are set by College staff. These are monitored by the Academic Profile Board, Academic Progression Boards and by the examination boards of the awarding bodies. The Academic Profile Board and Academic Progression Boards inform the Quality Improvement Plans and the triannual Quality Impact Reports. Reporting on academic standards to the Corporation Board takes place through the Deputy Principal Higher Education via the Senior Management Team as part of the CCG meeting cycle.

11 Appropriate data are used at programme level and at College level to monitor academic standards. These include data gathered from students, for example from the National Student Survey. Data are considered in the planning and design of teaching and resources through the Course Approval and Validation process

## **Rounded judgement**

12 Overall the processes for the governance and quality assurance of higher education academic standards are effective and comparable with that of other providers. The review team identified one area for development and no specified improvements in this judgement area.

13 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.

## Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

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

14 The College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out the College's vision for teaching and learning. The College Leadership Team Performance Report ensures that there is a regular review of teaching performance and effectiveness. The Teaching and Learning Strategy incorporates the 'Student Pledge', which includes specific reference to the development of 'higher skills'. 'Quality Assuring the Learning Journey: Build your Future' sets out the College's approach to quality assurance of the student academic experience.

15 The College's Higher Education Admissions Policy sets out the processes and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission. These are transparent, consistent and fair and make reference to appeals regarding admissions decisions. The Policy is informed by priorities identified in the College's Strategic Plan and Higher Skills Strategy for Education and is aligned with the admission requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation. The Director of Higher and Adult Education is responsible for ensuring that the Policy meets College and awarding body requirements and the Curriculum Operations Manager is responsible for ensuring that all staff involved in the admission processes are trained appropriately.

16 The College has developed comprehensive datasets to support analysis of student achievement and to identify the impact of strategies to enhance student outcomes. Analysis of student retention and achievement data has identified the need to provide targeted support for higher education students, for part-time students, and for male students on specified programmes, for example. As a result, the Learning Resources Centre has introduced study skills sessions specifically for higher education students: online research, writing skills, critical thinking, referencing, and plagiarism.

17 The College has recently reorganised its higher education curriculum to consolidate its 'Adult' and other higher education provision, with the majority of higher education teaching having been moved to the main College campus in Chesterfield, in order to deliver a stronger higher education student voice and to increase financial sustainability. A new role of 'Higher and Adult Education Support Coordinator' has been established to strengthen management of higher education student learning. In addition, the College has introduced dedicated support for higher education part-time students.

18 The College has seen below-benchmark student satisfaction among its part-time higher education students. The review team is satisfied that this does not present any risk to student academic experience as the College has already put in place measures to ensure there is targeted support for part-time higher education students. This includes induction days that focus on services and support for part-time students and held in the evenings so that part-time students can more easily attend, targeted bursaries and financial information, and study skills sessions held in the evenings so that part-time students can more easily attend. The College has used analysis of information from student surveys and consultations to begin the process of providing an equitable experience for its full and part-time higher education students, and to work towards lessening the achievement gap. The College expects to be able to report on the outcomes of these measures at the end of academic year 2017-18.

19 Staff who met the review team reported that excellence in higher education teaching is being fostered through a teaching observation process, supported by the new

'Improving not Proving' Strategy, which identifies areas of positive impact and areas for further consideration. The Strategy details four strands of teaching observation, namely standard observation, short focus observation, peer observation and learning walks. The review team found that staff are fully engaged in the new teaching observation process, with staff who met the review team commenting on the potential of the process to facilitate sharing and developing of best practice. In 2016, the College also introduced an internal annual conference for staff that lecture in higher education, the Higher Skills Symposium. All staff teaching solely in higher education have a recognised teaching qualification or are working towards one. Students reported in the Student Submission that teaching on higher education programmes is not always distinct from teaching on further education programmes. Students who met the review team commented that this is being addressed. The review team identifies this as an **area for development** and advises the College to further develop and embed the culture and practice of higher education scholarship and pedagogy among staff who teach higher education.

20 Related to areas highlighted for development covered in paragraphs 6 and 19, the review team found that the terminology used by the College to describe its higher education provision is inconsistent and lacks currency. This occurs in the titles of documents such as strategies, policies and procedures, and in titles of job roles. Specifically, the use of 'adult education' and 'higher skills' in many places, rather than 'higher education', is misleading. The review team consider that this could be confusing for students and potential students, and that it does not support the strong and cohesive higher education culture that the College is trying to embed. The review team therefore identifies this as an **area for development** and advises the College to review its terminology related to all higher education so that it is consistent and clearly indicates that it is higher education.

21 There is a structure in place for higher education student representation at programme level, with course representatives elected for each programme, and there is a schedule of higher education events set across the academic year, including staff meetings at which students are invited to be a part. The student voice is captured through surveys such as the student experience survey, end of year higher education survey; National Student Survey, course evaluations, online forums, and the Student Parliament.

**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**

22 The CCG has recently reorganised its senior management structure and introduced new strategies to facilitate a greater focus on the governance and management of the College's higher education provision and to strengthen higher education student identity. The review team heard that higher education student representation at programme level is in place, though found that representation of the higher education student body by higher education students in the College's deliberative committees and governance structures is an area that requires development. Currently, the Students' Union President sits on most of the College's deliberative committees and governance bodies but is a further education student, and the review team therefore found that the higher education student voice is not being heard and recorded as well as it might in the College's deliberative committees and at governance level. The review team identifies this as an **area for development** and advises the College to further develop its new strategies to ensure that the higher education student body is being represented by elected higher education students on the College's deliberative committees and governance bodies.

23 The College has processes in place for the monitoring of complaints. Complaints are reported to the Student Services Team or Secretariat and logged centrally in a register. The procedures for logging and dealing with complaints is compliant with OIA requirements

and is a staged process with clear descriptions about what to do at each stage, including escalation to the awarding bodies. Complaints are reviewed annually and an annual report, which details the number of complaints, is submitted to the Senior Management Team and Corporation Board. The annual report also feeds into the Quality Impact Reports. All cases of informal and formal appeals and complaints are checked by the Academic Profile and Assessment Boards that are held twice each academic year.

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

24 The College's policies and procedures in relation to consumer protection obligations are cited in the provider submission and staff who met the review team were familiar with them. The College has internal procedures for the sign-off of its own information and works with its awarding bodies in the sign-off of the information related to recruitment and admission and the course and programme handbooks. The College's 'Fees and Refunds Policy' states that students will be held responsible for paying fees for all resits and does not mention mitigating circumstances. Staff interviewed by the review team said this was incorrect and that in practice the Assessment Regulations of the awarding bodies regarding mitigating circumstances would always take precedence over the Fees and Refunds Policy. The review team identifies this omission in the published information and lack of alignment with practice as an **area for development** and advises the College to review its processes for checking the alignment of its policies and procedures (and those of the awarding bodies) with practice to ensure that they are cohesive and clear.

25 The review team found that much of the information available to prospective students, students and the public on the College website was very difficult to find, and this was echoed by the students who met the review team. The review team therefore identifies this as an **area of development** and advises the College to undertake a review of its webpages to ensure that the information on these is well signposted and more easily accessible.

### **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**

26 The College has its own established complaints processes and academic appeals are handled directly by the awarding bodies and organisation, with the procedures for appeal being signposted in programme handbooks. Policies and procedures for complaints are accessible via the website, virtual learning environment (VLE) and programme handbooks. Staff who met the review team described the processes by which students could make a complaint, and stated that information on complaints is provided to students in the student handbooks and is covered as part of the induction days at the beginning of term. The review team heard that staff work to resolve issues at course level informally by way of teaching staff picking up on issues as well by feedback from students.

27 The students who met the review team were not aware of how to access the procedures for appeals and complaints, and had not remembered this being covered in induction. When asked, students were unclear about what steps they would take if they wanted to make an appeal or complaint, other than to speak to their lecturer or tutor. None of the students the review team spoke with had received signposting to the procedures from any of the staff they had had occasion to complain to. Staff who met the review team stated that the procedures are available to students through the VLE, though said the College recognised that communication with students could be improved, especially regarding

complaints and appeals. The review team therefore identifies this as an **area for development** and advises the College to improve the ways in which the College and its staff signpost students to the College's appeals and complaints procedures.

28 Staff who met the review team cited examples of how the College involves students in material changes to courses and how this is communicated to them. Students and staff who met the review team discussed involvement in the creation of a new course in digital media in 2016, and how this changed student options by creating a new higher education course that students had reported they wanted to study. Staff who met the review team spoke of how the College had worked with the awarding organisation when an engineering programme was changed by the awarding organisation from one type of qualification to another to ensure that students could adjust to the changes.

29 No students who met the review team were on a teach-out programme. The College's Teach-Out Agreement outlines the responsibility of staff in ensuring that students who commence a programme have the opportunity and resources to complete it or to transfer to another programme. Staff who met the review team stated that all communications regarding teach-out come from the awarding body or organisation in the first instance, with day-to-day detail being communicated to students by the College.

## **Rounded judgement**

30 The College has in place policies and procedures for the governance and the quality management of the student academic experience that are effective, and policies and processes are in place to ensure that consumer protection obligations and student protection measures are met. The review team identified four areas for development and no specified improvements in this judgement area.

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

**QAA2103 - R9846 - Mar 18**

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