



Gateway Quality Review: Wales

Coleg Cambria

May 2019

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Coleg Cambria

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Coleg Cambria.

- **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 Coleg Cambria. The review team advises Coleg Cambria to:

- review and improve the accessibility of terms and conditions for all students at key stages of the admission process, including the Pearson provision (Consumer Protection).

Specified improvements

The review team did not identify any specified improvements.

About this review

The review visit took place from 14 to 15 May 2019 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Peter Hymans
- Penny Renwick
- Sarah Bennett (student reviewer).

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 Coleg Cambria

Coleg Cambria (the College) was established in August 2013 as a result of the merger of Deeside College and Yale College. It operates across five campuses and has a total of over 12,000 students (423 of whom were studying higher education programmes in 2018). Coleg Cambria delivers further education, adult learning, apprenticeships, work-based learning, school link programmes, and higher education. Only the higher education programmes fall within the scope of this review.

This will be the first Quality Assurance Agency Review for Coleg Cambria. Currently its foundation degrees and degrees are franchised through its University partners and it has course specific designation for its Pearson programmes. Partnerships currently exist with Aberystwyth University, Swansea University, Liverpool John Moores University, University of Chester, Glyndŵr University, and 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 staff have a good understanding of the FHEQ requirements. The partnership agreements between the College and its awarding bodies all state that the latter are responsible for the establishment of academic standards. The College was involved in the development of some programmes, including the FdSc Offender Management, Criminal and Social Justice with College staff working alongside awarding body staff. During this process the university staff ensured that the academic standards were in alignment with the relevant descriptors from the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement prior to a validation event at the University. Employers were also consulted during the writing of the programme. For Pearson programmes, the awarding organisation is entirely responsible for establishing the academic standards of the programme.

2 The College has recently developed an internal form for HE course approval, which should be submitted to the HE Steering Group, as it is responsible for the strategic management of the higher education strategy. The form is due for approval after discussion with the Principal and covers issues related to the demand for the course and resourcing, but does not cover academic standards.

3 Some of the programmes on offer at Coleg Cambria are bespoke to local industries including construction and aeronautical engineering. In these cases, the College benchmarks its programmes by accrediting them with the relevant professional bodies and UK skills standards.

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

4 Coleg Cambria states that the programmes it offers fit the HE pillar within the CQFW framework and that all eight high-level principles are adhered to when developing programmes. It also states that particular care is taken when working with English universities to ensure the eight principles and the common values of learning outcomes, levels and credit values are adhered to. Staff the review team met stated that the FHEQ is aligned with the CQFW and that staff cross-referenced and mapped the CQFW across its programmes, although this was not recorded.

5 Credit accumulation and transfer arrangements for programmes that align with CQFW standards are the responsibility of the awarding bodies through their accreditation of prior learning policies and procedures. As the credit arrangements for both FHEQ and CQFW are aligned, the procedures cover both frameworks. Only one request for credit transfer between programmes has been made and the College is working with the awarding body to ensure that credit is transferred within the programme regulations.

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)

6 Effective arrangements are in place for the maintenance and oversight of academic governance. The College governing body meets every month and comprises 20 members, including representatives from business, and the local community, members of College staff, student governors and the Chief Executive. The Governing Body follows the seven elements

of good governance set out in the Code of Good Governance for Colleges in Wales (Colegau Cymru) and maintains oversight of HE using a variety of methods, including reviewing and discussing regular reports relating to student progression data, performance outcomes and HE provision. The Governing Body is led by the Chief Executive, the Chief Operating Officer and the Principal, who are supported by the senior management team.

7 The HE Steering Group oversees higher education provision, which is responsible for the strategic management and implementation of the HE Strategy. The HE Steering Group can make recommendations to the senior management team, the Board, and subcommittees of the Governors as required. In accordance with the Code of Good Governance for Colleges in Wales, the Governing Body uses a variety of ways to meet with staff and employers, including learning walks and meetings with link governors. In meetings with the review team, representatives from the Governors felt that this arrangement provided them with an effective oversight of higher education provision at the College.

8 The College's Risk Register, which includes both further and higher education provision, is managed by the Risk Management Group: potential risks are reviewed and categorised in a colour-coding system using the College's Strategic Plan. The Risk Register is reviewed termly by the Audit and Risk Committee, or more frequently if needed, and reported to the Board of Governors regularly for analysis and approval.

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

9 Partner universities take responsibility for the setting of academic standards through programme development and there is shared responsibility for the maintenance of those standards, as set out in the memorandum of understanding, through the articulated allocation of responsibilities. The College has partnership agreements with the five HEIs that it works with, which outline responsibilities clearly. Staff the review team met had a clear understanding of how they work with their partners to jointly ensure that the academic standards for the College's qualifications are maintained.

10 Assessment policies are developed by the University partners and in the case of Pearson Higher Nationals, they have been developed by the College in adherence to Pearson regulations and guidance. Programme and module specifications set out clearly the academic level and learning outcomes of assessed modules. Assessment tasks are aligned to the learning outcomes. The College draws on Pearson subject specialists for support regarding assessment, and internal moderation processes are clearly documented. For franchised programmes the standards are set by the partner University. In some cases, the College uses the assessments set by the University. In other cases, the College will write the assessments and the University will verify them before they are issued. University partners provide support through informal and formal visits, and meetings including Joint Boards of Study and a moderation/cross-marking process. The students the review team met reported that expectations in assessment are set out clearly and that marking is closely aligned to the intended learning outcomes and to explicit grading criteria. The College uses internal moderation together with moderation by the relevant university partner to ensure students achieve the appropriate standards in assessment. Marking is supported by the use of a feedback matrix. Standards achieved by students are verified by external examiners appointed by University partners and/or Pearson. The College uses feedback from external examiners to assure itself that appropriate assessment arrangements are in place. As part of the quality cycle the HE Partnerships & Compliance Manager produces a composite report that is considered by the HE Operations Group. Detailed actions are taken in response to external examiner feedback, as evidenced from annual monitoring reports.

11 The Governing Body strategically uses data to gain an oversight of course health and uses this to triangulate with other softer measures such as meetings with students. The Link Governor has an important role in providing the Board with a detailed understanding of the data. Additionally, the College maps internal surveys to the NSS and this data is considered by the Board. Through its annual monitoring report and quality improvement plan the College monitors completion, attainment and success rates of students. All these measures have recorded high rates and all are on an upward trajectory. The HE Operations Group monitors in-year progress data through the HE quality improvement plans. At HE Programme Monitoring meetings, student attendance and retention data are closely scrutinised. College staff use a data dashboard to monitor student progress at programme and strategic levels.

Judgement

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

13 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)

14 Coleg Cambria has rigorous processes for managing and monitoring the quality of the student academic experience. Annual monitoring reports are developed by the academic team between September and November for each programme and presented to the HE Operations Group for approval. Once approved these are sent to the University. Programme teams attend the partner boards of study where these are discussed.

15 The College's annual monitoring report, produced in December, draws together the programme annual monitoring reports, identifying themes for college-wide enhancement through the identification of common issues and areas of good practice. Teaching and learning has been identified as a theme for enhancement from the current report and this is being addressed through a number of actions, including a College-wide Teaching and Learning Conference in July 2019. The annual Higher Education Conference had the theme of assessment in 2018 as this was identified as an area for enhancement through the annual programme monitoring process.

16 Student satisfaction with teaching and learning is monitored through analysis of student attendance and retention, module evaluation surveys and programme-level student satisfaction surveys. The latter two are also used to enhance provision at programme and College level through the identification of cross-cutting themes. Module evaluations are used by tutors to aid reflection for continuous improvement and these are shared with students and awarding partners. Staff-student forums are held twice per year either with the partner universities or internally.

17 The College has developed an effective quality assurance and enhancement cycle supported by an annual calendar of quality and enhancement activities as well as a framework of process and procedures that clearly identify its own and the University partner responsibilities. The Enhancement policy is very clear on how enhancement is achieved. Data is gathered for consideration by the HE Operations Group, the HE Steering Group and the Joint Boards of Study. The outcomes of this consideration inform annual monitoring reports and quality improvement plans.

18 The HE Student Charter articulates student responsibility for their own learning and availing themselves of the resources available. This is emphasised during induction. Students are supported as well as challenged through their personal tutorials to make good progress in their learning through taking advantage of the many opportunities the College offers, for example Welsh programmes, digital literacy qualifications, numeracy and literacy skills development and qualifications, competitions, work placements and workplace projects.

19 The decision for all HE students to have a personal tutorial of one hour per week was agreed at a senior management team meeting in 2017. Staff were reminded about this at the April HE Operations Group meeting. Through the use of individual learning plans (ILPs) students are encouraged to track their progress against individual learning targets. Use of ILPs is currently optional for HE students and while this is well developed in some areas it has not been universally adopted by all students. If not using the College ILP software then an equivalent process should be followed for all students from September 2019. As part of this it was agreed that all students, including part-time, would get one hour per week of tutorial time.

20 The College is highly effective at collecting and responding to student feedback. Student satisfaction with teaching and learning is monitored through module evaluation surveys and programme-level student satisfaction surveys. The latter two are also used to enhance provision at programme and College level through the identification of cross-cutting themes. Although the College does not participate in the NSS it carries out its own survey of HE students with questions worded similar to the NSS in order that it can benchmark its provision. Outcomes of the HE learner survey are considered by the HE Operations Group and monitored at Board level.

21 Students are kept informed of the actions taken as a result of their feedback by the inclusion of a 'You Said, We Did' paper at HE student forums. Actions taken included support for referencing, support from library services with additional in-class sessions having taken place, and upgrading of library resources across sites including the creation of HE areas within library spaces.

22 Oversight of resources for HE courses is the responsibility of the HE Operations Group, which has within its remit the responsibility for student services, self-assessment, quality monitoring, enhancement and student support. Minutes of meetings of the Group show clear consideration of issues relating to learning resources and support.

23 The College has invested heavily over the last three years to support the development of higher education. Some of this was spent on staff development and teaching and learning resources and the remainder has been invested in developing new higher education spaces including the Engineering University Centre, the Access & HE Centres at Deeside and Yale and the Northop Business School. HE students also benefit from the new Engineering Technology Centre at Bersham Road. Students stated that resources were of a high standard, although in some areas more advanced equipment was required.

24 In order to teach on a HE programme, staff need to have at least a first degree or equivalent and a teaching qualification. Staff CVs are verified by the Director for Quality and Higher Education before submission to the awarding institution and are then formally approved by the awarding body or Pearson. Where changes are made to staffing the CVs are submitted to the University for approval prior to staff teaching on that programme. In the case of Pearson programmes staff changes are approved by the Director for Quality and Higher Education. The College supports staff to attain degrees and teaching qualifications to enable them to deliver at HE level and also supports the acquisition of the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education and master's level qualifications. The College engages with Advance HE with staff attending development activities and it also supports staff in gaining both associate fellowship and fellowship of Advance HE.

25 The College's Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy provides a good framework for building excellence in teaching. As part of the strategy, HE staff participate in a Peer Observation process which enables the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. Additionally all HE staff are formally observed at least annually as part of their appraisal and development, with a composite observation report being considered at HE Operations Group.

26 The College invites employers to an Employer's Focus Group three times per year. Minutes of the June 2018 meeting show that it was well attended with a part of the agenda specifically related to HE.

27 Information about the College's higher education programmes including fees, support, facilities and resources is made available to stakeholders through the College website, the HE intranet, a printed prospectus, offer letters and the virtual learning environment. The website is attractive, but not all the information is easy to access, for example terms and conditions are under the link 'Why Cambria?'

28 The HE Partnerships and Compliance Manager has responsibility for overseeing the development of College policies, staff, and student facing information. Policies are developed by the member of staff responsible for the area and considered at the Higher Education Operations Group and then approved by the Board of Governors. Neither the HE Operations Group nor the HE Strategy Group has explicit responsibility for the consideration or approval of HE information within their remits. Students are not routinely consulted during the development of new policies or procedures. Marketing information is approved by the Head of Marketing before publication or placement on the website. Information to be published on the website is managed by the Deputy Director for the area and a new course information form has been developed for completion by Programme Leaders for submission to the Marketing department when updating the website. In practice the HE Partnerships Manager has the responsibility for monitoring all HE information and ensuring that it is updated as necessary.

29 Recently the College has developed a Document Development Flowchart in April 2019. The flowchart provides clear information on the steps to be taken when developing documents including equality impact assessment and translation into Welsh language and the role of the Board of Governors in final approval of policies and procedures. The flowchart has been shared with staff but has yet to be fully implemented.

The relevant code of governance

30 The College has satisfactory governance arrangements in place to ensure that student complaints are effectively addressed, and the welfare of students is secured. Responsibility for managing feedback and complaints is delegated to the College's Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Principal, who are accountable to the Governing Body, with the final outcome signed off by the senior post holder.

31 Student complaints and feedback are reviewed regularly to improve College services and identify changes that may be required. This data is published quarterly in a report, detailing outcomes, trends, and actions taken. The report is routinely passed on to the College Governing Body, and includes statistics relating to resolution details and the time taken to resolve complaints.

32 Although the College has taken steps to encourage student involvement in academic governance, and there is evidence of supported student membership of committees, including two nominated further education (FE) Student Governors, it was acknowledged that there is a lack of student representation at HE level. The Lead Student Representative for higher education met the review team and has a clear understanding of his role, communicating HE student's interests to the two FE Student Governors on the Board. The review team recognise that the student voice process is currently under review, with the aim to develop a formal mechanism of reporting between the HE student reps, and FE Student Governors, in order for the HE student voice to be involved in all areas of academic governance.

33 The College has a range of student support services in place for safeguarding students and student welfare. Information regarding student support is provided in the HE Student Charter and on the College website, and includes signposting to the College Safeguarding Team. Students the team met were all aware of the support services available to them, in addition to how to make an appeal or complaint.

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

34 The College is responsible for the recruitment of all HE students and for the admissions of all HE students except those applying for Aberystwyth or Swansea programmes. The College does not have its own admissions policy but relies on those of its HE partners and works to an HE Admissions Procedure and HE Admissions Process Map, that are the responsibility of the HE Partnership and Compliance Manager and approved by the HE Operations Group; this supports clearly documented procedures for each partner and consistent and transparent procedures. Applicants for Pearson programmes follow a documented Pearson Franchise Admission Process and apply directly. Successful applicants are issued a standardised offer letter that is in English and Welsh. There is a College policy to inform the application process for international students. The students the review team met reported positively on their admissions experiences, which were tailored to the needs of the individual and their employment context.

35 The College produces a Degree and Professional Development Prospectus. This includes information about each of the courses and about the validating partners. Information on course content, progression and duration is provided. Where available, bursary information is provided, but fee information is not included. Course information is also available directly from the website: this information is more detailed and includes some information on matters such as fees and additional course costs. For example, a kit list is provided for the Animal Management programme. The review team notes that information concerning the need for a DBS on the Early Childhood Studies Course is given on the website, but not in the prospectus.

36 The College uses the terms and conditions of the University partners for their provision. For Pearson provision, the College maintains it uses Pearson guidance in the provision of a Learning Contract. However, this document does not sufficiently set out terms and conditions. The Learning Contract acts as a signpost to information the students will have been provided with previously, such as initial advice and guidance including course details and alternative course options, entry requirements, opportunities for further progression, time and financial commitment required to complete the course(s) and any financial or other support, which might be available, and information about entitlements and the College Code of Conduct. A Learner Agreement provides opportunity to set out entry requirements and signals that a DBS check may be required for some courses.

37 The staff the review team met advised that students can find information about terms and conditions at the pre-application stage on the website; that they are further informed at interview and at the offer stage in the offer letters from partner HEIs. Additionally, this information is in student handbooks. The review team found that the terms and conditions of University partners can be accessed from the website but they are difficult to find. Offer letters for University programmes are made by the University with their terms and conditions attached. The College offer letter for Pearson students provides a link to the College website and to the Learning Contract, but this contract does not unambiguously set out terms and conditions. The Student Handbook, while detailed and helpful does not specifically mention terms and conditions. The students the team met were largely continuing students who understood College requirements and felt they had sufficient information. Other students reported finding the required information from a variety of sources.

38 The review team concludes that terms and conditions are not easily located or accessible and that students are not always exposed to clear unambiguous information about terms and conditions. The review team considers it an **area for development** for the College to review and improve the accessibility of terms and conditions for all students at

key stages of the admission process, including the Pearson provision (Consumer Protection).

39 The College subscribes to the OIA. University partners are informed about any complaints regarding their provision. The College Complaints Policy is comprehensive and allows feedback and complaints from anyone affected by College Services including applicants. This policy is accessible from the website. An induction checklist has been developed and includes a reference to a complaints procedure. The review team noted that the Student Charter does not make specific reference to a complaints procedure. However, students that the review team met were all clear about how they could make a complaint and emphasised the importance of talking with tutors or using their student reps to resolve matters quickly.

Student protection measures

40 The College Feedback and Complaints Policy is available to students, staff and prospective students on the College website, on the College VLE and signposted to students at induction. The HE complaints policy is based on guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). It details agreed timescales, procedures and who to contact regarding complaints and appeals. There is a separate formal policy for academic appeals for students on HE programmes, which also provides links and directs to the academic appeals of each awarding partner.

41 Complaints procedures are conducted in accordance with pre-agreed timescales, which are clearly detailed in the College policy. For example, complaints will be acknowledged within three working days and a response given within fifteen working days at the investigation stage. Appeals will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt. Similarly, the College Academic Appeals Policy is written in line with the Quality Code, *Chapter B9*, stating that the process for students to make an academic appeal will be fair and ensure completion as soon as is reasonably possible. Students who the review team met were all aware of how to make a complaint or submit an academic appeal, indicating that in the majority of cases complaints could be resolved informally.

42 Details regarding course closures, or issues regarding revalidation of previously approved courses, are available in the College HE Prospectus, which is available on the College website and in the Student Charter for HE students. The prospectus details that courses listed on the College website are based on the accreditation of the prior or current version of the course, and any updates or changes to the course will be made as soon as the College is aware. Should courses not be accredited as planned, or unanticipated delays or changes are made, students would be informed by the University and the College would take steps to contact students directly. To ensure continuity for students the College would work with the awarding body, and staff the team met described how support would be provided to students who had been offered a place to find either a suitable alternative course, or an alternative provider.

43 In summary, the College demonstrates an effective approach to the management of complaints and academic appeals. Although the College has yet to experience a course closure or change to an advertised programme, the College would take steps to actively inform and support students during the process.

Judgement

44 There is one area for development in this judgement area around consumer protection that requires the College makes information more available and clearer to students. Greater accessibility to terms and conditions is required within consumer

protection, particularly for students choosing to study Pearson provision. The area for development addresses a minor omissions or oversight, or updates to approaches which do not require major operational changes.

45 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

46 The College takes its responsibilities for Welsh Language Standards very seriously. There is a Head of Corporate Communications, Welsh Language and International who reports directly to the Chief Executive. Adherence to the Welsh Language Standards is monitored by the Head of Welsh Bilingualism, and compliance is assured through the Governing Body. The Board of Governors receives a Welsh Language Compliance Report and compliance in meeting the Welsh Language Standards is one of the five main College objectives as set out in the Public Good Statement. The extension of Welsh Language opportunities is a Board priority. At its November 2018 meeting the governors' attention was drawn to their statutory obligations, along with the progress achieved on the College's delivery of its Welsh Language Strategy and bilingual opportunities within the region. Particular reference was made to the number of students who chose to study at the College after previously attending Welsh medium schools in the area, and that there could be further opportunities to offer Welsh medium provision to these students. The Welsh Language Standards are published on the website and attention is paid to them in the College Risk Register. The Standards are supported by a Welsh Language Policy. A key aim in the HE Plan to support the Public Good Statement is to increase the number of learners studying some or all of their programme through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in line with College FE. An annual report on Welsh Language Standards implementation is published on the College website.

47 Almost all information and written communication is bilingual, including the website and all promotional material. The HE Admissions Procedure makes clear that communications received in Welsh, or any other language, will be treated no less favourably than those in English.

48 A commitment for the provision of Welsh medium services as set out in the College's Welsh Language Scheme is set out in the HE Student Charter. Applicants are asked about their Welsh language skills and whether they wish to be taught through the medium of Welsh. The Welsh language is actively promoted to the student body as a workplace skill and there are opportunities for students, staff and governors to develop their language skills, including higher level skills to master's level. The College delivers Welsh Language units as part of English-medium vocational courses at all College sites with a Welsh language tutor delivering alongside subject specialists. The College works in partnership with local Welsh medium and bilingual schools to improve the bilingual offer.

49 Staff reinforce the importance of the Welsh language, using greetings in class as an informal opportunity. More formally, evening classes are held and 20-30 students from across the College are engaged with these. Currently, 24 per cent of students are bilingual. Students can elect to be taught in Welsh through translation services and the team were told of one student while being taught in English, has chosen to submit all of their assessed work in Welsh. The students met spoke positively about how staff raise awareness of Welsh and about the opportunities to be taught and assessed in Welsh. They were also aware of the opportunity to take language classes, though none of the students met had taken this up. Opportunities are promoted via Google Classroom, on the intranet and at enrolment as well as informally.

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