Gateway Quality Review: Wales
Coleg Cambria

May 2023

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 with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets relevant 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:

- continue development of its internal quality assurance processes so that regular reviews of its practices for standards and quality can drive further improvements and enhancements (Standards).

Specified improvements

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

About this review

The review visit took place from 24 to 25 May 2023 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Diane Rainsbury
- Miss Elizabeth Shackels
- Dr Bradley Woolridge (student reviewer).

The overall aim of Gateway Quality Review: Wales is to:

- provide the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales 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) is a large further education college located in north-east Wales which operates across five campuses in Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire. The College was established in 2013 as a result of the merger of Deeside College and Yale College. The College 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.

The College's foundation degrees and bachelor's degrees are franchised through partnerships with Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Liverpool John Moores University, Swansea University, Wrexham Glyndŵr University, and the University of Chester. Programmes with the University of Chester are in teach-out which is to be completed this academic year. The College also delivers Pearson Higher National programmes. At the time of the review there were a total of 393 students on university-franchised and Higher National programmes and a further 117 students on non-prescribed programmes (awards made by Ofqual-regulated awarding bodies).

The College's Higher Education Strategy has five key strands: key partner relationships; flexible, career-focused curriculum; regional provider of choice; HE ethos; and coherent collaboration.

This is the College's second Gateway Review; the first review took place in 2019.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1   Coleg Cambria (the College) does not have degree awarding powers. Programmes are developed in conjunction with university partners, Pearson or other awarding bodies.

2   As the College's university partners are responsible for validating the programmes, the College adheres to the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and the Characteristics Statements for Foundation Degrees and Higher Education in Apprenticeships. Partnership agreements and responsibility checklists are in place.

3   Independent academic advisers have been used to provide assurance that national standards are met in the development of programmes.

4   The College's Quality Cycle is used to support the management of its higher education provision and streamlines its processes by aligning them to its partners' regulations. In addition, the College has recently created HE management positions, including a Higher Education Compliance Manager, Higher Education Administrators, a Vice-Principal for Academic Studies, and a Dean of Higher Education/Access to Higher Education, to manage the quality processes of each partner and support compliance by college staff.

5   The College Higher Education and Access to Higher Education Steering Group examines the outcomes of quality assurance processes, including student survey results, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, completion and attainment results, continuous improvement planning and module evaluations. Student representatives are members of this group.

6   The College has in place internal moderation of assessment processes which align and complement their university partner. External examiners are appointed by the College's partner universities. External examiners provide annual reports to the partner university which are then shared with the College. These reports provide further assurances that standards are both met and reflect national standards.

7   In terms of annual monitoring, programme teams complete a Programme Annual Monitoring Report (PAMR), or a university partner equivalent document, along with a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). These are approved by the relevant Curriculum Director before being submitted to the Higher Education and Access to Higher Education Steering Group. Progress against CIPs is monitored by the management teams within that Directorate, with oversight from the Dean of Higher Education/Access to Higher Education.

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

8   The College accurately aligns to the higher education pillar within the CQFW meta-framework and adheres to all eight high-level principles when developing higher education programmes. Threshold standards for higher education awarded qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications framework. The higher education framework approach adopted by the College ensures that practices align with the academic regulations of its partner universities/awarding bodies.

The Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

Core practice: The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.

9   The College does not have degree awarding powers but has in place partnership agreements with six degree-awarding bodies and one awarding organisation. The College has a clear understanding of its own responsibilities - for example, in the design and assessment of programmes.

10   The College adheres to the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and the Characteristics Statements for Foundation Degrees and Higher Education in Apprenticeships; this is monitored through the validation / approval of programmes with the partner universities / awarding bodies.

Core practice: The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

11   The College's higher education partners review programmes on an annual basis through the annual monitoring process and also more comprehensively through revalidation and periodic review processes. For Pearson provision, the College has developed a Guidance Handbook for staff with the rules and regulations for delivering Higher Nationals.

12   External examiners are appointed by higher education partners / awarding bodies. They undertake annual monitoring visits to the College and, via online platforms, sample marked assessments. External examiners are invited to assessment boards and external examiner reports confirm standards are met and comparable with similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions.

Core practice: Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

13   The College has an internal process for the approval of new higher education provision commencing with a discussion within the Directorate area as a result of emerging student demand or via a request from an employer / group of employers. If approved by the Assistant Principal and Vice-Principal of the Directorate area, this will then be taken forward to the Higher Education Strategy and Headline Performance group. All programmes must be approved by the Higher Education Strategy and Headline Performance Group. The College has in place effective arrangements to ensure that standards are credible and secure. The Higher Education and Access to Higher Education Steering Group examines the outcomes of the quality assurance processes - for example, student survey results, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, completion and attainment results, continuous improvement planning and module evaluations. Student representatives are members of this group.

14   As noted in paragraph 4, the College has created a number of new higher education management positions to oversee the management of its HE provision over multiple campuses. These posts are specifically designed to manage the quality processes and

procedures of each partner and support college staff to comply.

Core practice: The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

15   The College has appropriate internal moderation of assessment processes (see paragraph 6) along with appropriate annual monitoring and oversight arrangements (see paragraph 7). External examiner reports provide further assurances that standards are both met and reflect national standards.

16   The College has a Vice-Principal for Work Based Learning who is also responsible for employer engagement. College managers engage constructively with employers to promote an industry-facing experience for all students. Employer engagement within the College is well-established and working effectively.

17   The review team concludes that the College uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

Common practice: The provider reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

18   The Higher Education Quality Cycle details how students will be involved in college processes and how they are able to contribute throughout an academic year. The Cycle is reviewed and amended on an annual basis with the agreement of the Higher Education and Access to Higher Education Steering Group.

19   The College streamlines its internal policies and procedures to partner university regulations using a framework approach. Staff and students are then signposted to the corresponding policy within the partner university. The College acknowledges that it is on a journey with the development of its higher education processes to achieve greater alignment and ownership of its higher education provision. The review team **advises the College to continue development of its internal quality assurance processes so that regular reviews of its practices for standards and quality can drive further improvements and enhancements**.

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

20   The College works with six awarding bodies and one awarding organisation which have ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of the awards. The College adheres to relevant reference points for assuring threshold standards are consistent with national frameworks; this is monitored through the validation / approval of programmes with the partner universities / awarding bodies. The College has an internal process for the approval of new higher education provision. The College has in place effective arrangements to ensure the standards of the awards it delivers are credible and secure. The College has appropriate internal moderation of assessment processes along with appropriate annual monitoring and oversight arrangements to ensure assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. External examiner reports provide further assurances that standards are both met and reflect national standards. The review team identified one area for development in relation to the common practice to regularly review the Core practices for standards as means of helping the College to drive further improvement and enhancement.

21   The review team concluded that the College is effective in the delivery of Core and Common practices and maintains the standards of the awards, thereby meeting the

Expectations for Standards of the Quality Code.

Judgement

22   In order to reach the following judgement, the review team was able to explore a wide range of documentary evidence, including a self-evaluation document; and the review team was able to meet with a wide range of staff and students. The meetings and documents allowed the review team to see robust evidence which demonstrates that the academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications frameworks (*The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, and the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*) and the Expectations, Core and Common practices for standards as set out in the Quality Code; and that the qualifications awarded are in line with sector-recognised standards.

23   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 Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

Core practice: The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

24   The College outlined the admissions systems in its self-evaluation document and provided supporting documents which demonstrated the relevant baseline regulatory requirements had been met.

25   Discussions in the student meeting highlighted some issues in the application process had been experienced (such as duplication of application processes and communication issues with the university). Staff were aware of these issues, progress having been made in some areas with further plans to address these issues moving forwards. These discussions reassured the review team that changes to improve this process were ongoing, such as the plans to develop a dedicated UCAS system.

Core practice: The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

26   The majority of the College's programmes are franchised and the College collaborates closely with the relevant awarding body and contributes to programme development and enhancement. The College has full responsibility for the development and delivery of Pearson programmes, and has a detailed framework and processes to support its responsibilities. All new programmes are subject to internal approval prior to consideration by the awarding body. There is clear evidence that programmes were delivered in accordance with the requirements of its awarding bodies. External examiners affirm high levels of student satisfaction on the quality of their programmes and teaching. Students were overwhelmingly positive in their praise for the quality of their programmes and the dedication and support of teaching staff.

27   Programme teams engage in curriculum and programme development through their participation in university committees and processes including Joint Programmes of Study. Academic staff spoke of a genuine collaboration with their university partners - enabling them to participate fully in relevant processes and programme development, and propose modifications based on operational practice, industry relevance and student feedback.

28   Annual monitoring - both the College's own processes (PAMR) and the equivalent university process - is effective in maintaining high-quality programmes, identifying areas for development.

Core practice: The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

29   Most academic staff teach across both further and higher education. The College is responsible for ensuring teaching resources are sufficient in terms of overall numbers and breadth of expertise. The College has appropriate processes for resource monitoring and allocation at both operational and strategic level, and it is evident that staffing was well-resourced and had kept pace with the higher education student population and programme portfolio.

30   Staff appointment is governed by the College's own internal criteria that generally

require staff to have a higher qualification at least one above from delivery. Approval to teach higher education is subject to the College's own internal approval process as well as the relevant awarding body requirements. In addition, staff expertise is considered and confirmed at initial university validation with subsequent approval required for any ongoing changes to teaching staff as they occur. Annual monitoring provides an opportunity to reflect and report on any staff resource requirements, and there was evidence of this process working effectively in practice. For Pearson programmes, staff resourcing and expertise is also monitored through external examining with the reports commenting positively on these aspects.

31   The College demonstrates a commitment to staff development and scholarly activity. Staff are able to develop their expertise and professional currency through active engagement in relevant scholarly activity including higher-level postgraduate teaching qualifications, postgraduate taught and/or industry updating. All staff are encouraged to participate in the UK Professional Standards Framework with 23 staff having obtained Fellowship and a further six applications pending. There is active commitment and wide participation of staff in relevant sector groups including Advance HE, QAA events and peer networking at other institutions. Staff also participate in external validation panels and a number of staff are external reviewers and/or verifiers and external examiners.

32   Staff were appreciative of the opportunities available to them and how it benefits and enhances the academic and student experience. Staff also confirm individual applications were fully supported in practice and the remission policy effectively facilitating such engagement. Students were extremely positive about the quality of teaching and support provided by staff that was also reflected in the findings from various student feedback mechanisms.

Core practice: The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

33   The College has progressively enhanced the student learning facilities through its HE Centre on the Deeside Campus and provision of dedicated space for higher education students across all its sites. Extending dedicated higher education space was implemented in response to student feedback and is highly valued by students, with further plans to develop the Deeside Centre.

34   There is a comprehensive range of learning resources, facilities and specialist advisory and student support services, including those for additional learning needs. The Library is also well-equipped with access to a wide range of journals and specialist reading. Students are signposted to these services at induction through programme handbooks, the College virtual learning environment and individual documents. Students also have access to additional resources through the relevant awarding body. Students are highly satisfied with the facilities and resources available to them.

35   Librarians work closely with the academic team to identify new materials and provide academic skills support through the development of their own materials as well as one-to-one support. At operational level, the effectiveness of resources is monitored through day-to-day operational delivery and management, and the College's own quality monitoring processes at institutional and service provider level, and in response to student feedback. Programme annual monitoring is also used effectively to monitor and identify additional resource.

36   Students were overwhelmingly positive on the support they receive and the commitment and accessibility of staff in both academic and student service roles. From its

meetings with staff, the review team found that the close and effective working relationships between academic and student and professional services was also instrumental in providing a high standard of academic and pastoral support and ensuring resources remained up-to-date.

37   The review team concluded that the College has sufficient and appropriate learning resources and student services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Core practice: The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

38   The student voice at the College features through many mediums and provides students the opportunity to raise concerns such as through representation on the HE and Access to HE Steering Group, through annual reviews and module evaluations. The student submission confirmed that most students found the student voice mechanisms useful. Student representatives are elected by students within each programme at the start of each year and students agreed that the system worked well.

39   Students that met with the review team were satisfied that: they had ample opportunity for their voices to be heard; actions would follow; and students would be informed of changes and gave examples of where the College had made improvements on the basis of their feedback. The review team was satisfied that the College actively engages with students - individually and collectively - as partners in the quality of their educational experiences.

Core practice: The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

40   The College clearly outlined the complaints and appeals procedure in the pre-visit documentation. All student handbooks had the relevant information regarding complaints / appeals and the College has aligned with partners / Pearson's academic appeals policy. The review team was therefore satisfied that the relevant baseline regulatory requirements were met.

41   The review demonstrated that there were very few formal issues / complaints raised and, due to the class sizes, issues were usually resolved effectively on an informal basis. Staff and students were satisfied that the procedures in place were accessible and transparent for all students.

Core practice: Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.

42   No research degrees are offered at the College; therefore, this Core practice does not apply.

Core practice: Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

43   The College works in partnership with an extensive range of awarding bodies and these responsibilities are clearly set out in the respective Memoranda of Agreement, and operational processes. In the case of Pearson awards, the College follows its own operational processes. There was clear evidence of these working effectively in practice. For university-validated awards, external examiners and academic staff considered the link tutor

system to work well and were appreciative of their engagement in university boards and committees, and active participation in curriculum development and ongoing monitoring and review. In the main, students were positive about responsiveness to their feedback where this also involved the university partner.

44 The College works in partnership with employers to deliver placement and work-based learning opportunities within specific programmes. Some work-based learning programmes have also been designed for a specific employer and there are integrated learning opportunities for those students already in employment. All placement and work-based learning is delivered in accordance with the College's own processes, in conjunction with the quality assurance frameworks of the relevant partner university and/or awarding body, and/or the college-based learning framework. In all instances, the College retains full responsibility for assessment. Students receive clear and comprehensive information with relevant links to awarding body documentation or programme handbooks as appropriate. Students are clear about what was expected of them and who to contact. All students also have access to the full range of college academic and pastoral support services throughout their learning. The review team concluded that the arrangements worked effectively in practice and provide an appropriate and high-quality academic experience.

Core practice: The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

45 The College offers a comprehensive amount of support to facilitate students in achieving academic and professional outcomes. Various supported mechanisms such as personal tutors, library support, additional learning needs support, as well as support for academic study skills are provided to all higher education learners through library and academic study services.

46 The Value Added scheme has been introduced this year to help track students' progress as they move through their programmes. Students expressed mixed levels of engagement / satisfaction and staff acknowledged the scheme had examples of good practice but areas to improve, which the College acknowledged and is working on.

Common practice: The provider reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

47 The College is reliant on the policy and procedural frameworks of its university partners supplemented by a smaller number of higher education specific policies with some well-established core practices for reviewing quality within a well-established quality cycle. This incorporates a wide range of information including academic progression and completion and student feedback. Programme monitoring, the HE Self Assessment Report, Quality Improvement Plans and Quality Development Plans are used as a basis for driving improvement and enhancement. Regular programme team meetings provide the opportunity to address issues as they arise while the various student feedback mechanisms are also effective in supporting and driving improvement.

48 The Higher Education and Access Steering Group has oversight of the outcomes and action planning from the various quality review processes and the tracking of detailed action plans further drive and support improvement. The College recognised the importance of further developing its policy and guidance documents with such plans already well developed (paragraph 19).

Common practice: The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

49   Collaboration with validating partner universities through the link tutor system and participation in academic committees - working with and responding to external examiner reports - along with participation in a wide range of sector groups, constitute the main sources of external expertise. Engagement in external peer review is also an integral part of the programme approval process with some staff also having experience as external validation panel members. Staff draw on these experiences to inform their own professional or academic practice and contribute to the College's quality management processes. Close working relations with employers also support programme delivery and industry relevance.

Common practice: The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

50   The review team was satisfied that the College actively engaged students, individually and collectively, as partners in the quality of their educational experiences. The student voice at the College features through many mediums and provides students the opportunity to raise concerns, such as through representation on the HE steering group, through annual reviews and module evaluations, and evidenced via the student submission.

51   Students were satisfied that they had ample opportunity for their voices to be heard and actions would follow / students would be informed of changes. This reinforced the evidence of the student representatives' involvement in quality assurance procedures as outlined above.

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

52   The College has clear and fair processes for admissions. Some issues highlighted in the application process are being worked on by the College with the relevant university partner. Students are very positive about the quality of their programmes and college staff work collaboratively with their university partners to enable them to deliver high-quality programmes with industrial relevance. There are mechanisms in place to ensure programmes are appropriately resourced and staff suitably qualified. Staff are able to develop their expertise and professional currency and to engage in wider sector activity. A high-level of academic and pastoral support is provided to students through a close and effectively working relationship between academic and student and professional services. Students' views are considered and acted upon and, overall, students expressed overall satisfaction with their experience.

Judgement

53   In order to reach the following judgement, the review team was able to explore a wide range of documentary evidence, including a self-evaluation document; and the review team was able to meet with a wide range of staff and students. The evidence allowed the review team to explore the provision offered to students from the point of admission through to completion. The review team was able to see appropriate arrangements for admissions; evidence demonstrating effective engagement in the design and delivery of high-quality courses; appropriately qualified and skilled staff in the delivery of high-quality teaching; availability of appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support; and active individual and collective engagement with students. These practices allowed students to succeed in, and benefit from, higher education. The evidence enabled the review team to see that the provision meets the Expectations, and the Core and Common practices for

quality as set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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

Commentary: Welsh Language Standards

55   The College has structures in place to support the promotion of Welsh language, including a Head of Corporate Communication and Welsh Language; a Head of Inclusion; and a Welsh Language Skills Team. The College confirmed that students are supported by the College to undertake their studies in Welsh and seven higher education staff can deliver their programmes in Welsh.

56   The College's Welsh Language Strategy has a strong emphasis on increasing the proportion of learners obtaining qualifications through the medium of Welsh. The College provides additional support for learners through the Welsh Language Skills Team including support to improve Welsh language written skills, one-to-one mentoring and providing translations for terminology and technical terms.

57   Opportunities to undertake assessments through the medium of Welsh are available. Where there is no Welsh-speaking member of staff with the subject expertise, there are arrangements are in place for the translation of student work and staff feedback, and grading for the external examiner. All college higher education policies are available to students in Welsh.

58   Appropriate resourcing is in place to support students who are Welsh speakers and/or who study through the medium of Welsh, while staff are supported to develop their Welsh language skills with courses available free of charge.