



Gateway Quality Review: Wales

Coleg Gwent

November 2019

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Coleg Gwent

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

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

- promote more clearly opportunities for accreditation of prior certificated and experiential learning in materials for applicants and to staff involved in the admissions process (Quality Code)
- articulate more clearly its expectations for higher education level teaching, learning and assessment in relevant strategies and associated guidance to staff (Quality Code)
- formalise in the annual monitoring process at school and College level reporting on progress against actions identified in previous reports (Quality Code)
- establish a formal procedure that ensures all marketing materials are updated in a timely fashion to reflect external changes as they arise outside the annual updating process (Consumer Protection).

Specified improvements

The review team did not identify any specified improvements.

About this review

The review visit took place from 26 to 27 November 2019 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Richard Alderman (student reviewer)
- Dr Mark Atlay
- Mrs Alison Jones.

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 Gwent

Coleg Gwent delivers further and higher education, along with vocational education and training, across the former county of Gwent, South Wales. It operates from five main campuses at Newport, Pontypool, Usk, Crosskeys and Ebbw Vale. The College aspires to be the college of choice with the mission to enhance life chances through educational excellence for all. It aims to be one of the largest providers of HE in FE in Wales working through partnerships with its awarding bodies and other stakeholders to deliver high quality, sustainable provision that meets the needs of employers and supports student progression.

The College's higher education provision is delivered on behalf of four awarding bodies; Aberystwyth University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales (USW) and University of Worcester. The College also delivers Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications. The programmes cover a broad range of subject areas including business and management, construction, equine and animal health, creative industries and public health and care. The College offers a range of awards including Foundation Degrees, Bachelor's degrees and top-up programmes for Bachelor's degrees. At the time of the review, the College had 852 higher education students.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College makes appropriate use of the FHEQ and the CQFW in its standards setting processes. The awarding bodies have overarching responsibility for academic standards and checklists show those of the College and the awarding bodies in respect of key quality assurance processes. Consideration of the FHEQ and the CQFW is inherent in the course design process which involves discussion with staff from the awarding universities or the use of relevant Pearson course documentation. This is evident in the resulting course documentation and associated programme specifications. College staff have an effective understanding of the FHEQ and the CQFW and their use.

2 The College makes use of external reference points, including the Quality Code, guidance from relevant professional bodies, university staff and external examiners to ensure that standards are set at the appropriate level and are comparable to other HE providers. The process for the design and approval of assessments depends on the awarding body and is clearly understood by staff. External examiners confirm that standards are appropriately set and monitored, and learning outcomes are met. The award of credit is the responsibility of the awarding body.

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)

3 The College has effective governance arrangements, which allow it to have oversight of academic governance. The governing body (Board) of the College, which includes student governors and governors with specific higher education expertise, approves the annual Self-Assessment Report and Assurance Statement for the Funding Council and receives regular presentations in relation to higher education activity at the College. The College has also benchmarked its activities against the Code of Good Governance for Colleges in Wales, with no issues identified. There is a separate Higher Education Strategy to underpin higher education provision.

4 The College undertook a governance review in Academic Year 2018-19, establishing a new Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee to support an increased focus on quality. Sub-committees for higher education provision and the learner voice and experience now report to the Board through the Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee. Subsequent Self-Assessment Reports and associated documentation will be considered by this committee and recommended to the Board for approval. Board Members confirmed that they were briefed, where necessary, to understand issues in relation to higher education.

5 In view of the recent changes to the governance structure, it was not possible for the review team to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes. However, terms of reference and draft minutes indicated that the new structure would provide additional capacity to scrutinise higher education provision. The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Sub-committee is also a member of the Board, providing a link in relation to academic governance. The College has identified an action to appoint a third student governor explicitly from the higher education student body.

6 The Board has an Audit Sub-committee with oversight for risk across the College. The College has an institutional risk register that considers risks that cut across the College such as safeguarding. Academic risk is managed through the higher education committee framework. A standalone Higher Education Committee (HE Committee) undertakes annual monitoring of programmes, incorporating external examiner reports, student feedback, recruitment and student performance. The College operates a Results Improvements Initiative (RII) with enhanced monitoring for a small number of programmes where risks to academic quality have been identified. Programme-level risks are identified by programme staff who have access to a HE Dashboard containing key management information.

7 The College embeds the Welsh Language Standards through its Bilingual Strategy, progressed and monitored through subject/functional action plans and overseen through the College's Welsh Language Steering Group.

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

8 The College offers higher education provision through four awarding bodies that retain responsibility for the academic standards of all credit and qualifications granted in their names. In fulfilling the requirements of the partnership agreements, the College's HE provision operates in accordance with the academic regulatory frameworks and quality processes as determined by its awarding bodies. The College's responsibilities for helping to set and/or maintain academic standards of the awards vary depending upon the partnership agreement.

9 The role of link officers and partnership meetings/activities with awarding bodies help the College to understand its responsibilities regarding academic standards. Awarding body staff regularly visit the College to support a range of activities and College staff attend the university campuses for staff development sessions. In addition, the College staff representative sits on the USW partnership committee that gives assurance that the College is meeting expected standards through adherence to University policies and procedures.

10 The College Admissions Policy refers to standard entry requirements which are published on the College website. In adhering to the standard entry criteria, the College ensures students are admitted who have reasonable expectation of completing the programme. Staff confirmed that there are processes in place for assessing late applicants, mature applicants and those holding non-standard qualifications, with referral to the awarding body if required.

11 Assessments are approved through awarding bodies' procedures to ensure students are tested in the achievement of the learning outcomes. Staff confirmed that they set the assessments for validated provision and can contribute to assessments set for franchised provision to ensure that the College demographic is appropriately reflected. Marking schemes, second marking, standardisation meetings and external moderation ensure parity across different sites of delivery for franchise provision. College Higher Education Assessment Boards are held twice a year to ratify assessment/verification decisions and agree action where students have failed to meet the stated assessment criteria.

12 Ongoing, systematic review is undertaken at module, course, school and College levels, which is then used to inform the Higher Education Quality Development Plan (QDP) which enables outcomes to be used to drive improvement and enhancement. The QDP forms part of the College's annual Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (SAR) that provides assurance to the Board of Governors of the College's maintenance of academic standards. The SAR includes a reflective commentary on student data relating to recruitment,

retention, completion and pass rates, rigour and integrity within the assessment process, management and integrity of the recruitment process, and outcomes from external reviews.

13 The College makes effective use of data in monitoring academic standards. Staff confirmed they receive live data which they use proactively for monitoring purposes. Retention, attainment and completion is reported annually through HE Committee meetings, which also looks at wider aspects impacting upon the student experience such as low recruitment, poor learner perception and repeated outcomes. Based upon success in its further education provision, the College has recently implemented the Results Improvement Initiative (RII) to support underperforming higher education programmes.

14 The College draws upon external expertise to ensure that its processes are reliable, fair and transparent. Programme validation involves input from external experts and, where applicable, professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements are adhered to. External examiners are appointed by awarding bodies to confirm appropriateness of assessment and classification processes, and their feedback is used to inform the SAR and QDP. The College is also working with a consortium of Welsh colleges to develop higher education in further education benchmarking data that will be more appropriate for comparison purposes.

Judgement

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

16 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)

17 The College is responsible for student recruitment and for the admission of students to Pearson and USW programmes. Students applying to Aberystwyth programmes apply direct to the University, while those for the University of Worcester apply via UCAS. Applicants receive detailed guidance and the procedures are set out in the College Higher Education Admissions Policy and associated flow charts, which are clearly understood by staff. Survey feedback indicates that the application and enrolment process is effectively organised, reliable, fair and inclusive.

18 The College uses the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) policies and procedures of the relevant awarding bodies. The Student Charter commits the College to making information and guidance on the recognition of prior achievement available to students. However, there is no mention of the possibility of the accreditation of certificated or experiential learning in the Admissions Policy nor in relevant guidance to staff. In meetings, the team heard of students being admitted with advanced standing for prior certificated learning using appropriate procedures although staff were less clear about the possibility of applicants utilising experiential learning. The team advises the College to more clearly promote opportunities for the accreditation of prior certificated and experiential learning in material for applicants and to staff involved in the admissions process, identifying this as an **area for development**.

19 The College has effective processes for the design and development of new courses. Initial informal discussions are followed by formal consideration by the Higher Education Steering Group then by the Senior Management Team (SMT). Courses are developed with support from the awarding body and involve the consideration of professional body requirements, subject benchmarks and other external reference points as appropriate.

20 Students receive effective induction and are provided with course handbooks which they consider to be accurate and helpful. Classroom teaching is augmented by material and activities delivered through the virtual learning environment (VLE) and further supported by structured personal tutorials. Students spoke positively about the quality of their teaching and of the support they received from tutors, and this is confirmed by the outcomes of internal surveys and by the National Student Survey.

21 Assessments are set and approved under the arrangements of the relevant awarding body and communicated to students through handbooks and the VLE. Students receive guidance on effective academic practice and submit assignments through text-matching software when appropriate. Staff understand their role in the assessment process and external examiners confirm that assignment setting and marking is appropriate.

22 The College's Student Charter states that students should gain detailed feedback within 10 working days although the arrangements for higher education students is 20 working days to allow for moderation. This is clearly communicated to students in course handbooks. Students are clear about the tasks set which became progressively more challenging and reported that they received timely and developmental feedback.

23 In discussion with programme leaders, tutors and learning support staff, the team heard of a variety of ways in which teaching and learning was delivered, supported and assessed appropriate to the subject and to higher education students. This was confirmed by external examiners and the College's internal monitoring procedures. The team

concluded that, in order to meet its strategic objectives and to support the dissemination of appropriate higher education practice, the College might more clearly articulate its expectations of higher education teaching, learning and assessment, drawing on its internal expertise. The team advises the College to articulate more clearly its expectations for higher education teaching, learning and assessment in relevant strategies and associated guidance to staff, identifying this as an **area for development**.

24 The College has recently reviewed and revised its procedures for continuous and annual monitoring of learning, drawing on the views of staff, students and external examiners. School reports draw on module and course-level monitoring and are considered by the HE Committee. This informs the SAR and its associated QDP for consideration by the Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors before submission to the Board.

25 The processes for continuous and annual monitoring are clear, effective and well understood by staff. However, although School and College action plans are closely monitored during the course of the year, there is no formal reporting on the actions that have not been completed or carried forward into the new action plan. This means that it is potentially difficult for the HE Committee and the Governors to identify persistent issues or to recognise the actions which have been successfully addressed during the year. Consequently, the team advises the College to formalise in the annual monitoring process at School and College levels reporting on progress against actions identified in the previous year's reports, identifying this as an **area for development**.

26 The College has recently appointed an HE Progression Officer team, with an Officer on each campus, to assist students making the transition from further education to higher education study in addition to supporting learners once they have enrolled on their higher education course. Facilities, learning resources and support services are monitored through the student feedback mechanisms and reported on during annual monitoring at School and College levels. Students confirmed that they had access to appropriate facilities and resources through the College and these were augmented by those provided by the awarding bodies, either online or through loans, or facilitated access to specialist resources. Where additional needs were identified, such as amending the opening hours of the library to accommodate evening study, the College responded in an appropriate and timely manner.

27 The College's approach to student feedback is set out in the Learner Involvement Strategy. It gathers feedback from students via a range of informal and formal mechanisms including surveys, focus groups and learner forums, an HE Learner Experience Week and learner representative meetings. Student views inform the annual monitoring process and feed into the College's SAR and associated QDP. The effectiveness of these mechanisms was confirmed by students who talked positively about the range of ways in which their voices were heard and of the resultant actions taken by the College.

28 Given their vocational nature, many of the College's higher education courses have placements and arrangements for these are effective. Expectations of placement learning are made clear to staff and students through appropriate handbooks. Where necessary, the College provides students with additional support. Students who had been on placement confirmed that they had been appropriately prepared and supported. An employer who spoke to the team confirmed that they were appropriately briefed about their responsibilities.

29 The College has in place a range of effective mechanisms to support students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. Students' academic needs are identified through the teaching and assessment practices, and they are referred to appropriate support where necessary. Progression of students to further study is considered as part of the annual monitoring process. Maintaining contact with graduates who progress

into work is more difficult and senior staff reported that they were looking at more effective ways of gathering information. The Student Written Submission identified aspects of employability as an area for improvement, while students who met the team believed that they were appropriately supported.

30 The College keeps its core practices under review in order to enhance the educational experience of its students. Strategic priorities and annual monitoring are the main drivers for change. Recent changes to the committee structures and new posts focusing on progression and support were designed to provide more of a focus on higher education students. This had been further supported through the provision of new learning environments at many campuses and further investment in the College's VLE.

31 The College uses external expertise to manage quality and support the learning experience. As well as its use of external examiners, feedback from employers and links with relevant professional bodies, the College draws on its contacts with awarding universities to improve and augment its processes including, for example, in course design, supporting staff to Fellowship status through the LEEP programme at USW, and adapting student support processes from the University of Worcester.

32 HE students are represented on the Learner Experience Steering Group and on the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Forum, which reports to the Curriculum and Quality Sub-committee of the Board. Learner representatives attend Higher Education Learner Forums which take place twice a year and Campus Learner Forums attended by the Principal. Student representatives who met the team confirmed that there were appropriate mechanisms for them individually and collectively to engage in, and enhance, College processes.

The relevant code of governance

33 The College has effective arrangements to encourage student involvement in academic governance. The Board and Curriculum and Quality Sub-committee include student governors, who are briefed and inducted by the College to understand their roles and responsibilities. The College has a Learner Involvement Strategy and there are a range of mechanisms, for example, Higher Education Learner Forums and campus-based Principal's Forums, which allow students to provide the College with feedback, which report up to the Curriculum and Quality Sub-committee. Student representatives are supported by the College and Students' Union to understand their responsibilities through training and role descriptions. The Board receives an annual learner voice report, which summarises the involvement and activity of student representatives. Student feedback received through course and programme surveys feeds into the annual monitoring processes, including the SAR and QDP.

34 The College provides paid opportunities for students as Student Ambassadors to attend particular meetings and to participate in quality enhancement activity such as learner walks as part of the annual Learner Experience Week.

35 The College has a Higher Education Student Complaints Policy and Procedure and Guidance Note. A termly report is received by the SMT and the Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee receives an Annual Complaints Report summarising feedback, identifying themes and reporting on student satisfaction in the handling of complaints. A very small number of complaints are received in relation to higher education provision.

36 The College has a Safeguarding Policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of all learners. The College has identified an action to implement a formal tutorial system for students and ensure this is consistent across all the College's campuses. Students met by

the review team reported that they were confident in accessing support and reporting issues through scheduled support time with programme staff.

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

37 The College is responsible for the marketing of its higher education programmes, supported by a jointly produced marketing brochure with USW. The College Higher Education Guide is available to download from the website. The higher education webpages include relevant information for prospective students, including how to apply, fees and financial information and learning support, together with the Student Charter, Terms and Conditions, Complaints and Appeals, and related policies.

38 Course information leaflets are published on the College website and are updated annually by course leaders and Heads of School prior to sign off by the Head of Higher Education. The leaflets include additional requirements for consideration by prospective students prior to making an application, including additional costs. The review team found an example where there was no reference to a recently introduced additional cost. This related to the Foundation Degree Veterinary Nursing where the regulator now requires DBS checks to be put in place for students from September 2020, which the College confirmed would be an additional cost to students. In addition, the leaflet included other costs relating to 2018. The review team considers as an **area for development** that the College establish a formal procedure that ensures all marketing materials are updated in a timely fashion to reflect external changes as they arise outside the annual updating process.

39 The College's HE Admissions Policy, approved by the College Management Team, sets out its approach to admissions to ensure that procedures are consistently and fairly applied. The College's responsibility for admissions (including setting of admissions criteria) varies across the awarding bodies and is clearly set out in a detailed flowchart for each awarding body which is managed by the Admissions Office. The College procedure for dealing with admissions complaints is located in its HE Student Complaints Policy and Procedure.

40 Staff involved in the admissions process undergo regular training to ensure they maintain accurate and up-to-date information to support prospective students. Information on the admissions processes are provided on the College's website and reflected in the College's HE Student Contract Terms and Conditions.

41 Detailed student guidance notes and a flowchart are available to support clear and transparent understanding of the College's Student Complaints Policy and Procedure. The College subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) which reviews the College's Complaints Policy on an annual basis.

Student protection measures

42 The College has a Terms and Conditions document which forms part of the Student Contract, which is provided as part of the offer letter and becomes valid upon acceptance of an offer. The Terms summarise the College's procedures for course closures and changes to programmes of study, including assisting students to transfer onto alternative programmes of study if necessary.

43 The College has actively responded to student feedback to make course changes in relation to programme content and assessment; these had been proposed through the programme revalidation process and consultation with students. Students confirmed that the College's approach was appropriate and timely.

44 The College confirmed that it has not closed any programmes of higher education study to date and consequently does not have a separate course closure policy. In view of small cohort sizes and impact on programme viability, the College undertakes detailed monitoring of higher education course applications and makes decisions on course delivery in April/May. When a decision is made not to run a programme, students are supported to study an alternative programme and/or study at an alternative campus, or defer where a course is to be suspended in the forthcoming academic year.

45 The College has a HE Student Complaints Policy and Procedure and Guidance Note which details the stages of complaint handling and resolution and entitlements to refer to the awarding body or Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) following completion of internal procedures. Students met by the review team were confident in accessing this information through student handbooks should this be necessary.

46 Complaints are rated according to their severity and an independent investigating officer is allocated accordingly. The College has received a very small number of complaints in relation to higher education provision. The College provided an example of a group complaint which had been referred by one complainant to the OIA; the complaint had not been upheld but a recommendation identified to clarify signposting in relation to student entitlements to escalate complaints once internal procedures are completed. The College has worked with the OIA to revise documentation accordingly.

Judgement

47 There are four areas for development in this judgement area around the UK Quality Code and consumer protection. They focus on the College taking further action to promote opportunities for accreditation of prior learning; more clearly articulating its expectations of staff in higher education teaching, learning and assessment; formalising the process of reporting on progress against actions from previous year's annual monitoring reports; and updating marketing material to take account of external changes as they arise. The areas for development address minor issues or oversights, or updates to approaches which do not require major operational changes.

48 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

49 The five local authorities in the College's catchment area are among those in Wales with the lowest level of Welsh speakers. Data from enrolment for 2019-20 indicates that 262 of students consider themselves to be Welsh speakers and/or have attended Welsh medium schooling and only 0.4% of students stated that their preferred language for correspondence is Welsh. Among staff, 6.8% indicate they have advanced or fluent skills in Welsh.

50 The College has recently approved its Bilingual Strategy to meet its responsibilities as identified in the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy. Each Faculty has its own action plan and an additional plan covers functional departments. Implementation of the strategy is monitored by the College's Welsh Language Steering Group reporting to the SMT. Governors receive updates on progress from the Welsh Language Manager and compliance with requirements features in the corporate risk register.

51 The College has in place a range of structures, activities and resources to support the Welsh language including a Welsh Language Centre, Welsh Clubs, and Welsh buddying systems. Staff are encouraged to learn Welsh free of charge and there is induction into expectations for Welsh language use and support.

52 Prospective students are made aware of Welsh medium provision at open days, freshers fairs and in letters and marketing material which are available in Welsh. Applicants receive offer letters in English and Welsh. Students have access to Welsh language tuition, a Welsh language tutor and to Welsh language speakers for advice and support. On some courses, option modules are fully available in the medium of Welsh. Students are informed that they have the right to submit written assignments in Welsh on assignment briefs and to have a Welsh speaking personal tutor in handbooks and at induction. Where required, assignments submitted in Welsh are translated for assessment and for scrutiny by the external examiner.

53 The College gathers feedback on its Welsh language provision through its standard mechanisms including Learner Walks. The team discussed the College's approach with students including Welsh language speakers. They confirmed that they were aware of their entitlements and that there were appropriate formal and informal mechanisms in place to support their studies in Welsh. The team considered that the College provided and actively promoted opportunities to staff, students and prospective students in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards.

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