



Quality Review Visit of Farnborough College of Technology

March 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Farnborough College of Technology

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

- **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 **area for development** that has the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards. The review team advises Farnborough College of Technology to:

- strengthen student awareness and participation in the student engagement opportunities available (Quality Code).

Specified improvements

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

About this review

The review visit took place from 7 to 8 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Sarah Bennett (student reviewer)
- Ms Deborah James
- Ms Diane Rainsbury.

The overall aim of Quality Review Visit is to:

- provide the relevant funding body with an expert judgement about the readiness of a provider to enter, or continue to operate within, the higher education sector.

Quality Review Visit is designed to:

- ensure that the student interest is protected
- provide expert advice to ensure that the reputation of the UK higher education system is protected, including the protection of degree standards
- identify development areas that will help a provider to progress through a developmental period and be considered 'established'.

Each review visit considers a provider's arrangements against relevant aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements, and in particular:

- the reliability of degree standards and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers
- the quality of the student academic experience, including student outcomes where the provider has a track record of delivery of higher education.

About Farnborough College of Technology

Farnborough College of Technology is a further and higher education college based in Hampshire delivering vocationally orientated programmes from its main campus in Farnborough and smaller premises at Aldershot. The majority of its higher education provision is delivered under a long-standing Accredited Institution arrangement with the University of Surrey, through which the University delegates significant responsibilities for the validation and delivery of foundation degrees and bachelor degrees. The College also delivers initial teacher training qualifications under a franchise arrangement with the University of Greenwich and has recently resumed delivery of two higher national programmes approved by Pearson. The University Centre Farnborough, established in 2013, provides a focal point for higher education provision within the College and recently relocated to a newly built facility on the Farnborough site. The College has approximately 5,000 students, of which 388 students are studying on prescribed higher education programmes.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College works within the procedural and regulatory frameworks outlined in its partnership agreements to ensure that academic standards meet UK and awarding partner requirements. Programme approval processes incorporate external peer review to ensure alignment of learning outcomes to national threshold standards. The College has a consistent approach to programme specifications, following standard templates issued by the awarding partners that clearly reference FHEQ levels. Staff use programme specifications as the frame of reference for delivery and are supported in their understanding of learning outcomes and academic levels.

2 Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to maintain academic standards and promote consistency in assessment and marking. A rigorous assessment process is applied to all programmes, including internal moderation and use of an Assessment and Verification Monitoring Group that provides additional scrutiny of marking standards. Academic standards are monitored through the use of progression and achievement data in programme review and at Board of Examiners meetings. External examiners participate in the processes for setting and maintaining academic standards and their reports confirm that standards are comparable with those of other UK providers.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

3 Governance arrangements allow for comprehensive oversight of higher education provision in accordance with the AoC Code of Good Governance. The College internal auditors have conducted a full compliance audit against the Code which resulted in a positive outcome and the last Ofsted report rated academic governance as outstanding. The Corporation Board membership includes four governors with substantial higher education experience, including a University of Surrey representative, to promote improvements to the higher education student experience.

4 Annual reports on higher education activities are submitted to the Corporation Board and have a strong emphasis on self-evaluation. The Curriculum and Standards Committee (CSC), a subcommittee of the Board, receives and examines detailed annual reports on higher education, including data on completion and progression. Outcomes are monitored by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) and by the senior management team.

5 Principles of academic freedom and collegiality are respected. Staff are represented on committees, included as Corporation Board members and are actively involved in reviewing the College's strategic mission statement. A whistle-blowing procedure has been instigated and approved by the Audit Committee, including processes for disclosing malpractice to senior managers. Arrangements for safeguarding and counter-terrorism are in place and action plans link to government Prevent Agenda aims.

6 Risk management is reviewed frequently by the senior management team. The Corporation Board receives twice yearly updates of risk register priorities and reviews the full risk register annually. The College Report and Financial statements for 2016 confirm

that an 'adequate and effective framework for governance, risk management and control' is in place.

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

7 The College has effective and robust arrangements in place for discharging its responsibilities for academic standards in line with its awarding partner agreements. As an Accredited Institution of the University of Surrey, the College has substantial responsibilities and demonstrates fulfilment of these duties through Annual Review Reports to the University. A representative from the University of Surrey is a member of the College QSC, further strengthening oversight links between the College and the University. Similarly, responsibilities for the more recent franchised provision with the University of Greenwich and Pearson are clearly defined and understood.

8 College procedures for validation are adapted from the quality assurance processes of the University of Surrey, are clearly specified in the HE Staff Handbook and are aligned with the Quality Code. QSC oversees a two stage validation process that enables detailed scrutiny on academic standards setting and includes senior managers, independent expert readers and external peers in the approval process. Programme Specifications align with the format required by the awarding partners and are centrally maintained by the Academic Registry. Learning outcomes are devised in accordance with the FHEQ, relevant subject benchmark statements and occupational standards and the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment methods is clearly indicated in student handbooks.

9 Internal arrangements for ensuring reliable assessment processes include a comprehensive Assessment Policy and guidance on assessment in the HE Staff Handbook. External examiners are appointed to each programme to verify academic standards and robust procedures are in place to respond to issues raised, including oversight by QSC of programme team responses and action plans. Responses to external examiner reports are a strong element of the Annual Review Reports submitted to the awarding bodies. External examiners participate in Examination Boards and the reports of these Boards are considered by the Academic Board.

10 Quantitative and qualitative data is used effectively by the College to monitor academic standards, particularly through analysis of student outcomes included in programme level Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) and comprehensive Annual Review Reports to the awarding bodies. The SARs are peer evaluated prior to moderation by senior managers and Annual Review Reports are reviewed by QSC. At College level, an HE SAR summary is appended to the overall College SAR, although the College is currently adapting its reporting approach to enable consolidated reporting across all higher education provision and to fit with revised external reporting requirements.

Rounded judgement

11 The College has appropriate governance structures, policies and procedures that enable it to fulfil its responsibilities to its awarding partners and to meet baseline regulatory requirements in the setting and maintenance of academic standards. The review team identifies no areas for development or specified improvements.

12 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)

13 There are effective mechanisms in place to manage and monitor the quality of the student academic experience. Board of Studies exercise regular oversight of programme delivery including the consideration of external examiner reports and items raised by students. Programme teams produce annual SARs that contribute to a composite Annual Review Report for the awarding bodies. These documents are duly considered through QSC and Corporation Board with examples of corrective action and planned enhancement being undertaken. The College has responded appropriately to a recent decline in overall student numbers through increased marketing activities, strategic resource investment and enhancement of the portfolio offering. Current indications are that recruitment will recover for the forthcoming academic year.

14 Feedback from external examiners, and programme team responses, are considered by Boards of Studies at which student representatives are present, and external examiner reports are posted online. Despite such transparency, most of the students met by the team were unaware of this practice (see paragraph 19). As noted above, the College makes effective use of external peer review through its processes for programme approval. In addition, Employer Advisory Panels are used to inform curriculum developments and many programmes operate a visiting speaker programme which has been positively evaluated through the annual monitoring process.

15 A commitment to investment in higher education learning resources and infrastructure is evidenced through the new University Centre and in investment priorities for the current and forthcoming HE Strategy. Operational responsibilities for resources work effectively in practice with evidence of programme resource needs being addressed through capital bids and a systematic framework for library purchases. Oversight is exercised through the Curriculum and Student Experience Committee. A comprehensive range of professional support services are provided, backed up by specific and accessible online handbooks. Students met by the team confirmed the extensive range of support available and were particularly complimentary on the accessibility of teaching staff and the benefits derived from small class sizes.

16 The Assessment Policy provides useful guidance to staff on assessment practices. A College-wide Teaching and Learning Policy guides delivery and all staff are required to undertake continuing professional development. Graded teaching observations are implemented consistently and a new system of peer observation has been introduced. Research and scholarly activity is incorporated in the workload model and staff may apply to the Research and Scholarship Committee for support. Monitoring and reporting to CSC and the Corporation Board enables oversight of staff development activity. Staff met by the review team confirmed the effectiveness of the processes for inducting and mentoring newly appointed staff and for ongoing professional development. Staff also attested to the effectiveness of the HE Practitioners' Forum as a valuable means of informing and sharing academic practice.

17 The College has mechanisms to facilitate the active involvement of students in quality assurance procedures. This includes module feedback, surveys, the HE Student Forum, engagement in validation panels, representation on Corporation Board and Boards of Studies and the recent extension of such representation to other deliberative committees. Students receive information on the role of student representatives through the HE Student

Rep Handbook, role descriptor and briefing leaflet. Following appointment, students have an informal briefing and meet with the Director of HE regularly. The College is planning to move towards more formalised training as well as extending its promotion of recruitment to these roles.

18 Evidence of systematic processes for collecting and responding to student feedback is available and the College uses such feedback to inform developmental plans at each iteration of the monitoring and reporting cycle. Results of the National Student Survey (NSS) are analysed and considered at programme level through Boards of Studies and collectively through the deliberative committees; QSC and CSC. The College has taken steps to identify and rectify issues regarding the organisation and management of programmes which was below the sector benchmark in the NSS results and is monitoring actions closely at College level. A range of formal and informal mechanisms are used to report back to the student body and students provided examples of changes made in response to comments.

19 Despite the wide range of information publicised in handbooks, user forums and on the virtual learning environment, students met by the team indicated low awareness of several student engagement and representation opportunities including the appointment of students to deliberative committees, the location of external examiner reports and Board of Studies minutes and the availability of appeals and complaints procedures. The College's 2016-17 SAR acknowledges the challenge of effective student engagement in practice and outlines ongoing actions to strengthen student partnership in quality assurance and enhancement. While acknowledging the actions underway and the recent introduction of some initiatives, the review team advises the College to strengthen student awareness and participation in the student engagement opportunities available, and identifies this as an **area for development**.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

20 A HE Student Governor is appointed to represent students at HE Forum meetings and at Corporation Board and is well supported by staff. The HE Student Governor, and their further education counterpart, produce a combined report of student activities which is considered by the Corporation Board.

21 Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place to ensure the welfare of students, including the Complaints Policy and Safeguarding Policy, both of which have been revised in line with CMA and OIA guidance. The Principal oversees complaints and serious concerns are reported directly to the Chair of Governors. A comprehensive report analysing complaints is considered annually by the CSC which examines data against key performance indicators and approves arrangements for complaint handling. Annual Review Reports required by the degree awarding bodies also include complaints and academic appeal data and are considered by both CSC and the Corporation Board.

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

22 The College is responsible for handling all admissions applications and has effective arrangements for ensuring a consistent and transparent approach, including standardised forms and centralised processing arrangements that apply across all programmes. The Director of HE reviews all applications, makes recommendations to Programme Managers and maintains oversight of all successful and declined offers. A complaints process regarding admissions is available to students. The Admissions Policy

for higher education is published on the website and admissions information is available in the online HE Staff Handbook and through support and training for key staff.

23 Sound arrangements are in place for ensuring that sufficient information is available for prospective students to make informed decisions. Information is principally provided via the College website, which is currently being updated following an internal review of the information. Students met by the team considered the admissions process straight forward. The College uses standard checklists and complies with the requirements of its awarding bodies concerning information sign-off. All programme specifications are available on the website and Key Information Sets are published for eligible programmes based on centralised records. The terms and conditions made available for prospective students are clear.

Student protection measures as expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) Principles of Good Administration, and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures

24 Current practice for managing course closures is outlined in a College statement although the College is working towards embedding the approach more fully into College procedures. In the event of failure to recruit sufficient numbers, applicants are informed and advised of alternative options, including assistance with finding a place at other institutions. The College reciprocates by considering applicants referred from elsewhere. Students are guaranteed the opportunity to complete their full studies through teach out arrangements in the event of programme closure. Amendments to programmes are made in accordance with the awarding partner regulations and changes are communicated to students. Fee information is communicated via the website and enrolment form and the College makes clear its position regarding fixing student fees for the duration of the programme.

25 The CSC monitors and evaluates the timeliness of the College response to academic appeals and complaints. The College Complaints Policy is comprehensive and has been recently reviewed against the OIA good practice framework to reinforce the principles of objectively, confidentially, fairness and timeliness. Measures are in place to ensure that students can raise matters without risk of disadvantage and the student right of recourse to the OIA is clearly articulated. Appeals against assessment decisions are made directly to the awarding bodies. The College has responsibility for appeals on higher national programmes although none have been submitted to date.

26 While the written Student Submission confirmed that students are informed of appeals and complaints processes in student handbooks, at induction, through tutorials and online, students met by the review team demonstrate low awareness of the options available (see paragraph 19).

27 The College uses data on complaints and appeals outcomes effectively. Summary reports are considered by the CSC. This committee also oversees the Annual Review Reports compiled for the awarding bodies which detail complaints and academic appeal data.

Rounded judgement

28 The College has sound policies and procedures in place to ensure that the quality of the student academic experience is appropriately managed and monitored in line with the baseline regulatory requirements. Due consideration has been given to relevant external frames of reference, codes and guidance to verify the alignment of current practice and to

identify areas where internal processes can be strengthened. The review team identifies one area of development to strengthen awareness of current student engagement activities among the wider student body. The review team makes no recommendations for specified improvements.

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

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