



# Quality Review Visit of Kirklees College

May 2018

## Key findings

### QAA's rounded judgements about Kirklees College

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

### Areas for development

The review team identified the following **areas for development** that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards at Kirklees College. The review team advises Kirklees College to:

- develop a more learner-focused exit strategy with particular emphasis on the continuity of staffing (Quality Code, Student Protection)
- ensure that opportunities for personal tutor meetings are provided consistently across higher education programmes (Quality Code)
- further develop the governance arrangements for the monitoring of higher education complaints (Code of Governance)
- complete the review of its existing complaints policy and procedure in respect of the timeliness of responses and appropriate signposting to the procedure of the awarding bodies (Student Protection).

### Specified improvements

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

## About this review

The review visit took place from 1 to 2 May 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Sally Dixon
- Mr Anthony Turjansky
- Mr Daniel McCarthy Stott (student reviewer).

The overall aim of Quality Review Visit is to:

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

Quality Review Visit is designed to:

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

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

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

## About Kirklees College

Kirklees College is a large further education college formed by the merger of Huddersfield Technical College and Dewsbury College in 2008. It has two main campuses in Huddersfield and Dewsbury, with a further four sites offering specialist curriculum provision in Creative Arts, Land-based Studies, Engineering and Process Manufacturing.

The College currently offers Pearson Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, foundation degrees and undergraduate programmes validated by Teesside University, together with some franchised teacher training programmes from the University of Huddersfield. At the time of review the College had 269 higher education students on its level 4, 5 and 6 directly funded and franchised programmes. There were also a further 145 students studying part-time on specialist and professional programmes in business management, health, social care, counselling and teacher education.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College works with its awarding bodies and organisations to ensure that its higher education programmes meet national expectations for academic standards. A validation arrangement with Teesside University was in teach-out at the time of review, with foundation degrees due to have completed by the end of the current year and 'top-up' and full honours degrees by the end of 2018-19. The College delivers the University of Huddersfield Education and Training Consortium's PGCE in Lifelong Learning under a franchise arrangement. Pearson Higher National awards now comprise the majority of higher education provision, which also includes professional certificates and diplomas of other awarding organisations. These are positioned at levels 4 to 6 of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation's (Ofqual) Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and are equivalent to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) levels 4 to 6.

2 University programme specifications appropriately describe the level of awards, modules and learning outcomes and reference the relevant qualification characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statement as appropriate. Module specifications for university awards describe their FHEQ level and intended learning outcomes. College-developed specifications for Pearson programmes describe awards, units and learning outcomes at FHEQ levels 4 and 5 and reference the associated honours degree Subject Benchmark Statement. Qualification specifications and associated handbooks for programmes of other awarding organisations describe or reference awards, units and learning outcomes at levels 4 to 6.

3 For awards of Teesside University, validation reports provide explicit confirmation of alignment with the FHEQ, the Foundation Degree Qualification Characteristics Statement and Subject Benchmark Statements in addition to any relevant professional standards. Course designers undertake development in the use of external reference points and staff met by the review team demonstrated a good understanding and effective use of level descriptors in the writing of learning outcomes.

4 External examiner reports for university and Pearson programmes explicitly confirm that threshold academic standards are being maintained, and that the academic standards set are comparable with those at other providers. Awarding organisations other than Pearson operate their own quality assurance mechanisms that include external verification of standards at levels 4 to 6.

### 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

5 The review team found that the College has in place effective governance arrangements to maintain oversight of the College's higher education provision. The College has a defined structure for its governance meetings that includes a Quality, Performance and Standards Committee, which reviews aspects of the College's higher education provision. This committee reviews key performance indicators (KPIs), academic standards, self-assessment, curriculum framework, equality and diversity performance, student voice and external examiner feedback. In addition, the College has a nominated link governor for higher education.

6 The Corporation has undertaken self-assessment of governance of the College, which is based on a model provided by the Institute of Directors. In addition, the sub-committees including the Quality, Performance and Standards Committee produce annual performance reports. The College supports academic freedom and has a Research and Scholarly Activity Policy. The College encourages staff development and supports staff in undertaking higher level qualifications. It also provides staff with opportunities to undertake scholarly activity and shares the impact of this through cross-College events.

7 The College has a Higher Education Committee, which reports into the Quality, Performance and Standards Committee. The Higher Education Committee includes representation from the governing body in its membership. The Higher Education Committee reviews the feedback from external examiners, student voice, policies and programme viability. There is evidence of papers submitted to the Higher Education Committee, which outline access agreements, student voice, and student data including student performance.

8 The College has a Risk Exposure, Distance to Travel and Control Dependency Report that outlines the headline risks with current and target levels of risk. Risks are monitored via a key College risks system that assigns risk to individual staff for monitoring. This includes the potential risks associated with the failure to retain staff and in curriculum planning. The Corporation receives reports and papers on strategic risk management.

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

9 Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of awards delivered by the College resides with its awarding bodies and organisations. The responsibilities of the College in respect of each of its awarding partners is set out in Memoranda of Agreements and operations manuals. The College's Higher Education Committee maintains operational oversight of academic standards, including oversight of programme approvals, assessment and responding to external examiners.

10 The College's awarding bodies maintain responsibility for the definitive record of programme specifications and any subsequent changes. Learning outcomes are clearly defined within programme specifications and module descriptors. The College has developed a higher education module box policy to ensure that full details of all modules delivered at the College are available. This includes information relating to learning materials, assessment materials and sample student work.

11 College staff are able to propose new programmes that align to the College's strategy. The College has a rigorous critical review process and an internal validation event before seeking formal approval by the awarding body. Staff are supported by the Learning and Development Centre and Advanced Teaching and Learning Coaches in the programme development process and the development of learning outcomes and assessment briefs.

12 The College has in place clear processes for programme monitoring and review. These include review of module feedback questionnaires, student consultative committee feedback, external examiner recommendations and student data at programme level, which is collated into an Award Leader report. Further annual monitoring consists of the collaborative partner annual monitoring report for Teesside programmes, an annual evaluation of course for the Huddersfield franchised programme, and the annual programme monitoring report for Pearson programmes.

13 The Head of Higher Education produces a College-wide higher education annual monitoring report that comments on a number of areas relating to academic quality. The outputs of the document then lead to the production of a Quality Improvement Plan. The latest higher education annual monitoring report identifies issues that could affect academic

standards and has highlighted the impact of staffing resources on a number of programmes across the College and specifically those in teach-out. While the College has responded to individual issues that have arisen and put in place measures to ensure academic standards have been maintained, the team identified issues that may affect the student experience of those students on teach-out which has led to an area for development in the Quality Code: Student Academic Experience (see paragraph 20).

14 The College uses the academic regulations of Teesside University and has its own internal assessment policy for Pearson awards. The College maintains responsibility for setting assessments and ensuring they align to the module learning outcomes and assessment criteria for all programmes apart from those awarded by the University of Huddersfield. For programmes awarded by Teesside University, a sample of assignment briefs is reviewed and verified by the external examiner prior to release to students. For Pearson programmes, a lead internal verifier reviews a sample prior to issue to students. These processes were found to be effective. A key feature of the College's Assessment Policy is that assessment outcomes are reported along with written and verbal feedback within 21 working days and students confirmed that on the whole, bar any staffing issues, these timeframes were adhered to.

15 External examiner reports demonstrate that student work is of an appropriate academic standard for the level of award. The College makes effective use of external examiners and adheres to the regulations of its awarding bodies in relation to the appointment and utilisation of external examiner reports. Feedback from external examiner reports is discussed informally at programme level and formally at the Higher Education Committee and an action plan is produced. Where issues have been identified, the College has responded well to any recommendations and external examiners have confirmed on subsequent visits that items identified have improved. Students reported that they had read and discussed external examiner reports in class and that these were accessible via the virtual learning environment (VLE).

16 A number of programmes at the College include placements and these are managed jointly by a central placement team and individual departments. The central placements team carries out all appropriate risk assessments, while the department undertakes visits and audits to ensure that academic standards are being maintained.

## **Rounded judgement**

17 The College's awarding partners set the academic standards of the higher education programmes it delivers through the application of their own academic frameworks and regulations. The College has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards through its governance structures, internal quality processes and procedures and adherence to the regulations of the awarding partners. There are no areas for development or specified areas for improvement in this judgement area.

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

## Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

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

19 The College's Higher Education Strategy contains a commitment to high quality teaching and learning that enhances students' employability, while the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy prioritises staff development. Staff teach across further and higher education programmes as part of integrated curriculum areas. Staff new to higher education receive a specific briefing before commencing teaching. The College hosts staff development days and staff can also access professional development activities of awarding bodies. The College supports research and scholarly activity through remission of teaching hours and staff receive up to 75 per cent of funding for study of higher qualifications, including master's degrees. Staffing, staff development, research and scholarly activities are considered at validation (and in Pearson centre approval) and regularly evaluated in monitoring and review reports. Staff complete a minimum 30 hours of recorded professional development annually. All academic staff possess a recognised teaching qualification and participate in the College's performance development and review scheme. For University programmes, tutor delivery approval is coordinated with awarding bodies.

20 External examiners for the Teesside BA (Hons) Photography and BA (Hons) Fine Art programmes, which are in teach-out, reported issues related to staff capacity, and students indicated additional pressures in the Foundation Degrees in Computing and Business and Management that had impacted their experience. While there is evidence of an agreed exit strategy in operation, this tends to focus on administrative matters related to programme closure. Notwithstanding that the foundation degrees will have ceased delivery by the end of the current academic year, the BA programmes will remain in operation for a further year. While satisfied with the actions taken thus far to mitigate against staff departures, the review team advises the College to develop a more learner-focused exit strategy with particular emphasis on the continuity of staffing, identifying this as an **area for development**.

21 Programme learning and teaching strategies are approved at validation and described in programme specifications and handbooks. In addition to programme monitoring, an annual Internal Quality Review process identifies good practice and areas for development. Performance of new staff is reviewed regularly during their probation period and the College plans to introduce an additional peer-review process next year. Advanced Teaching and Learning coaches provide support and mentoring in pedagogic practice and are highly regarded by academic staff. Students expressed general satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning and have confidence in their tutors' qualifications and expertise, including professional/industrial experience.

22 Students receive an introduction to higher education alongside a programme induction. Programme handbooks signpost academic and pastoral support and learning resources, and the VLE hosts course documentation and materials and provides access to library services and online coursework submission. Students also access their grades and attendance profiles via the VLE. The College invested in new learning analytics software which was being rolled out at the time of review. Each student is assigned a personal tutor with whom they meet to review their academic progress and formulate action plans. Although the provider submission indicated that students met with personal tutors at least once a semester, discussions with students and staff suggested that the frequency of these meetings was more variable. Although there is evidence that minimum expectations for personal tutoring have been included in next year's curriculum planning, the team advises

the College to ensure that opportunities for personal tutor meetings are consistently provided across higher education programmes, identifying this as an **area for development**.

23 The College is committed to providing and sustaining an inclusive, student-centred and modern learning environment. Two main campus buildings in Huddersfield and Dewsbury are supplemented by additional sites delivering specialist curriculum with their own Learning Resource Centres and library services. The Dewsbury site currently hosts a higher education Study Centre which is to be superseded by a new Higher Skills Centre from September 2019. The majority of students expressed satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of resources and had particular praise for the VLE. Learning resources and student support are considered at programme validation (and at Pearson centre approval) and regularly evaluated in monitoring and review reports.

24 The College's student voice strategy comprises course representation, internal surveys, focus groups and student conferences. New course representatives receive briefings from higher education managers and via the VLE, which will be supplemented by formal training from the next academic year. For university awards, academic panels meet with students as part of programme review and reapproval, while staff of Teesside University meet additionally with students during annual Quality Enhancement Review visits. Students regularly complete summative module evaluations. Eligible students participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) which has seen a decline in overall satisfaction from 92 per cent to 75 per cent, which the College mostly attributes to the transition to Higher National programmes and its impact on achieving NSS reporting thresholds. Nevertheless, the majority of students who contributed to the review expressed confidence in the quality of their learning experience.

25 The College's higher education Assessment and Feedback Policy references programme assessment policies and regulations, including recognition of prior learning; formative and summative assessment; extensions and mitigating circumstances; re-assessment; academic misconduct; academic appeals; external examiners; and assessment boards. Assessment strategies are approved at validation and described in programme specifications and handbooks. Coursework briefs describe assessment tasks in relation to intended learning outcomes, and marking criteria are published in programme and module handbooks. Students receive detailed formative and summative feedback. Internal verification of assessment is supported by sampling and standardisation activities and evidenced via internal verification reports. The majority of students expressed confidence in the appropriateness and clarity of assessments, assessment briefs and marking criteria, and the timeliness and quality of assessment feedback.

26 Assessment Boards for the validated Teesside University programmes are held at the College to confirm students' marks and awards. Boards are chaired and administered by College staff for whom training is provided. Assessment Boards for the University of Huddersfield franchised programmes take place at the awarding body with College participation. The College convenes local Assessment Boards for its Higher National programmes to confirm student marks prior to submission to Pearson.

27 The College meets the requirements of its awarding bodies and organisations for programme monitoring and modification, and for periodic review and revalidation, and the review team found the College's approach to be systematic and effective. Annual monitoring reports for awarding bodies and Pearson use a range of quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate programme performance and quality. Within the College, module leader reports contribute to reports of programme/award leaders which in turn inform production of a College-level report and accompanying Quality Improvement Plan for consideration by the Higher Education Committee and onward transmission to the Governors' Quality, Performance and Standards Committee. Teesside University annual quality enhancement

visits and Pearson centre quality visits provide additional monitoring. The College satisfies the requirements of its other awarding organisations through the production of annual self-assessment reports, supported by centre visits and reports of external verifiers.

28 The College has established employer collaborations that support programme design, development and delivery. Placements contribute to a number of awards including the PGCE in Lifelong Learning and HNC Advanced Practice in Early Years Education, and the professional diplomas in Education and Training and Counselling. Students source placements with the support of academic staff and the College's central placement team. Both students and employers receive placement guidance, supported by procedural documentation, placement agreements and site visits. Mentors' feedback on students' placement performance contributes to their assessment. In addition to placements, programmes utilise external visits and field trips, guest lectures, live briefs, work-related projects and exhibitions to enhance students' employability.

### **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**

29 The governance arrangements for embedding the student voice effectively protect student interests and allows engagement with student feedback. The College has a Student Voice Strategy. There are annual elections to the Student Union and two of the members are nominated as Student Governors to sit on the Corporation. The College notes that these are not currently higher education students. Student representation is at programme level with elected student representatives and there is a super representative who sits on the Higher Education Committee. Meetings are held at programme level and across the provision through a Student Consultative Committee for higher education.

30 The governance for student complaints is fair and appropriate. A summary report on the student voice is presented to the Higher Education Committee. Complaints feed into the Higher Education Committee and the Quality, Performance and Standards Committee. A summary report on the student voice is also submitted to the Corporation, although this covers all students and there is no specific mention of higher education in the report. The review team found that the complaints monitoring arrangement could be improved to ensure that the governing body has sufficient detail to maintain appropriate oversight of the student experience within the College. The review team therefore advises that the College further develops its governance arrangements for the monitoring of higher education complaints, identifying this as an **area for development**.

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

31 Kirklees College has shared responsibility with its awarding partners for ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met. Ultimately, the awarding bodies and organisations are responsible for the accuracy of definitive course information although much of the responsibility is with the College. For all Higher National programmes, foundation degrees and top-up programmes, responsibility for admissions and recruitment, including the production of all promotional and programme material, is fully delegated to the College.

32 The College has clear processes in place for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, which is documented in the higher education Applications Policy. The College's admissions team is responsible for managing the applications process and entry requirements are reviewed annually by the Head of Student Recruitment, Applications and Careers. There is a clear appeals process included in the Applications Policy and available



via the College website, though no appeals have been received in the last three years. Timescales for communicating decisions on admission are clear and students are able to make use of accreditation of prior learning, which has been used by the College. All students are interviewed and receive an induction upon arrival.

33 The College has a clear set of Terms and Conditions that includes the implications of accepting a place, how to cancel a place and the rights available to students when things go wrong. The Terms and Conditions are accessible and make clear reference to the complaints procedure, the students' right to appeal to the awarding body, and their right to appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

34 There is a clear process for signing off publicly available information and this is well understood by staff. Students receive accurate and comprehensive information on their programmes including a breakdown of modules, duration, location of study and awarding body.

### **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**

35 The College has a higher education Course Changes and Closure Policy, which came into force in December 2017. This covers course closure for prospective and current applicants. The higher education Applications Policy also contains information with respect to potential course closures. The College is currently in the process of teaching out provision with Teesside University. The University undertakes annual quality enhancement visits, which include discussions with students where students have commented on their experience and are happy with the programme. The College also holds exit strategy meetings with the University and the review team is satisfied that the College takes seriously its responsibilities for protecting the interests of its students in the event of course closure. However, the review team heard from several students whose experience had been affected because of staffing issues during the teach-out period. The College recognised that this had been a problem and has begun to put in place measures to mitigate this issue. The review team felt that further work needed to be undertaken, contributing to the area for development identified in paragraph 20.

36 The College has a Complaints Policy and Procedure. The arrangements are outlined in student handbooks and on the VLE and staff and students are aware of them. Complaints are monitored in the annual motoring process. The College's complaints procedure allows 30 working days for a response to complaints or 60 working days for complex issues. The Senior Leadership Team acknowledges that the timeliness of resolution has not been benchmarked to other providers and notes that this exercise could be undertaken. While the Complaints Policy and Procedure clearly advises students on their rights to refer the complaint to the OIA for independent resolution, the College acknowledges that the policy does not signpost students to the awarding body after exhausting the College's internal complaints procedures; the College confirmed this will be included in the next policy update. The review team advises the College to complete the review of its existing Complaints Policy and Procedure in respect of the timeliness of responses and signposting to procedures of the awarding bodies, identifying this as an **area for development**.

## **Rounded judgement**

37 Arrangements at the College for the academic governance and management of the student academic experience are appropriate and effective in the context of the responsibilities delegated to it by its awarding partners and the baseline regulatory requirements. The review team identified four areas for development. They relate to the development of a more learner-focused exit strategy for programmes in teach-out, consistency in the frequency of personal tutorials, the governance arrangements for the monitoring of higher education complaints and the completion of the review of the complaints policy.

38 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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