



Quality Review Visit of Lambeth College

March 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Lambeth College

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.**
- **There is no confidence requiring specified improvements before there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

Areas for development

There are no **areas for development**.

Specified improvements

The review team identified the following **specified improvements** that relate to matters that are already putting, or have the potential to put, quality and/or standards at risk at Lambeth College. The review team recommends that Lambeth College:

- ensures that accurate, complete and consistent communication to prospective and current students is formally provided (Consumer Protection)
- implements a process for the effective management and oversight of all information relating to higher education provision (Consumer Protection)
- establishes and implements a formal policy with appropriate safeguards in the event of course closure that ensures that information provided to students is clear, transparent and timely (Student Protection).

About this review

The review visit took place from 14 to 15 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Mark Cooper
- Ms Sophie Elliott (student reviewer)
- Mrs Catherine Symonds.

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 Lambeth College

Lambeth College is a general further education college with three sites based in the London Borough of Lambeth. The College's higher education provision is delivered from the Clapham site. At the time of the review the College had 51 higher education students evenly split between full and part-time, with the majority of part-time students in employment. The College delivers two courses: a Foundation Degree in Childhood Studies, which is validated by London Metropolitan University, and a Diploma in Education and Training, which is validated by Canterbury Christ Church University.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College, in partnership with its awarding bodies, has effective arrangements in place, such as where course specifications explicitly align with and reference the FHEQ. These arrangements ensure that the academic standards of programmes are set at or exceed UK threshold standards as set out in the FHEQ.

2 External examiner reports confirm that standards are met and are comparable, with all information and themes triangulated and discussed in partnership meetings and through annual monitoring processes. Associated action plans are subsequently monitored through to completion. First marking is carried out by the College, with second marking and moderation overseen and, where appropriate, carried out by the awarding bodies to ensure that academic standards are accurate, consistent and meet national standards and relevant benchmark statements.

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 The review team found that the College has effective governance arrangements in place, including a considered approach to risk management, which enables clear oversight of academic governance.

4 The College has introduced the Principal's Quality Board, reporting to the Quality Committee, a subgroup of the governing body. This process ensures informed, consistent oversight within the institution.

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

5 The College operates within the arrangements specified by the two awarding bodies. They monitor and review compliance to their regulations by the College through the annual reporting process, link staff arrangements and other reporting structures, which include an annual review process.

6 Academic standards are assured through external examiner arrangements, which include procedures for assessment and examination boards. Processes are in place to review and monitor programme and student performance, including retention and achievement data. Oversight by the awarding bodies is appropriate. The recently introduced enhancements to the reporting structures at the College will strengthen oversight at senior management levels within the College.

7 The two courses delivered by the College require students to be in a relevant workplace setting. Within the workplace, all students have a mentor who supports the student in achieving the course learning outcomes. Mentors receive training for their roles by College staff. While there is some inconsistency in how oversight is maintained between the two courses, the use of mentors ensures that students are appropriately supported.

Rounded judgement

8 The College, through its governance structures, various internal processes and procedures, adherence to its awarding bodies' regulations and evidence of engagement with the FHEQ, has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards. There are no areas for development or specified areas for improvement in this area.

9 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)

10 The student academic experience is maintained by appropriate policies, procedures and mechanisms that underpin the overall student learning experience, reinforced particularly well by supportive and robust course leadership.

11 Entry and admission processes are clear and outlined in a range of documentation, and are the shared responsibility of the College and its awarding bodies. The 10-step admissions process maps the formal application stage through to enrolment. All prospective students are required to complete an initial assessment and attend a formal interview before an offer of a place is made. Once on programme they are formally enrolled at the College and with the partner university. Students with relevant previous experience or qualifications have the opportunity to apply for accredited prior learning using the awarding bodies' policies and procedures.

12 Strong course leadership is supported by a formal and supportive observation of learning and teaching processes. Associated feedback and appraisal systems identify improvement opportunities for teachers that lead to relevant professional development activities. Staff involved in the delivery of higher education qualifications also undertake professional development training with their respective university partner, as well as in-College professional staff development activities.

13 Students whom the team met are satisfied with the teaching and learning experience they receive at the College, and were particularly positive around the personal support they receive from course tutors in communicating the content of the courses and in the assessment feedback.

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

14 The review team found that the College actively provides opportunity for student engagement in academic governance mechanisms, including various processes for student feedback to be considered at a senior level. Higher education students have an opportunity to become governors at the College's governing body but this opportunity has not yet been taken up. Student complaints are effectively addressed under the College's governance structures.

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

15 Information to prospective students is available on the College website and via the prospectus. The website includes course information, admission requirements and College rules and standards. The College does not provide all of the baseline information required to ensure that consumer protection requirements are met. Course fees are not detailed on the website; however, College staff advised the review team that information on fees is available on the relevant awarding body website. In addition, the requirement that students need to be in work or have access to a relevant setting to undertake the courses was absent from the College information. Details of extra costs such as those associated with the purchase of books were not included in information about the courses.

16 More information is available for current students. Course information is provided to students as part of the admissions and enrolment processes. Handbooks provide useful information and details of terms and conditions are provided. Once the course has commenced, the course leaders are proactive in ensuring that students have the course information they require, although some of this information is provided verbally in a classroom setting. Students confirmed that they are clear about most course content-related requirements and would ask course leaders if any additional information was required.

17 While the information made available by the College is appropriate in part, there have been difficulties on when and where students were able to access some relevant student support information. For example, delays and inconsistencies in information on bursaries and support for additional learning needs led to some confusion among the students. The College has now addressed these particular issues for the current cohorts of students and acknowledged that some information had been poorly advertised and communicated. Information is sometimes provided verbally by course leaders, and this informality of approach resulted in some students not being aware of certain matters or having only partial information. As an example, the students had different interpretations of how to engage with the student representative system. The review team identifies the need for a comprehensive and consistent approach to information provision as a **specified improvement**. The team recommends that the College ensures that accurate, complete and consistent communication to prospective and current students is formally provided.

18 The inconsistent approach to the provision of information required to meet consumer protection obligations appears to be a consequence of the lack of oversight within the current College arrangements. The College confirmed that no formal sign off process is currently in place for information on the website or in other published materials, although a process for website information is planned as part of the launch of a new website in the near future. Most senior staff were unaware of the consumer protection obligations as detailed in the CMA guidelines for UK higher education providers. Prospective students did not have all the information required to make an informed decision about their choice of course (paragraph 15) and current students were reliant on course leaders for some information (paragraphs 16 and 17). There is limited oversight of information provided to prospective and current students; policies and information have not been considered with alignment to CMA requirements in mind and hence there is the potential to put the quality of the student experience at risk. Therefore, the review team identifies the following **specified improvement** and recommends that the College implements a process for the effective management and oversight of all information relating to higher education provision. This is to ensure that information for prospective and current higher education students is complete, fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

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

19 During the review visit, it was confirmed that the College is intending to proceed with a merger with London South Bank University, although at the time of the visit, the agreement was not officially in place.

20 The College had sent the merger confirmation letter to London Metropolitan University and Canterbury Christ Church University, starting the official withdrawal process from both institutions. The review team was made aware of the potential closure of the higher education provision within the College, although conflicting views surrounding the timings and comprehensiveness of the closures were presented to the review team. The

College had not officially shared this information with the students, although some students whom the review team met showed limited knowledge of the situation.

21 The College gave the review team to understand that it will be seeing through the current higher education provision to the end of level 5, and will not be accepting a new intake of students on to level 4 in 2017-18, and while the College's Quality Assurance Framework refers to course changes and closures, as do its agreements with its awarding bodies, no formal course closure policy is in place to ensure the continuity of provision for current students. This is a significant requirement of the baseline regulatory requirement for student protection measures. Therefore, the review team has identified an area for **specified improvement** and strongly recommends that the College establishes and implements a formal policy with appropriate safeguards in the event of course closure that ensures that information provided to students is clear, transparent and timely.

22 The review team found that the College communicates material changes to current courses informally to students through the programme leaders. Students confirmed that they are well advised and can make informed choices.

23 The College has in place a formal complaints policy which ensures that complaints and appeals processes are appropriately independent and confidential, and are actioned in a proportional, fair and timely manner.

24 There is effective oversight of complaints when they do occur, and the College utilises the outcome of student complaints to improve student experience.

Rounded judgement

25 The College has demonstrated through its various governance structures and internal policies and procedures that it meets the baseline regulatory requirements effectively in respect of governance arrangements, admissions processes, teaching and learning and academic staff development. However, the review team found that there were omissions, inconsistencies and a lack of oversight in the College's approach to information, which has led to two specified improvements. In addition, the review team found that the absence of a College course closure policy means that the baseline regulatory requirements for student protection measures are not met. As the College confirms that the current higher education provision will close, the absence of such a policy offers the potential for serious risk to students affected.

26 The review team concludes that there is no confidence requiring specified improvements before there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

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