



Quality Review Visit of Middlesbrough College

November 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Middlesbrough College

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at Middlesbrough 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 did not identify any areas for development.

Specified improvements

The review team did not identify any specified improvements.

About this review

The review visit took place from 14 to 16 November 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Professor John Deane
- Miss Sarah E. Bennett (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 Middlesbrough College

Middlesbrough College (the College) is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in the Tees Valley, servicing more than 13,188 students from across the Tees Valley and beyond. It offers a wide range of programmes, including further education courses, in all 15 designated subject areas, apprenticeships, employer training, and higher education courses, as well as full-time and part-time programmes for 14-16 year olds (MC Academy).

The College's vision is 'to be the leading provider of education and training creating a positive future for everyone in Teesside'.

The College's higher education provision falling under the remit of the Quality Review Visit comprises 30 higher education programmes, made up of seven in full-time only mode; 12 in part-time only mode; and 11 in both full-time and part-time mode. At the time of the review visit, the College reported that for academic year 2016-17, it had a total of 749 higher education students. For the past 20 years, the College has maintained an indirectly funded franchised partnership with Teesside University (the awarding body). The College will transfer its validation arrangements to the Open University (the new awarding body) and Pearson Education (the awarding organisation) from the start of academic year 2018-19. Consequently, in preparation for the next phase in its higher education development, the key focus of activity in the current academic year is managing the transition from the current to the new awarding partners.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The current awarding body (as will the new awarding body and organisation) retains overall responsibility for the academic standards of its awards, and either provides the programme specifications or validates those produced at the College. In all cases, there is clear alignment with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statements, where appropriate. Programmes have been developed to ensure alignment with the current awarding body's Quality Handbook. The awarding body is responsible for ensuring that its awards are appropriately aligned with the FHEQ through its approval processes. Programme learning outcomes are framed in accordance with the credit level descriptors for the levels of study associated with each type of award and are considered at programme approval events.

2 College staff deliver, assess and internally moderate in accordance with, and under the oversight of, the quality assurance mechanisms of the awarding body as set out in the Quality Handbook. The provision is managed through the Tees Valley Higher Education Business Partnership (TVHEBP), as described in the Operations Manual and Memorandum of Agreement, which clearly set out the responsibilities of the awarding body and of the College. Staff who met with the review team provided evidence of recent experiences of successful revalidation of both foundation degree and bachelor's programmes, demonstrating a sound understanding of the FHEQ.

3 The Programme Validation Committee oversees new programme development. Approval documents are required to demonstrate evidence of research into similar awards and cross-reference to Subject Benchmark Statements, professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) expectations, national occupational standards and the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statements. Programme approval forms prompt consideration of these external reference points. Staff who met with the review team demonstrated enthusiastic and active engagement with the comprehensive schedule for the design of programmes, from level 4 to 6, for validation by the new awarding body.

4 External examiners, appointed by the awarding body, confirm comparability with other UK providers and that standards are appropriate for the awards. Institutional-level oversight is exercised through the HE Standards Committee (HESC), which will be retitled the HE Academic Board in December 2017.

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 Governors have wide-ranging expertise in teaching, industry and higher education and support the College well. The Board of Governors provides overall strategic leadership for the College, with the HESC, College Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) all reporting to the Board of Governors. Responsibility for higher education provision is delegated to the HESC. Student representatives benefit as regular members of the HESC, the Standards Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee. A Student Governor also sits on the Board of Governors, and this representation will continue with the move to the new awarding body.

6 In July 2017, the Board of Governors formally signed off the decision to move all of the College's higher education provision to a new awarding body. A formal agreement was signed on 27 September 2017, and a formal validation approval visit took place on 6 September 2017. The College ensures governance and management of its academic standards through the partnership agreement with its current awarding body, and will continue to do so through the partnership agreements with its new awarding body and awarding organisation for 2018-19. The Principalship maintains effective oversight of the delivery of higher education within the College and assigns responsibility to the HESC. The HESC is responsible for ensuring that governors and the SLT are kept up to date with progress and developments.

7 Oversight of academic risk is effective. Recruitment and progression data are submitted to the Board of Governors throughout the year via an annual monitoring report presented by the Director of HE to the HESC. A three to five-yearly Internal Audit Cycle covers all aspects of College activity. Any recommendations are fed back to the Board of Governors in an Exception Report, which is then delegated to a senior manager for action. The Board of Governors receives regular updates until each matter is resolved.

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

8 The College currently operates all its higher education provision with one awarding body, and this relationship is formalised and responsibilities outlined through a Memorandum of Agreement, and operationalised via the awarding body's Quality Handbook, plus the TVHEBP Operational Manual and TVHEBP Board. All arrangements between the College and the awarding body are set out in the responsibilities checklist.

9 The Quality Handbook of the existing awarding body and the Handbook for Validated Awards of the new awarding body provide the reference points for programme development. There is a comprehensive schedule for the design of new programmes for approval during 2017-18. All responsibilities of the College regarding the development and monitoring of programmes are outlined in the new awarding body's Handbook for Validated Awards and the existing awarding body's Quality Handbook. The College has also applied to a new awarding organisation for direct centre registration for its Higher National provision.

10 The College follows the awarding body's template for annual monitoring via module evaluation reports, which feed into the Annual Programme Leaders Report, which includes consideration of external examiner comments. The awarding body's Collaborative Partners Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report is then produced by the Director of Higher Education and the Higher Education Office (HEO) and sent to the HESC and the Board of Governors. Action plans developed are monitored by HESC. The College has set out a programme validation procedure and programme approval template and engages with employers in programme development. The Director of HE provides updates to the Board of Governors on key higher education metrics. The College has in place effective arrangements for managing collaborative provision, assessment, monitoring of data on student performance and progression, retention, degree outcomes and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education, and student satisfaction via HESC and the HE Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report.

11 The Board of Governors of the College took the decision in July 2017 to move all higher education provision from Teesside University to the Open University and Pearson Education. The Board of Governors, College Standards Committee and the HESC are managing the oversight of this major change and the Director of HE provides updates to the Board of Governors and HESC. The College has a transition plan and a schedule of programme validation that has been agreed with the new awarding body and which has

built-in stages to support staff. The College has a plan for monitoring all of the policies that need to be produced before the College begins to offer the courses from September 2018. Staff who met the review team confirmed that HESC, and going forward Academic Board, will have oversight of the development of these policies. The College is investing in additional professional services posts to support the transition to the new awarding body. At the same time, the College is moving its HNC/HND provision to a new awarding organisation and has developed programme handbooks and mapping documents to the FHEQ, and has agreed with the awarding organisation that the handbooks will be the definitive programme specifications. The team is confident that the arrangements put in place by the College to manage the oversight of the transition to the new awarding partners are effective.

Rounded judgement

12 Both Teesside University (the awarding body) and the Open University (the new awarding body), and Pearson Education (the awarding organisation), set the standards of the College's programmes through the application of their own academic frameworks and regulations, to which the College adheres. The College, through its adherence to its awarding partners' regulations and its engagement with the FHEQ, the relevant Code of Governance and the Quality Code, has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards. No areas for development or specified improvements were identified.

13 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)

14 Overall responsibility for the quality of the higher education student experience lies with the HESC, supported by the HESC terms of reference. The College monitors the quality of the student experience by examining KPI data, including National Student Survey (NSS) scores, which is heard at the VPAC/SIRS Faculty HE Meeting.

15 Recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures are effective. These are informed by the 2017 College Admissions Policy, which sets out clearly the policies for the recruitment of students to all undergraduate and postgraduate courses. These processes are overseen by the College Management Team and reviewed annually by the HESC. Admissions criteria are the responsibility of each Programme Director, and all Admissions Tutors and staff are informed of the Admissions and Equal Opportunities Policies and related procedures, and receive appropriate training. Students with an additional learning need or disability are encouraged to declare their requirements at interview. Applicants are also encouraged to identify any previously achieved learning through work, training or prior education. UCAS deadlines are adhered to where applicable.

16 The College's support services are available on the College website. Student Engagement Officers provide a range of signposting and advice services with a student drop-in and open-door policy. The review team heard that academic staff are aware of how to refer students. Additional Learning Support (ALS) is delivered by Learning Support Assistants and the ALS team. Students have tutorials at regular intervals, depending on the module offered. These include one-to-one tutorials with staff to discuss academic progression, and pastoral tutorials to discuss personal issues.

17 Student feedback and the student voice are heard through elected student representatives, who attend regular programme meetings. Student voice, support and enhancement are listed as regular agenda items. Student representative meeting minutes, the newly implemented HE Working Groups and HESC meeting minutes indicate that students and staff regularly engage in discussion, sharing feedback and suggestions for improvement. Students who met with the review team described taking part in module evaluations in meetings with the Head of HE. External examiner reports and the minutes from relevant College meetings are shared with students on the VLE.

18 Student representatives are elected by their fellow students, provide feedback to staff to enable improvements, and ensure that progress is shared among their peers. Students are encouraged to stand for election in order to become representatives as part of the awarding body's minimum standard. Representatives are also required to attend a training session run by the Students' Union in order to prepare them for their role.

19 The College uses a range of outcomes, including feedback from programme reports, module reports, annual feedback questionnaires and NSS data to inform an annual Action Plan and monitoring report. The College's NSS scores are very positive and significantly higher than the national average. All programme leaders complete a Module Evaluation Report annually, which tracks student engagement, staff feedback, student feedback, and external examiner comments. Likewise, programme leaders complete a Programme Leaders Report, which outlines the programme specification, progression and achievement data, and student feedback. These results are used to complete the HE Monitoring Report.

20 Under the terms of the current validation agreement, the College shares responsibility for managing quality and risk, and staff ensure a good range of programme resources. The College responds positively to feedback from students regarding the quality and availability of resources, which have been expanded to better reflect higher education provision, including eBooks and access to academic journals. Students who met the review team reported good resources and availability.

21 The College has expanded its provision to ensure improved staff capability in scholarly activity and research. Staff are well supported to maintain research and are given time for scholarly activity with a continuous programme of CPD throughout the year, including Workforce Development Days. The College has further plans to invest in staff membership of the Higher Education Academy. Each directorate has a dedicated Teaching and Learning Mentor to support and train staff in a phased 'Start for Success' programme. The College Learning and Teaching Policy is being altered, and the observation process changed to reflect the differences between further and higher education. Teaching staff are observed annually, and those who met the review team also described informal teaching observations and constructive support from other staff. A revised teaching, learning and assessment strategy has been drafted and is due to be implemented. Overall, these advances will further develop effective, research-led learning and teaching within the College. Senior staff have the academic freedom to question the College and come up with new ideas. Through a commitment to collegiality, the College gives staff the opportunity to make their voice heard and comment to senior staff, which would continue to be actively monitored within the new validation arrangements. The review team is confident that the standard of teaching and learning will continue in the transition to new awarding partners.

22 When developing programmes, the College has extensively and effectively outsourced to external consultants and industry partners to ensure that course content is highly relevant to the specific needs of local employers and trades. Staff who met the review team described significant links to industry, including in hospitality courses where students had links to Michelin-starred chefs and undertook specialist training.

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

23 The College elects student representatives to sit on the Board of Governors through the Students' Union by way of online elections on 'Canvas', the College's VLE. The student representatives present reports on the student voice at Board of Governors meetings, and students who met with the review team confirmed that their voice is heard and listened to. Elected student representatives will remain on the Board of Governors with the move to the new awarding body. Students are also represented at the HESC. Student Feedback is a standard agenda item on the HESC.

24 The Governors receive an annual report that updates them on the type and range of complaints in higher education and looks for trends and patterns in the complaints. The Colleges subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

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

25 To ensure that information for intended audiences is clear, easily accessible and trustworthy, the College has implemented a published HE Information Procedure issued by the Director of Marketing. Approval must be gained from the Director of HE or the HE Cross-College Co-ordinator for all published marketing and course-specific information. Details of programmes offered by the College are outlined on the College website,

and students who met with the review team reported that the information they had received allowed them to make an informed decision.

26 The College has worked collaboratively with the awarding body's Department for External Relations to ensure the accuracy of web and paper-based publications. This is confirmed in the Collaborative Provision Annual Monitoring Evaluation Report. To ensure compliance with the requirements of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the College consulted with the awarding body to ensure that terms and conditions, and the information provided during the application and offer phase and on course closures and changes, was fit for purpose. Staff training, including for Governors, has been provided on consumer protection and the implications for higher education. There is clear staff engagement with the accuracy of information provided to both prospective and current students.

27 Within the College, the HESC terms of reference include the review of marketing and publicity to ensure CMA compliance; it is a standing agenda item. All new policies and procedures are submitted to HESC for approval. Information is also scrutinised during the programme approval process. The HESC approved the Higher Education Admissions Policy and the terms and conditions that are published on the website and reproduced in the Student Handbook. Admissions information is available to prospective students through the online prospectus, website and hard copy. This includes information on appeals against admissions decisions.

28 The first point of contact for prospective students is the website or printed HE Guide. In advance of the review visit the College's higher education webpage included a welcome to the new awarding body, stating that most courses were delivered in collaboration. The College is working on a marketing plan and a transition plan, each with a timeline for key activities up to September 2018. By the time of the visit, new programme leaflets had been developed which were publicly accessible. The website information explains in easy-to-understand language that programmes are 'subject to validation'. The statement provides a clear explanation that in the unlikely event of programmes not being approved, all applicants would be offered alternative programmes of study and guidance towards other providers as appropriate. These developments reflect the translation of actions into practice during the transitional period.

29 The review team found that that the transition plan to the new awarding body contains appropriate activities which are progressing to the agreed timescales; these include the ongoing development of new policies, which are being overseen through the deliberative structures and ongoing engagement with the new awarding body's quality contact. The evidence together demonstrates confidence that the plan would be fully implemented by September 2018. There will be no enrolment to the programmes validated by the new awarding body until September 2018.

30 The College's higher education webpage provides a useful 'essential information' section. Documents include terms and conditions; appeals against admissions decisions; course closures and changes; an Access and Participation statement; complaints; and a link to the awarding body's Student Handbook. Students who met with the review team confirmed the usefulness of pre-entry information.

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

31 The College's Complaints Procedure covers all stakeholders rather than being specific to higher education. There are informal and formal stages which have worked effectively to date as being analogous to stage one of the awarding body's process. The College Ombudsman decision is 'final' but students are informed that a complaint may be escalated to the awarding body's policy, which aligns with the guidance set out by the OIA. Formal reports are produced by the Vice Principal for Quality and presented at termly management meetings and annually to the Corporation Board. The institutional annual monitoring report, produced by the Director of HE, includes a section for the review of the nature of complaints. This is approved by the Corporation Board before being reported into the awarding body deliberative structures. The complaints procedure is accessible on the College's website and on the VLE. Students are informed of the procedure during induction. Students who met the review team had a good understanding of the complaints procedure and stated that in most cases complaints are resolved informally and promptly.

32 Changes are being made to the Complaints Policy in the light of the move to the new awarding body. Staff who met with the review team confirmed that all policies are scheduled for revision to 'enhance existing College policies' under the transitional plan with the new awarding body, which is being guided by the new awarding body's Senior Quality and Partnerships Manager. As part of this exercise, the complaints procedure will be formally strengthened; oversight provided through the monitoring of the schedule will provide the assurance of completion.

33 There is a formal academic appeals procedure which applies to all higher education students, who are protected through the current awarding body's process; the student handbooks provide directions to access the current awarding body's academic regulations. The HESC terms of reference include responsibility for the receipt and management of student appeals. Student handbooks provide a useful reference point for policies, which are also available on the VLE. Students who met the review team confirmed their understanding of the process for academic appeals. A new policy, Academic Appeals Regulations, has been introduced in preparation for the arrangement with the new awarding body.

34 The review team heard that, as part of the implementation phase, the alignment of all policies, including the arrangements for appeals and complaints, will be addressed as each individual programme comes up for validation, which is required to fulfil the conditions of the new awarding body.

35 There are position statements for course closures and changes which are included in the HE Guide and published on the website, allowing for this process to be accessible and transparent. The review team found that arrangements for closing the provision with the current awarding body were formalised into appropriate plans to protect the students and that changes were communicated in a timely and appropriate manner. The Standards Committee receives formal updates, including consideration of CMA matters, to ensure institutional oversight of these arrangements. Students who met with the review team confirmed that they have appreciated the approach taken by the College and are assured that their interests will be protected during the 'teaching out' period. The new awarding body's Institutional Approval Panel highlighted the 'dedication and enthusiasm of academic staff and the senior management team', which has been evident throughout the process. The review team noted the high level of dedication, which provides assurances in regard to the implementation of the transition plans.

Rounded judgement

36 The review team considered the quality of the student academic experience at Middlesbrough College, including student outcomes. The College has demonstrated through its governance structure and working with its awarding partners that it meets all the baseline regulatory requirements in this area effectively. No areas for development or specified improvements were identified.

37 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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