



# Quality Review Visit of Redcar and Cleveland College

March 2018

## Key findings

### QAA's rounded judgements about Redcar and Cleveland College

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

- **There is limited confidence requiring specified improvements before 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 is limited confidence requiring specified improvements before 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 Redcar and Cleveland College. The review team advises Redcar and Cleveland College to:

- further develop the Governing Body's role to ensure that effective and transparent arrangements are in place (Code of Governance)
- further develop the arrangements for engaging students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Quality Code)
- ensure that higher education students are represented at all levels of the academic governance structure (Code of Governance)
- include explicit reference to the role of the OIA in the College's policies and procedures (Student Protection).

## 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 Redcar and Cleveland College. The review team recommends that Redcar and Cleveland College:

- ensures that there is clear and effective strategic oversight for higher education through the College's deliberative structures (Code of Governance)
- systematically monitors and evaluates all aspects of higher education through the College's deliberative bodies (Quality Code).

## About this review

The review visit took place from 6 to 7 March 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Lynne Braham
- Mrs Jane Durant
- Mr Stuart Cannell (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 Redcar and Cleveland College

Redcar and Cleveland College (the College) is a small general further education college. The College's mission is 'raising aspirations, exceeding expectations'. The College delivers provision at a dedicated higher education centre in Redcar.

The College delivers its higher education provision under franchise arrangements with Teesside University. The College is one of five colleges within the Tees Valley that work collaboratively with Teesside University to deliver higher education provision through the Tees Valley Higher Education Business Partnership (TVHEBP). The five colleges work in partnership with Teesside University to provide programmes co-developed and validated by the University. All programmes are indirectly funded and are validated by Teesside University.

The College has around 200 higher education students. Its higher education provision consists of higher national programmes, foundation degrees, honours degrees, and a postgraduate certificate. Provision is delivered in a range of curriculum areas, including engineering, construction, education, counselling and social care. Until September 2016, all higher education programmes were delivered part-time. In 2017 a full-time Certificate of Higher Education programme in adult social care has been added to the College's portfolio.

The College is currently in the advanced stages of a merger with Stockton Riverside College with an anticipated date for the conclusion of the process being July 2018.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 Higher Education at the College is delivered under a franchise agreement with the awarding body, Teesside University (the University), and programmes are designed and developed for delivery by the College. The provision is managed through the Tees Valley Higher Education Business Partnership (TVHEBP) according to its Heads of Terms, the Memorandum of Agreement between the University of Teesside and the College, and the TVHEBP Operations Manual.

2 The College programme teams work closely with the University in the development and approval of new programmes, including writing course documentation, developing module and programme specifications and student handbooks, and attending approval events. Approval processes ensure that programmes are aligned with the FHEQ, and Subject Benchmark Statements and Characteristics Statements are clearly referenced in programme specifications. Module guides clearly align to the FHEQ, with learning outcomes set at the appropriate level and linked to programme-level objectives.

3 External examiners' reports confirm that the academic standards of the College's programmes are comparable with those of other UK higher education 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

4 Since December 2017, the College has adopted a simplified structure for its Governing Body to enable rapid improvements in the learner experience and is currently ongoing. Under its interim arrangements, the Governing Body meets every two weeks, with the focus of the meeting either being on the finance of the College or the student academic experience. The only subcommittee that sits under the Governing Body is the audit committee. This reduced structure will be in effect until the merger process has been concluded. However, the College intends to reassess the frequency and effectiveness of the revised arrangements in April 2018. The College operates a weekly meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Group, which has higher education as a standing item for discussion and feeds into the Governing Body; this is intended to provide oversight of academic governance arrangements. The Higher Education Group sits under the Curriculum and Quality Group and meets four times a year to consider cross-College issues.

5 The College has aligned the underpinning principles of the Governing Body to the Nolan 'Seven Principles of Public Life'. The College has not explicitly carried out an alignment or mapping exercise to the relevant code of governance, and although this formal consideration has not occurred, many of the principles within the codes of governance are being met. However, while governance arrangements are effective in practice, the lack of formal alignment to a relevant code of governance means that the College lacks a robust operational and strategic approach. The College does not conduct a cyclical check to ensure that the Governing Body continues to meet the relevant codes of governance, therefore, this is not guaranteed. The team therefore advises the College to further develop the Governing Body's role to ensure that effective and transparent arrangements are in place (Code of Governance) and identifies this as an **area for development**.

6 The chief mechanism by which the Governing Body maintains oversight of higher

education is the Collaborative Provision Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report (CPAMER). Production of the CPAMER is a requirement placed on the College by the awarding body and it contains a wide range of information. However, although there are several mechanisms through which higher education is reported across the College, there is a lack of clarity about the structures for strategic oversight. There is insufficient evidence of effective review and evaluation taking place through the deliberative structures. The College relies extensively on external drivers to maintain oversight of the strategic direction of its higher education provision, including through the TVHEBP and its links with the University. The College has recently introduced performance review and business-planning processes, although these mechanisms are yet to be fully embedded or used effectively as part of a cohesive approach. Additionally, there is a lack of review and evaluation of higher education through the College's deliberative bodies and insufficient evidence of effective oversight and evaluation of provision, and robust action planning to enable improvements to take place. There is insufficient emphasis given to assuring oversight of academic standards at institutional level, and a lack of strategic oversight of provision. The team therefore recommends that the College ensures there is clear and effective strategic oversight for higher education through its deliberative structures, and identifies this as a **specified improvement**.

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

7 The University is ultimately responsible for the management of academic standards at the College, with some responsibilities shared between the two institutions. College staff ensure alignment to threshold academic standards when developing new programmes prior to submission for approval by the University. College staff are well supported by comprehensive documentation from the University and by proactive engagement within the TVHEBP. Samples of College programme specifications, and module and programme leader reports confirm adherence to the University's policies and procedures for the management of academic standards.

8 Management structures are clear, and senior leadership includes a Higher Education Manager, with line management responsibility for programme leaders. College staff follow the University quality processes and regulations, supported by designated link tutors. The College's deliberative structures include the Higher Education Group, the Curriculum and Quality Group, and the Higher Education Student Focus Group.

9 Definitive records of programmes are secured and maintained by the University. Programme specifications and handbooks and module handbooks show an outcomes-based approach aligned to the FHEQ level of award, with descriptors of level and attainment. Students access these through the virtual learning environment (VLE). A cycle of periodic programme review at the University ensures effective formal approval and recording of changes to definitive programme documents. Current programmes under periodic review include all higher national programmes and the FdA Supporting Teaching and Learning. College mechanisms for recording student achievement vary across programmes making it labour intensive for managers to gain easy oversight of student marks. Definitive records of achievement are maintained by the University. Staff and students confirm they know how to record and access assessment marks.

10 The recently introduced business planning method, linked with a rigorous and comprehensive performance review process, ensures full and formal consideration is given by senior staff to curriculum planning, resourcing and performance indicators. Factors considered include market need, finance, resources, and staffing. Proposals for new programmes are submitted to the University and are subsequently developed solely by College staff, or in collaboration with other members of the TVHEBP. Formal approval

events held at Teesside University involve the College development team, university academics, external experts, and employers.

11 In line with the University's quality assurance arrangements, College staff take responsibility for setting, marking and moderating assessments. Assessments are outcomes based, employing a variety of methods. Programme teams undertake first and second marking, and moderation. In addition, further moderation and standardisation takes place across partner colleges in the TVHEBP. Module, award, and progression boards convened at the University, and attended by College staff, deliberate and approve assessment outcomes, thus maintaining definitive records of achievement. There have been no occasions where RPL has been used over the past three years.

12 Formal oversight of academic standards relies significantly on the University's review processes. Comprehensive module and programme leaders' reports draw on statistical data and written evidence. Reports are submitted to the University and also considered by the College's Higher Education and Quality Improvement Managers. Significant issues are identified and escalated to senior leaders for consideration and action planning. Some strategic oversight of programme leaders' reports and other aspects of academic standards, such as feedback from external examiners, is maintained through presentation of the College CPAMER to the Board of Governors. However, other than this process it is difficult to identify how academic standards are routinely monitored and reviewed throughout the College's deliberative structures (see specified improvement in paragraph 6). A revised business and performance review process is currently being introduced to ensure increased rigour and scrutiny by senior managers. The University checks standards and aspects of quality through annual Quality Enhancement Visits (QEVs). The Strategic Steering Group of the TVHEBP also reviews student performance data.

13 The University appoints external examiners who scrutinise assessment decisions and attend award and progression boards. External examiners' reports are disseminated to programme teams by the Higher Education Manager and Quality Improvement Manager, who together identify significant emerging issues. Programme leaders reflect on the content of external examiners' reports within annual programme leaders' reports. A summary of external examiners' feedback is presented to the Governing Body as part of the CPAMER. Reports are available for access by students on the VLE. Reports confirm that academic standards and students' achievement aligns with required threshold standards and are comparable with those in other UK institutions. In addition to external examiners, expert and independent input is effectively sought during new programme development and programme reapproval. Examples include the involvement of employers through a critical reading process, and through consultation with employers and placement providers to ensure relevant programme content and context.

14 Students undertaking work placements and placement providers receive detailed and comprehensive handbooks, including roles and responsibilities. Where relevant, appropriate reference is made to requirements and arrangements for Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Routine monitoring of placement providers by a designated member of staff ensures students work in safe environments.

## **Rounded judgement**

15 There is one specified improvement in this judgement area, which recommends that the College ensures there is clear and effective strategic oversight for higher education through its deliberative structures. The specified improvement relates to weaknesses in the College's approach to this aspect of the baseline regulatory requirements, which the team considers could, if not addressed, lead to serious problems over time.

16 The review team also identified one area for development with advice to the College to further develop the Governing Body's role in order to ensure that effective and transparent arrangements are in place.

17 The review team concludes that there is limited confidence requiring specified improvements before 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)

18 The Teaching and Learning Quality Procedure and the Learner Engagement Strategy outline the College's approach to the provision of teaching and learning for both further and higher education students. The College aligns its higher education provision to strategies of the University and there is no specific higher education strategy or learning, teaching and assessment methodology.

19 Assessment operates according to the University regulations, and students confirm that arrangements are clearly communicated at induction, through the VLE, and through student and module handbooks, with clear assessment and grading criteria provided. Students confirmed that assessment feedback is developmental, clearly linked to grading criteria, and returned within 20 working days as required by the Teesside University's Assessment and Feedback Policy.

20 Formal and informal opportunities exist to allow feedback on a range of issues and students gave examples of action being taken in response. The Learner Engagement Strategy describes formal opportunities for students to meet with senior managers through student forums and with programme teams through Programme Course Committees at the College. There is limited formal student representative training, and students explained that the forums operate largely on an informal basis, through meetings between student representatives and the Higher Education Manager. Although there is evidence that students attend Programme Boards at the University, the team found no evidence of formal meetings of the College's Programme Course Committees, or of students' involvement with these. Informal opportunities for providing feedback work well, although students are not proactively engaged in the wider academic experience. There is no specific higher education student representation on the Governing Body and there are limited opportunities for students formally to engage with College-level decision making. The review team advises the College to further develop the arrangements for engaging students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their academic experience, identifying this as an **area for development**.

21 The quality of teaching is monitored through a peer-observation scheme, which has been developed to include a focus on higher education, referencing the University's policies and practice. Examples of the positive impact of the development of peer observation were provided by staff and in the comprehensive Teaching and Learning Practitioner Activity Report 2016-17.

22 The introduction of a comprehensive performance review process offers opportunities for systematic monitoring and oversight of the student academic experience, although the examples seen by the team contained little evidence of oversight of peer observation of learning and teaching, as required by the process.

23 The College carries out its annual monitoring processes using the University quality model and reports are produced at module and programme level using University templates. A summary is provided to the University through the annual CPAMER, reflecting on the quality of the College's higher education programmes and identifying some necessary actions. Module and programme reports are considered by the Higher Education Manager and the Quality Improvement Manager, who identify issues and actions but it is not clear where else in the College's deliberative structures module and programme reports are



routinely monitored. The CPAMER summary document is provided to the Governing Body, although samples of minutes showed limited consideration or engagement with the content of the report.

24 The College relies significantly on the review and enhancement mechanisms undertaken through the University to manage, monitor and enhance the student academic experience. Primarily this is through the production of the CPAMER. However, it is unclear how information on the student learning experience is provided through feedback or statistical data, which is used effectively for systematic identification of enhancement opportunities. Additionally, there is little evidence of how oversight and effective evaluation of the student academic experience takes place through other internal College reporting processes, or of how appropriate consideration of higher education takes place at College level. The review team recommends that the College systematically monitors and evaluates all aspects of higher education through the College's deliberative bodies and identifies this as a **specified improvement**.

### **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**

25 The Governing Body maintains oversight of complaints received and how they are resolved through the annual CPAMER report. The governance arrangements ensure that student complaints are effectively addressed through both informal and formal procedures, and through both the University's and the College's own policies.

26 There are limited opportunities for students to be involved in the academic governance structures of the College. Although there is a student position within the terms of reference of the Governing Body, this post is not specifically targeted at a higher education student. The College stated that the student governor role is currently filled by a further education student and had been vacant until very recently. Furthermore, there is no student representation on the Curriculum and Quality Group nor on the Higher Education Group where students' views are considered and programmes are reviewed. The team therefore advises the College to ensure that higher education students are represented at all levels of the academic governance structure, as an **area for development**.

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

27 Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that consumer protection obligations are met in relation to Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance. Teesside University policies and procedures for admissions are clearly articulated and effectively implemented. Applications and admissions are managed either through UCAS or online at the University, which may involve College staff interviewing applicants. A designated member of College staff supports higher education applicants, and a central record of applicants and enrolments is maintained at the University. Students confirm the pre-course information they received is helpful, and a mix of formal and informal interviews supports decision making.

28 There are effective mechanisms in place for checking the accuracy and consistency of information provided to applicants and students. The University's terms and conditions are well publicised. Knowledge and acceptance of these is prioritised at enrolment through formal processes at both the University and the College. Students stated that they recognised and understood the terms and conditions pertaining to both institutions and consider the application of these to be effective. Programme information is available to applicants and is readily accessible through the University's website, with the University

having responsibility for maintaining the content and ensuring its accuracy. The reliability of information produced by the College, including the website, programme specifications, and student handbooks, is assured through University audits and the annual QEV.

29 The College has a clear policy and procedure for complaints. The complaints process is staged with clear timeframes, involving informal discussion and resolution, a formal complaint and investigation, appeal process, and appropriate reference on to the University. In practice, the College's focus is on early intervention and resolution to avoid escalation of issues. Within the past three years few formal complaints have been received. Although not recorded, the local management of informal complaints is responsive. Students and staff confirm this approach is effective in securing satisfactory resolution to issues.

### **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**

30 The Complaints and Appeals Policy is accessible on the VLE and in the Student Handbook. The College operates the University's academic appeal procedure, which consists of a three-stage process, with information on how students can appeal the final decision through the Office of Independent Adjudicator (OIA). There have been no academic appeals over the past three years. Students stated that they are confident in where to find further information if they needed to make an academic appeal.

31 The College operates its own Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure that covers the entire provision. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, it can be escalated to the complaints procedure within the awarding body. The College receives very few formal complaints and all matters raised have been resolved within the College's procedures. The procedures contain an informal and formal stage in which a student can raise concerns, with further information on using the awarding body's complaints procedure if the student remains dissatisfied with the resolution within College. However, there is no explicit mention in internal College documentation of the OIA within this procedure. Although the OIA is referenced in a flowchart within the Student Handbook there is no contextual information about its role in the process, and the College relies on the University to provide detailed information to students. The team therefore advises the College to include explicit reference to the role of the OIA in the College's policies and procedures and identifies this as an **area for development**.

32 On a number of occasions, the College has taken the decision not to run a programme owing to low student recruitment. When this occurs the College works effectively with students concerned, and through its TVHEBP partner colleges, to arrange a satisfactory outcome for individual students. If appropriate, students may be offered a place on another programme within the College, or on the same programme at a partner college. The review team met students who had applied to a programme which did not run and had decided to accept a place on another course within the College. They stated that they were kept well informed at each stage of the process and what resolutions were possible. The team found that the arrangements put in place were appropriate.

### **Rounded judgement**

33 There is one specified improvement in this judgement area, which recommends that the College systematically monitors and evaluates all aspects of higher education through its deliberative bodies. The specified improvement relates to weaknesses in the College's approach to this aspect of the baseline regulatory requirements, which the team considers

could, if not addressed, lead to serious problems over time.

34 The review team also identified three areas for development, advising the College to: further develop the arrangements for engaging students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their academic experience; ensure that higher education students are represented at all levels of the academic governance structure; and to include explicit reference to the role of the OIA in the College's policies and procedures.

35 The review team concludes that there is limited 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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