



St Mary's College

Initial Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

March 2013

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About this review

This is a report of an Initial Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at St Mary's College. The review took place on 26-28 March 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Mrs Sally Powell
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by St Mary's College and to make judgements on the likelihood that the college's policies and procedures (some of which may still be under development) will meet UK expectations for academic standards and quality. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - threshold academic standards¹
 - the quality of learning opportunities
 - the quality of information
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² Background information about St Mary's College is given on page 3. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Initial Review](#) and has links to the review guidance and other informative documents.³

¹ For an explanation of terms, see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/initial-review.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about St Mary's College (the College).

QAA's judgements about St Mary's College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the College:

- The policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body.
- The policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities.
- The policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the College:

- the effective working relationship with the partnership network and the awarding body (paragraphs 1.13 and 2.4)
- the application of the College's core values by the higher education team and support staff which contributes to the overall experience of the higher education students (paragraphs 2.1, 2.10 and 2.16)
- the effective contribution and support provided by the Higher Education Advisers (paragraphs 2.5 and 2.20).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to St Mary's College:

- that by June 2013, the higher education team develops ways of reporting the annual review process back to the Staff Student Liaison Meeting to close the feedback loop and enhance the students' involvement in the quality assurance procedures (paragraph 1.14)
- that by March 2014, the College clarifies and develops the roles of its committees to promote its responsibilities for the management of higher education and the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities (paragraphs 1.15 and 2.9)
- that by June 2013, information relating to induction and the Degree Study Success Course is timely, clear and accessible (paragraph 3.2)
- that by the next occasion at which students are enrolled, the College makes available complete student handbooks in hard copy and electronically to all higher education students from the start of the course (paragraph 3.3).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that St Mary's College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- The implementation so far of the College Information and Learning Technology Strategy (2013-16) and in particular the intention to extend wireless access across the campus (paragraph 2.7)
- The development already commenced of a more systematic recording of leavers' destinations and links with alumni (paragraphs 2.14 and 2.19)
- The College's development of the management and administration of placements (paragraph 2.30).

About St Mary's College

St Mary's College, Blackburn (the College), is a Roman Catholic Further Education College under the trusteeship of the Maris Fathers. Its mission is to: 'seek to provide a challenging, high quality education whereby all members of the College community can grow as balanced individuals, morally, intellectually and spiritually'. It currently has over 1,300 students, most of whom are 16-19 years old and studying A levels. The College has delivered higher education for 13 years, initially in partnership with Liverpool Hope University and, in past years, has enrolled up to 400 students. It is one of two sixth form colleges that form the Network of Hope, the other being Holy Cross College, Bury. The College continues to work as a partner of Liverpool Hope University but this provision is not within the scope of this review.

In 2006 franchised provision for the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Rehabilitation) was established with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The Foundation Degree ran under this arrangement from 2006 and expanded into a second pathway, for Social Care, in March 2012. In 2012 the College also received its first directly funded numbers from the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), recruiting 14 students to both pathways of the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care. It has received additional directly funded numbers for recruitment to both pathways in 2013. Although the directly funded provision is new, the College has experience of teaching the Health and Social Care (Rehabilitation) as franchised provision working with the same partners. The review team therefore used some documents on the franchised provision in its consideration of the College's management of the directly funded provision.

Recent government higher education policy changes have affected recruitment levels and the number of places that higher education institutions were able to offer to franchised partners. The effect of tuition fees, the notification late in the recruitment cycle from HEFCE of the numbers of directly allocated students available to the College, and a prolonged period of financial insecurity in an area with substantial deprivation have all provided challenges for the College.

Explanation of the findings about St Mary's College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.⁴

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)⁵ is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the [Review of College Higher Education handbook](#), also on the QAA website.⁶

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care has been allocated to the level specified in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Responsibility for this lies with the awarding body, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), through their approval and revalidation procedures. Annual and periodic reviews have given the College the opportunity to review the level of the provision internally within the limits of a programme that is delivered by five other partners working with the same awarding body. The reports from these reviews all confirm that the College is fulfilling its obligations with regard to standards. Recommendations from these reviews have formed part of the action plans for the improvement of the programme.

1.2 Evidence for this was found in the recent revalidation report for the Rehabilitation pathway, the validation of the Social Care pathway and in the Memorandum of Cooperation. Student handbooks and module guides confirm the appropriateness of the curriculum to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes at the relevant level. Staff spoke of the frequent informal liaison with the University (UCLan), especially with the Link Tutor.

1.3 A periodic review of the overall partnership took place in 2012. This was a strategic review, with external representation, of the strategic and operational aspects of the partnership and highlighted many positive aspects. Reapproval for a period of six years was recommended. The approval mechanisms adopted by the awarding body are well matched to the expectations of *Chapter A1: The national level*, of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and include an appropriate level of externality.

Use of external examiners

1.4 An external examiner is in place for the whole programme across the five college partners. The University is responsible for their appointment and induction, provision of a report template and receipt of the report from the examiner. The external examiner oversees

⁴ The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection; please contact QAA Reviews Group.

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx

and approves agreed assessment tasks in advance and normally attends the award board at the awarding body.

1.5 The annual external examiner's report relates to all five partners delivering the programme and, on occasions, the extent to which comments relate to specific partner colleges are sometimes difficult to isolate. The awarding body is aware of this and has taken steps to emphasise the importance of college specific comments within the generic report template. The University's guidelines produced for examiners reinforce this. Discussion at the partnership meeting, which takes place around the assessment board helps to relate comments to specific partners. Successive external examiners have made positive comments about the College's provision. On occasion the College Director of Higher Education has sought clarification from the partnership network to identify comments relevant to the College in order to help the development of the programme.

1.6 Within the College, the annual external examiner report is circulated to all relevant staff, and discussed within the UCLan management meetings, which are College meetings dedicated to this programme. The Course Leader responds to actions and recommendations from the examiner's report through the Course Leader's annual report to the University (UCLan). This report is approved by the College Director of Higher Education before being sent to the awarding body for scrutiny and approval.

1.7 Students have access to external examiner reports through Staff Student Liaison Meetings, where they are routinely discussed with the whole cohort. Students who met reviewers were aware of the external examination arrangements and how examiner reports were used within the College. The College's use of its external examiner ensures that the academic standards are maintained at appropriate levels.

Assessment and standards

1.8 The design, regulation, moderation and review of assessment are the responsibility of the awarding body. Representatives of the awarding body the review team met confirmed that these procedures have been mapped against chapters *B1: Programme design and approval*, *B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* and *B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

1.9 Evidence from partnership meetings and meetings with staff indicate that the partnership is proactive in reviewing the assessment strategies adopted. Both internal and cross-partnership moderation activities ensure the consistency of marking and grading. The College has initiated the internal moderation of assessments before they are sent to the awarding body for moderation. This encourages the consistency and understanding of marking.

1.10 Information and guidance for assessments is provided to students in their handbook and module guides, and further reinforced in taught sessions. The awarding body's policies on the timeliness of feedback is maintained or exceeded, and was confirmed in the student submission and by the students whom the reviewers met. Moreover, students value the additional explanation by tutors of the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Students reported that written feedback was constructive and further explanation was given in tutorials. Students had reported difficulty in reading handwritten feedback and, as a consequence, first marker comments are now typed. The most recent external examiner reports confirm satisfaction with the quality of feedback.

1.11 Staff receive training in assessment and its processes from the awarding body through the HE Toolkit, which can be accessed remotely. The College and the awarding body provide additional ongoing staff development for assessment and this has

increased staff confidence in marking at the appropriate level and led to the introduction of internal moderation.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.12 The awarding body has responsibility for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes. This is set out in the Memorandum of Cooperation and the arrangements are working effectively. The partnership network of the awarding body and the five colleges allows each college to engage with and learn from shared topics. Documents seen by the review team showed that the College was able to contribute to changes to the programme approved in 2008 and again in 2012, following the outcomes of a more substantial periodic review. The periodic review involved external and student participation following the awarding body processes which are aligned to *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*, of the Quality Code.

1.13 The College participates fully in the awarding body partnership and moderation meetings, and its requirement to undertake annual monitoring. The standard template is developed by the Course Leader and refers to course statistics, student feedback, course team feedback, external examiner reports and results in an action plan. The Director of Higher Education agrees the annual report and forwards it to the awarding body, and is responsible for communicating any issues and outcomes to the Senior Operations Leadership Team, Senior Management Team and the Quality Assurance committee of the Board of Governors within the college. The College's effective working relationship with the partnership network and with the awarding body is a feature of **good practice**.

1.14 Students are involved in the review processes through their membership of the Staff Student Liaison Meeting. This enables them to raise issues which inform the annual review process. The review team **recommends** that the higher education team develops ways of reporting the annual review process back to the Staff Student Liaison Meeting to close the feedback loop and enhance the students' involvement in the quality assurance procedures. Current student numbers permit all students to attend these meetings. As the cohort size grows, the College has plans to consider the introduction of student representatives, with appropriate training.

1.15 In the light of changes to the external environment, the management of risk, the desire to continue to be able to offer higher education provision and in the responsibility brought by the introduction of directly funded students, the review team **recommends** that the College clarifies and develops the roles of its committees to promote its responsibilities for the management of higher education and the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

Subject benchmarks

1.16 Both pathways of the College's programme have been approved according to the awarding body procedures which include reference to the subject benchmark statements. The documents for these events refer to relevant subject benchmarks and to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Partnership meetings allow the awarding body opportunities to advise colleges of updates to the Quality Code. University staff provide support for College colleagues during and beyond the approval process, which ensure this is continued into the review phase.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 Academic and support staff work closely together under the leadership of the Director of Higher Education. The learning needs of higher education students from the local community are well understood by staff and are central to the education philosophy of the College. Provision is tailored to accommodate these needs so, for example, the regular study day for the Foundation Degree will be the same for each cohort in both first and second year of the programme to facilitate childcare and other arrangements for students. The review team considers the application of the College's core values by the higher education team and support staff, which contributes to the overall experience of the higher education students, to be **good practice**.

2.2 The higher education teaching team consists of the Course Leader and two other subject specific teaching staff together with two Higher Education Advisers one of whom is qualified to master's level, the other to postgraduate level. The whole team is appropriately qualified and each individual holds or is studying for a postgraduate qualification. The teaching team, including the Higher Education Advisers, with the exception of the newest member, possess Postgraduate Certificates in Education (PGCEs). A member of the higher education team is PGCE coordinator for the College and mentors the newer member of the team in their PGCE studies. Both mentor and mentee receive teaching remission to support this activity. The course team are active practitioners in their own professional teaching area, staff having been specifically recruited to meet the vocational needs of the programme. Staff are encouraged to continue to engage with practice and to develop their teaching. This ensures that academic studies and work-based learning are thoroughly integrated in the Foundation Degree.

2.3 Students reported that teachers are knowledgeable, thorough and make sessions interesting. Staff encourage students to develop their awareness of scholarship and professional practice through learning and teaching activities and by the example staff set by their own continued involvement in professional practice.

2.4 College staff are assisted in maintaining current knowledge of higher education practices through active participation in the partnership with colleagues from the awarding body and other colleges validated to offer the same Foundation Degree. Through this they are able to share information, experiences and good practice. Practices initiated by the College and shared within the network have been adopted by other partners and the Director of Higher Education is a past chair of the partnership meetings. The College has participated in informal peer observation of teaching sessions across the partnership, as well as within the College. This contributes towards the effective working relationship with the partnership network and the awarding body, which is a feature of **good practice**.

Learning resources

2.5 As set out in paragraph 2.2, the whole higher education team is well qualified in their subject and have or are working towards teaching qualifications and keeps up to date with higher education matters in part through the UCLan partnership. They maintain

currency in their professional areas. A personal tutor system is provided by the Higher Education Advisers who advise and support students from pre-enrolment through to completion. They deal with matters including admissions advice, applications for mitigation, career advice and disability support. Students value the assistance they receive from them and the team identified the effective contribution and support provided by the Higher Education Advisers as a feature of **good practice**.

2.6 College staff teaching higher education, including the Higher Education Advisers, are able to access UCLan staff development opportunities and use the UCLan library. The College has an annual performance review process. A formal system of teaching observation is in place, which links into annual performance review. Ofsted criteria are used to grade observations. Staff explained that the higher education approach is captured in the fulfilment of appropriate learning outcomes by the session. Higher education staff regularly attend partnership and external staff development events and conferences. Several have undertaken higher degree studies at UCLan for which 50 per cent funding was available. The College operates in service teacher training days and staff may access UCLan's Learning Development Unit programme of higher education staff development. Although criteria for approval are not specified in the staff development policy, staff are encouraged to apply for support where development needs match the strategic objectives of the College. Staff reported that it was very unusual to be refused support.

2.7 The College has recently established a dedicated work room for the higher education students, which they value. The College is developing its use of its virtual learning environment, which is well used by students and the majority of staff. It includes lecture notes, assessment details and key information from the partner awarding body. There has also been recent investment in new Information and Learning Technology (ILT) resources for higher education students. In addition to the desktop computers in the higher education work room, netbooks, laptops and iPads are available for loan to students. Specific support from an ILT technician is available through the Learning Lab. Students are positive about the level of availability of IT equipment but would welcome the option to use their own laptops or devices on campus. The ILT strategy (2013-16) has started to implement a development programme for the College which is specifically tailored for the typical student recruited. The team **affirms** the implementation so far of the College Information and Learning Technology Strategy (2013-16) and in particular the intention to extend wireless access across the campus.

2.8 Overall students value the library services at the College and UCLan. Following feedback from students, a group study area was created in the College library. The College has funded an ordering service for resources from the main university campus and electronic resources are available remotely through the UCLan network. Although some students had experienced access problems, most were satisfied with the resources and assistance available.

Student voice

2.9 Currently the main route for formal student input is through the Staff Student Liaison Meeting which all directly funded higher education students are invited to attend. Feedback in Staff Student Liaison Meetings has resulted in improvements to ILT resources and to the creation of the higher education work room. Although external examiner reports are shared with students at this meeting, the Staff Student Liaison Meeting does not give formal consideration to annual review reports or similar documents. The team **recommends** that the College clarify and develop the roles of its committee to promote its responsibilities for the management of higher education and the enhancement of learning opportunities (see paragraph 1.15).

2.10 The College is responsive to students' views and this position was endorsed by students met by the review team. Students are encouraged to raise any issues informally with their lecturer or with their personal tutor. Feedback in Staff Student Liaison Meetings has resulted in improvements to ILT resources and to the creation of the higher education work room. The Course Leader conducts informal learner feedback and students complete module questionnaires. Staff generally resolve issues promptly to enhance the student experience. Where relevant, student views will be fed into discussion at the UCLan partnership meeting. This is an example of the regular, close contact between students and staff which provides an atmosphere in which issues can readily be raised. This contributes towards the application of the College's core values by the higher education team, which enhances the overall experience of the higher education students and is a feature of **good practice**.

2.11 UCLan administers a programme student survey across all the partnership network provision. The results of this are used to supplement the results of the National Student Survey which, because of the small scale of the provision, can be difficult to interpret.

2.12 There is a higher education student appointed to the Board of Governors, but this is not currently a UCLan student from the College's directly funded provision largely for practical reasons as the governors meet in the evening. There is scope for further liaison from the higher education student governor to the UCLan students who attend during the day.

Management information

2.13 The small size of current provision has enabled data collection and monitoring to be undertaken this year by the Director of Higher Education and the Course Leader. The College recognises that this position is not sustainable with planned growth. Recruitment and retention figures are sent weekly to the Curriculum Management Team and the Senior Management Team, are discussed in higher education team meetings and with the partnership network. A report of higher education data is provided to each meeting of the Board of Governors' Quality Assurance Committee who have noted the additional demands for monitoring in the light of direct funding of places by HEFCE. UCLan receives the higher education data through the annual monitoring report.

2.14 Some students are already in employment when they enrol. Most advice about career progression and planning comes through the teaching staff with their individual specialisms in the sector and this is supplemented by the Higher Education Advisers. The College's planned approach to the collection of the destinations of leavers' data is **affirmed** in paragraph 2.19.

2.15 The College has adopted an effective electronic system for the tracking of student progress throughout their studies. Attendance, tutorials, one-to-one meetings and other issues can be recorded and are accessible at any time to individual students and relevant staff on campus and remotely. The record is tracked by the Higher Education Advisers who follow up any issues with a view to promoting students' engagement with their programme.

Admission to the College

2.16 Admissions policies and procedures at the College are clear, effective and systematic. The College focuses on providing a higher education experience for specific groups of adult learners within its catchment area. Recruitment and selection procedures are geared towards these groups, largely comprised of mature returning learners. Staff have specific goals in their annual monitoring process related to the support of admissions.

All students have an informal interview with a Higher Education Adviser to prepare them for formal application, in which they are given advice on their choice of programme and preparation for study, and discuss placement requirements and learning support. This contributes towards the application of the College's core values by the higher education team and support staff, which contributes to the overall experience of the higher education students and is a feature of **good practice** (see paragraphs 2.1 and 2.10).

2.17 Overall students commented positively on the processes of application. All students have an informal interview with a Higher Education Adviser to prepare them for formal application, in which they are given advice on their choice of programme and preparation for study, and discuss placement requirements and learning support. Students valued the help of the Higher Education Advisers through these pre-enrolment processes. The College offers the Degree Study Success Course each summer. This consists of four weekly sessions called on study skills and preparing for study at higher education level. Previously these have taken place during July and August. Some students whom the review team met, reported delays in receiving information prior to the start of the new Social Care pathway in 2012. Staff noted a tradition of late recruitment, which in this case had hampered planning for the Degree Study Success programme, and acknowledged that communication with potential students was insufficient. In 2012 the sessions were fitted into the normal timetable in the autumn (see paragraph 3.2).

Complaints and appeals

2.18 Students understand where to find guidance and support in making complaints or appeals. The student handbook clearly states relevant UCLan procedures for appeals and there is a College 'Procedure for Dealing with Complaints'. Students are introduced to the procedures at induction. The College reports that the majority of complaints are dealt with on an informal basis, and this was endorsed by students whom the team met. Students reported that ready advice and assistance regarding complaints or appeals procedures was available from Higher Education Advisers.

Career advice and guidance

2.19 Career education, information, advice and guidance is embedded into the College's provision. The vocational focus of programmes leads College staff to refer regularly to employment-related matters. UCLan staff supplement this through career/progression talks and events held at the College and at UCLan campuses. Higher Education Advisers discuss employment routes and progression options with applicants from the start of the admissions cycle and through their role as personal tutors. College staff capture anecdotal information from students, which they publish in the local press and are planning ways of developing a systematic process for collecting the destination of leavers in higher education data to inform and support their future provision and to feed into College reporting processes for higher education. The team **affirms** the development already commenced of a more systematic recording of leavers' destinations and links with alumni.

Supporting disabled students

2.20 Students with a disability are mainly identified in the first instance through their initial application to the College. The Higher Education Advisers play a key role with regard to disability information and offer a range of advice and support on educational assessments, funding and the subsequent development of individualised learning support plans. During the course the higher education team are proactive in offering diagnosis and support to students who did not declare a disability on entry. Students spoke positively of disability support and supplied examples where the College had provided additional support

and resources for students. The effective contribution and support provided by the Higher Education Advisers is a feature of **good practice**.

2.21 Although no formal policy exists for making reasonable adjustments for students on placement, examples were provided as to how this had been addressed on a case by case basis. The College content management system enables staff across the College to access information relating to students with disabilities ensuring that consistent advice and support is provided.

Supporting international students

2.22 The College does not recruit, and does not currently intend to recruit, international students.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.23 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through partnership with UCLan is managed effectively and likely to enable students to achieve their award. The College has also been working with Liverpool Hope University and Holy Cross College since 2000 on programmes franchised by Liverpool Hope University (LHU). This provision continues as franchised provision for St Mary's College although Holy Cross College is using directly funded numbers for this programme. St Mary's College provides accommodation for LHU staff to teach on the LHU programmes shared across the Network of Hope and pastoral support for students. The College no longer provides any subject specific teaching. As explained in the introduction (p. 3), the College has used its directly funded numbers for the UCLan Foundation Degree and responded to this allocation with the addition of the Social Care pathway, validated in March 2012.

2.24 A formal agreement is in place between Liverpool Hope University and both colleges and, separately, between UCLan and the College for the programmes offered. These ensure clarity of the relationships and responsibilities which relate to the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.25 There is no flexible, distributed or e-learning.

Work-based and placement learning

2.26 All Foundation Degree students are required to undertake an assessed work placement as part of their programme. Higher Education Advisers initially discuss the placement in interviews with prospective students. On enrolment students receive detailed information in the Student Handbook and the placement module guide. Students stated that information surrounding the placement requirement was thorough and clear, and they understood what was required of them with regards to the work-based element of the programme.

2.27 The College requires students to find their own placement although there is support available from the Placement Coordinator should they find this difficult. The College believes that this will help students gain skills in communication and assist the transition to higher education learning. Students the review team met, reported that, while they are provided with clear guidance on how to approach potential providers, this can prove challenging. Consequently some students have secured placements that they do not view as beneficial given their intended career path although they are in the relevant sector.

2.28 The College ensures that all placements, once identified, are risk assessed. Placement providers are largely local private providers and Local Authority care providers. Placement providers are also given an employer agreement to sign, which outlines what they should undertake to offer students. However, the examples of such agreements provided for the team during the review were not signed. Every student receives one tutor visit while on placement and this is formally documented. Students attend placement and College concurrently and therefore feel able to access support and raise issues whenever required.

2.29 Students negotiate a learning agreement with the placement provider before beginning their placement and this forms the basis of the work-based learning experience. Although the review team heard that this is regularly referred to by students, staff and the placement provider, the team saw examples of student portfolios where this agreement had not been completed.

2.30 A series of forms and letters exist to support the management of placements. The review team heard that the institution is reviewing its approach to managing work-based learning and the team **affirms** the College's ongoing development of the management and administration of placements.

Student charter

2.31 The student charter has previously taken the form of the UCLan Card, which was distributed to learners and featured on posters in the College. Staff told the review team that this has been altered during the last academic year to a more expansive document called the Student Charter. While UCLan students were involved in the formulation of the Charter there was no direct contribution from St Mary's students.

2.32 Students whom the review team met were aware of the content of the UCLan Card, if not its name. Some had seen the poster about it while others some had seen a notice in the higher education work room about the new charter. Some were also aware that it could be found on the virtual learning environment. The team saw evidence that information about the charter had been communicated to students.

3 Quality of information for students and applicants

Summary

The policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 Responsibilities for the approval, monitoring and review of information are shared between the College and the awarding body. The College operates within clear guidelines produced by UCLan and these are audited on an annual basis. Internally the Higher Education Advisers are responsible for the development of marketing material. This is done in collaboration with the College Marketing Officer and approved by the Director of Higher Education. Marketing campaigns have included local press and radio. The team found marketing materials to be accurate, comprehensive and well understood by students.

3.2 In order to support students prior to their programme of study commencing, the College runs a Degree Study Success Course over a four week period leading up to enrolment (see paragraph 2.17). The course is optional and students still awaiting

confirmation of a place are also invited to participate although it is made clear this does not constitute an offer of a place. Students indicated they had to wait for confirmation of the course's start date in 2012 for a significant period of time. The College informed the team that this was due to a large number of late applications for the Foundation Degree. This late communication had, however, hampered the preparations new students had to make, including childcare and work arrangements. The team therefore **recommends** that information relating to induction and the Degree Study Success Course is timely, clear and accessible.

3.3 The Director of Higher Education is also responsible for approving student handbooks which are produced by customising a UCLan template to the course. While the team found the handbooks to be accurate, there was confusion among students as to what exactly constituted the course handbook, whether they had received these in hard or soft copy and some students reported receiving their handbooks late. The College also acknowledged that the handbook was not, at the time of the review, available online to students, as had been stated. The team therefore **recommends** that the College makes available complete student handbooks to all higher education students at the time of enrolment in hard copy and electronically.

3.4 The College has a relationship with a regional newspaper which enables them to upload news items and other material directly to the paper's website. This has brought a higher level of visibility to the College's provision. The College also produces a periodical magazine entitled Results Newsletter which includes a range of stories about the higher education students.

3.5 All Foundation Degree students are guaranteed an interview at UCLan for progression to level six. The team were informed by staff that students are increasingly seeking to progress from the Foundation Degree and that UCLan staff play a supporting role, attending the College and giving advice about the processes involved. Students spoke positively about the information they received regarding progression, although they would prefer the opportunity to progress within the College itself.

3.6 The responsibility for maintaining the Key Information Set data belongs to the higher education team. The information sets are readily accessible on the Unistats webpages and carry the UCLan logo, as does the Foundation Degree homepage. When the first cohort of students on the new Social Care pathway complete their studies an equivalent Key Information Set will be produced.

3.7 The virtual learning environment is used to house a wide range of learning resources for students and the Director of Higher Education is responsible for monitoring staff usage. Staff have access to the UCLan virtual learning environment and are responsible for ensuring that important information is subsequently disseminated through College mechanisms. The review team heard that usage of the virtual learning environment varies among the staff team and that the College is working to improve consistency by disseminating good practice.

3.8 The institution has been using a content management website to record and share important information relating to the student experience. All interactions with students are captured using the site including personal tutoring records and disability information where applicable. The site is used to record and share attendance not only with students but with parents. The College are looking at further ways to enhance the student experience using the website and the team agreed that this was a positive development.

3.9 As noted in paragraph 1.14, external examiner reports are routinely shared with students in the Staff Student Liaison Meetings.

Glossary

Initial Review is very similar to Review of College Higher Education (RCHE). The guidance note for Institutional Review is intended to be read in conjunction with the RCHE handbook. The RCHE handbook gives formal definitions of terms such as 'threshold standards' and 'learning opportunities' (pages 17-20). This glossary provides a quick reference to the terms.

The guidance for Initial Review can be found on the QAA website at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/initial-review-guidance.aspx

The RCHE handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx .

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

academic standards: The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

credit(s): A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement: Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice: A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution or college manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework: A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications: A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities: The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome: What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition: A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study): An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications: Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information: Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code: Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

subject benchmark statement: A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard: The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications **frameworks**. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation: Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

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