



Quality Review Visit of Stanmore College

March 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Stanmore College

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.**
- **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. The review team advises Stanmore College to:

- ensure more effective representation of higher education within its governance arrangements (Code of Governance)
- develop guidance for students with regards to the use of social media for teaching and learning activities (Quality Code)
- clarify its strategic approach to higher education provision in the light of future changes to the College's provision (Quality Code).

Specified improvements

No specified improvements were identified by the team.

About this review

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

- Professor Mike Bramhall
- Mr John Simpson (student reviewer)
- Ms Deborah Trayhurn.

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 Stanmore College

Stanmore College is a further education college located in the London Borough of Harrow. Harrow is an affluent outer London borough. According to the Greater London Authority Diversity Indices, Harrow is ranked seventh highest nationally for ethnic diversity and second for religious diversity.

In 2015-16 there were 1,247 16-18 year old full-time students studying at Stanmore College, 59 full-time adult students and 1,985 part-time adult students. In terms of higher education provision, the College offers two foundation degrees, one titled FdA Working with Children and Young Children (C&YP) and the other FdA Healthcare Play Specialism (HPS). Both courses feed into a one year BA (Hons) level 6 progression delivered at the College titled BA (Hons) Working in Integrated Services for Children and Young People. All higher education provision delivered at the College is currently validated by The University of West London, although this partnership is closing with the final programme being taught out in the 2017-18 academic year.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College delivers foundation degrees and a BA (Hons) progression degree in collaboration with, and validated by one awarding body, The University of West London (the University). It determined in 2016 to discontinue further foundation degree intakes at the College. It was approved to run a revalidated level 6 programme until 2018 under a discontinuation strategy managed by the University.

2 It is the ultimate responsibility of the College's awarding body, the University, to allocate the qualifications to the appropriate benchmarks. The University and the College are jointly responsible for the academic alignment during the delivery of the programmes. The College uses guidance provided by the awarding body and makes effective use of the FHEQ.

3 There are agreements and Memoranda of Understanding which describe the agreed quality framework, responsibilities and the management of the programmes. These are reviewed annually at the Academic Partnership Review.

4 Monitoring by the University and the verifications of external examiners ensure that standards set for programmes and modules address relevant reference points and are comparable with other higher education providers. These reference points include Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and the requirements of the appropriate professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, in this case the Healthcare Play Specialist Education Trust (HPSET).

5 The programme handbooks provide students with clear information regarding their programme. They articulate the FHEQ with structure and content and give students a clear understanding of the learning, teaching and assessment for each level including exit point of achievements of the programmes.

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

6 Governance arrangements for the quality monitoring of courses are outlined in the HE Strategic Plan and are arranged through quality procedures of the University and reported through an annual review meeting at the University attended by representatives of the College. The College also has a quality policy.

7 The institutional agreement between the College and the University, minutes of the various committee meetings where higher education quality assurance is discussed and annual course and partnership review reports provide evidence of how higher education is governed at the College. The review team saw evidence of the review of risk for higher education provision at Senior Leadership Team and Governor's meetings, although this is not always separated out from the consideration of further education provision. In addition, the review team examined evidence confirming that the Governing Body reviews and signs off the annual assurance of quality for higher education and that this is discussed at Governor's meetings.

8 However, the team identified some areas where the governance of higher education could be strengthened. The review team found that formal higher education student

representation within the College's governance arrangements, particularly within the Governing Body, could be improved. This is considered further in the student academic experience section of this report.

9 More generally, the Colleges' management practices and governance terms of reference do not focus explicitly on higher education programmes. For example, the higher education programmes are included with the College's further education provision in the College's risk register. It was not evident that reporting activity always explicitly demonstrate oversight of higher education, although there are examples where higher education is referenced specifically. The review team advises as an **area for development** that the College ensure more effective representation of higher education within its governance arrangements.

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

10 The University sets the academic standards and provides the regulations for the awards. The College relies heavily on the University's infrastructure, academic strategies, policies and procedures, including the Quality Handbook, to manage its higher education provision.

11 In recent months the College has outlined embryonic statements for a higher education Strategic Plan, although the plan and intent for future higher education practices at the College are not yet fully outlined. The review team identifies that presently the Colleges' arrangements to discharge responsibilities in setting and maintaining standards for higher education meet a threshold level. However, the team concludes that given the imminent changes to its higher education provision, more clarity around the College's strategic approach to higher education is needed. This is explored further in the student academic experience section of this report.

12 The Healthcare Play Specialist Education Trust (HPSET) use the HPS programme as the professional qualifications to register successful students onto the HPSET Register. HPSET report progress annually. National Occupational Standards are used in course design.

13 The programmes delivered at the College are confirmed as meeting the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Definitive records of the programmes and their operation are maintained in the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). This houses module handbooks and Annual Module Leader Reports. These records do not include the external examiner reports, and the College may wish to consider making these available to students.

14 A team of two works with the Head of Higher Education to deliver the programmes. Healthcare Play Specialists, who are registered with HPSET, oversee the workplace elements of the HPS course and sign off the workplace competencies. The Head of HE manages programmes and liaises directly with the University and professional body. Standards are secured with strong oversight from the University who confirm practices with the College using Link Tutor arrangements and annual reporting meetings.

15 Since the discontinuation strategy of the University was invoked for higher education programmes delivered at the College, meetings take place each term with the University in line with its discontinuation strategy. Student achievement and progress is reported at monthly internal meetings and annually to College Governors. Formal information approving student achievement and progression is provided and reviewed at the University's subject boards and progress and award boards which the College reports to.

16 Arrangements are in place to ensure students have achieved the academic standards set and that comparability of awards are confirmed. The external examiner

confirms the appropriateness of the marks awarded and the external examiner reports are considered and responded to. Student work is formally moderated across a network of delivery partners which further reassures the College that assessment practices meet academic standards set. Other work by the College to assure itself that academic standards are maintained include staff development to support marking processes, the use of a plagiarism detection system through which assessments are submitted and the development of students writing support at level 6.

17 College use of data to monitor academic standards meets standard approaches. Module Leaders produce annual reports which are included in annual programme reviews and these are considered in partner reports made to the University. Student skills and performance data are used by the College to monitor academic standards and higher education students are included in monitoring of individual student progression, session by session, recently introduced College wide.

Rounded judgement

18 The review team considered the reliability of degree standards delivered at Stanmore College and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers. It concludes that the provider's arrangements, working with their validating partner The University of West London, meet the threshold academic standards set out in the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statement. There is sufficient oversight of the College's higher education provision within its governance structures, and its arrangements for discharging its responsibilities in maintaining the academic standards of the qualifications it delivers are effective.

19 The review team advises one area for development centred on providing more effective representation of higher education within its governance arrangements. This is advised in light of the fact that arrangements for the delivery of higher education at the College are evolving, in particular with the closing of the agreement with the validating partner.

20 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

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

21 The College has responsibility for recruitment, selection and admission to its higher education courses. The College relies heavily on rules and regulations as laid out within the University's Admissions Policy and the Academic Partnership Handbooks. Through reviewing processes and meeting senior staff, teaching and support staff and students, the review team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice.

22 Effective monitoring and use of data for enhancing the student experience and academic outcomes is undertaken by the Head of Higher Education and discussed in monthly meetings with the Head of Quality. Higher education is strategically aligned with the new reporting mechanisms, whereby progressive data analysis, in line with the College Quality Policy, has been incorporated into the review for each course. The review team found that the College's arrangements for using data to improve the student experience is effective, and this results in good student progression and achievement.

23 The introduction to students during 2015-16 of a new marking and assessment system to demonstrate to students how their module learning outcomes have been met has been identified by the external examiner as a feature of strong practice within the marking and moderation process. This concentration on demonstrating the learning outcomes to students is monitored and reviewed by module leaders. Students are identified that need additional support in understanding how assessment demonstrates learning and steps are taken both at a higher education team level and with the students to address this. The review team concludes that this process of involving students in the learning and assessment process is effective in practice.

24 The College uses a VLE platform where all information relating to the courses can be found. Students are given a Student Handbook from the University, which is also available online, an online College Course handbook, and a Personal Development Plan. Module guides are used for all modules that highlight the employability skills, graduate attributes and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that each module offers. Details of reading lists and other learning resources are identified in the guides. The College has introduced additional activities that are integrated into the teaching sessions to enhance delivery and promote differing learning opportunities. The review team found that the variety and use of these learning resources is effective in supporting students.

25 Professional practitioners also contribute to the delivery of workplace competencies or core practice, acting as mentors for students in the workplace. The mentors have to be registered with HPSET to meet their standards. In order to be registered with HPSET and gain a licence to practise students must pass both their academic work and work-based competencies. Students are given a Practice Assessment Booklet to record their progress in meeting the competences.

26 The College has input from its external examiners who review the outputs of each module and provide feedback on good practice and areas for enhancement. This feedback is incorporated into the Annual Course Report. In addition other external reviews such as the Harrow Council funded review, and the University's Academic Partner Link Tutor report also feed into the quality enhancement process. The review team concludes that the College's

arrangements for using external stakeholders and external input to improve the quality of the student experience is effective.

27 Students are encouraged to use social media in their learning, but the only College policy on this is written primarily for employees and not students. The review team advises as an **area for development** that the College develops guidance for students with regards to the use of social media for teaching and learning activities. However, more generally the review team concludes that the College has effective arrangements in place in ensuring that information provided is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

28 The College has a staff development programme and it encourages staff to apply for Fellowship or Senior Fellowship of the HEA. Additional staff opportunities can be accessed through the University Institute for Teaching, Innovation and Learning and attendance at their annual Collaborative Partnership Conference. The review team concludes that the College has effective support arrangements in place to ensure that its staff are competent in research, scholarship and pedagogy, although these are reliant on the University and the Association of Colleges 'HE Coordinators' Network'.

29 Obtaining formal student feedback within the College is articulated within the College Quality Policy. The higher education courses generate student feedback through a range of methods. Feedback is acted upon through action planning and is monitored through the quality assessment cycle. Each student cohort feedback through a course evaluation questionnaire that feeds into the Annual Course Reports. A rolling action plan for enhancements is used, and this is used for feedback to the students on the actions taken. The review team therefore concludes that the College has effective arrangements in collecting and responding to student feedback.

30 The review team noted that College relies heavily upon the processes of the University for its higher education admission strategy, and more generally to review and enhance its higher education provision. CPD for its higher education staff partly relies on attendance at the University's collaborative partner events. The College's current HE Strategic Plan contains plans for higher education staff development and elements of developing learning and teaching practices, but quality processes detailed in the plan are reliant on their awarding body for its higher education courses.

31 Therefore, clarifying the College's future strategic approach towards its higher education learning, teaching and assessment, as well as a clearer approach to higher education admissions, would strengthen the future development of the College's higher education provision for when its partnership with the University ends. The review team therefore advises as an **area for development** that the College clarifies its strategic approach to higher education provision in the light of future changes to its provision.

The relevant code of governance (such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs or the Association of Colleges' Code of Good Governance for English Colleges)

32 Arrangements are in place to enable two student representatives for each of the higher education programmes to provide formal feedback to programme and the University's staff. Representatives are introduced to the expectations of their role by the Head of Higher Education. Programme representative training is offered by the University. The programme representatives provide an annual representatives' report for each student level.

33 Student module feedback to staff is provided through online module feedback and the College is encouraging fuller coverage of feedback on modules, and increased engagement through higher feedback completion rates. The College's higher education

team meets students in programme board meetings. The University's Link Tutor meets students each term as part of the discontinuation strategy.

34 While the College effectively encourages student engagement in academic governance at the programme level, the College is reliant on further education student representatives providing a broader student representative role at Board of Governors meetings. Higher education student matters are not always adequately represented through this system, which focuses mainly on core non-higher education matters. A more general area for development to increase higher education representation with the College's governance arrangements is identified by the review team earlier in the report, including reference to student representation.

35 College arrangements in meeting any complaints are effective and the welfare of students is secure. The systems for handling complaints are outlined in a College-wide document and include associated forms. Students are aware of these arrangements. Registers of any complaints received are maintained and reported on annually to the governing body by gender and ethnicity. The meeting and informal contact arrangements at the College and through the University's Link Tutor role are robust and staff are responsive to issues raised.

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

36 The College follows the University's admissions policy relating to the recruitment, selection and admissions of higher education programmes as described above, with the University making the final decision. On confirmation of the course students hold dual enrolment at the College and the University.

37 Students that receive government funding follow and receive the University's terms and conditions whereas self-funded or employer sponsored students follow the College's terms and conditions. The terms and conditions are consistent for all students albeit presented in a different way.

38 Course handbooks provide students with a comprehensive guide to higher education at the College with key information, structure and content, learning, teaching and assessment and guidance on quality management and enhancement.

39 The provision of information is a shared responsibility between the College and the University, although no information is publicly available without agreement from the latter. Students confirm that course information that was present on the website previously was user-friendly and indicated that there was sufficient details available to make an informed decision prior to enrolment. The team reviewed the College's previous version of their adult prospectus and found that information provided was appropriate.

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

40 The College's policy and procedures for complaints and academic appeals are fair, transparent and timely. Where possible the College encourages complaints to be dealt with informally and for all parties to reach an amicable resolution. More formal complaints are submitted in writing and a receipt given within five working days. These are managed

centrally within the executive support team who decide on the best person to deal with the complaint. The College endeavours to respond to formal complaints within 21 working days.

41 There is a formal academic appeals procedure which is the responsibility of the awarding body and the College adheres to this. The University's academic regulation document has a comprehensive guide to appeals which is articulated within the student handbook. If any student remains dissatisfied, they can refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). All these policies are included in the programme handbooks and are available on the VLE.

42 Complaints and Academic Appeals are monitored through the year by the College and the University and are discussed at the academic partner annual review. Students that met the review team had a good understanding of the complaints and appeals procedures and state that in many cases complaints are resolved informally with the programme team or the University's Link Tutor and were able to give examples of where the outcomes have improved the student experience, including the amendment to timetabling to fit around student's childcare commitments.

43 There is a process in place in the event of course changes or closure and the ultimate responsibility is with the University defined in its management of academic partnership arrangements. Presently the University has applied for the termination of the academic partnership arrangement with the College. The College has worked closely with the University to ensure careful steps for course closures have been put in place to ensure current students are not disadvantaged. This includes student meetings and an action plan for each course as well as regular visits from the University's Link Tutor.

44 The University has taken student feedback into consideration when terminating the partnership and this feedback has allowed the revalidation of the progression degree to allow current students to progress and complete to level 6. After meeting College and University staff and current students the review team are confident of the effectiveness of the arrangement of course changes and closures.

Rounded judgement

45 The review team considered the quality of the student academic experience at Stanmore College, including student outcomes. The team concludes that the provider's arrangements, working with their validating partner The University of West London, meet the baseline regulatory requirements, and that effective arrangements are in place as they work through the termination of the partnership.

46 The review team advise as an area for development that the College clarifies its strategic approach for its future higher education provision. This is recommended in light of the fact that arrangements for the delivery of higher education at the College are evolving, in particular with the closing of the agreement with the validating partner. A more specific area for development is also advised relating to ensuring it is clear to students what the policies and expectations are in relation to the use of social media in their academic studies.

47 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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