



Quality Review Visit of Uxbridge College

March 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Uxbridge College

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

- ensure that higher education students are represented throughout the academic governance structure (Code of Governance)
- ensure that the Complaints Policy sufficiently differentiates, where appropriate, between higher education and further education students (Student Protection)
- explicitly articulate procedures for applicants to submit complaints or appeals about admissions decisions (Consumer Protection).

Specified improvements

The review team identified no specified improvements.

About this review

The review visit took place from 8 to 9 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Mrs Alison Jones
- Mrs Sala Kamkosi Khulumula (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 Uxbridge College

Uxbridge College is a general further education college which has been an established educational institution since 1965. The College offers programmes from pre-entry level through to level 6, as well as a range of bespoke training and education programmes. The College has grown steadily over the last decade and currently has around 4,500 full-time equivalent students.

The College offers higher education provision in a number of curriculum areas. The College's offer is primarily further education in nature, but there is a deliberate strategy also to offer a limited complementary set of higher education programmes, which are designed to meet local need and to provide alternative progression routes into higher education for the College's level 3 students.

The College offers Pearson Higher National Certificate and Diploma programmes in a number of subjects, and a Diploma and Professional Graduate Certificate programme in education and training, validated by Canterbury Christ Church University. The College has around 280 students studying on higher education programmes.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The review team found that the College's adherence to the policies and procedures of its awarding partners ensures that programmes meet or exceed the threshold standard for each qualification as set out in the FHEQ.

2 The College works with its awarding partners in the approval, monitoring and review of its higher education programmes. The awarding partners retain ultimate responsibility for ensuring alignment to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and for considering subject benchmarks and other relevant frameworks.

3 The Canterbury Christ Church University (the University) programme is aligned to the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, uses the relevant regulatory frameworks of the University for Initial Teacher Education, and uses the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers as a reference point. College staff work with the relevant University subject teams and programmes are approved through the University's validation process, which ensures that they are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

4 For the Higher National programmes, modules are quality assured and approved by Pearson and the College selects which to deliver. Pearson designs and approves the qualifications, which are referenced to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for level and academic standard. The College understands its responsibilities for maintaining standards set by the awarding organisation.

5 Programme information articulates the relevant learning outcomes to be achieved at each level and these are mapped against assessment criteria. External examiners confirm that assessments are appropriate for the relevant level of the FHEQ.

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 The College's Higher Education Strategy sits within the overall College Strategic Plan, which sets the blueprint for financial sustainability, partnerships and accountability of the governing body. The College has a clear governance and management structure that allows for oversight to be maintained, including a nominated higher education governor.

7 The governing body is clear on its role to support and to respect academic freedom and collegiality, and academic staff are given the freedom to develop programmes that are relevant to student and industry needs.

8 Risk is mitigated through the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (HE SAR) which is approved and signed off by the Higher Education Governor, who currently has delegated responsibility from the full Corporation for this task. The report includes information on risk assessment from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TL&ASC), the Student Affairs subcommittee, and Safeguarding and Prevent reports. This then feeds into the College's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

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

9 The College adheres to the regulatory frameworks and quality assurance procedures of its respective awarding partners. There is a robust Health Check system of audits, conducted by the Academic Standards Team, to monitor programme compliance through the year, the results of which are reviewed by the Higher Education Academic Standards Committee (HEASC), including identified issues, actions and good practice. The College's adherence to its awarding partners' regulations and requirements ensures that programmes reflect relevant external benchmarks.

10 The College's policies for assessment, internal verification and recognition of prior learning set out detailed arrangements for testing that students have achieved the academic standards set in line with the requirements of its awarding partners and are reflected within programme handbooks. Assessment Health Checks (AHC) ensure effective compliance with the College's policies at programme level.

11 The College makes effective use of independent and expert input in the setting and maintenance of standards, engaging with external examiners, employers, industry representatives and partner organisations. New programme developments and programme changes are informed by feedback from stakeholders including students, alumni, industry contacts and employers. External examiners are involved in the assessment process, and meet with curriculum teams and students. The Academic Standards Team monitors responses to actions arising from external examiner reports captured within Quality Improvement Plans (QIP), provides a summary report for consideration by senior management, and publishes the reports on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) for student information. External examiners confirm that standards are appropriate to the qualification level and therefore comparable with those of other UK higher education providers.

12 Academic Board is responsible for confirming new programme proposals, in line with the College's Higher Education Strategic Plan and School Development Plans, before they are submitted for consideration and approval by the awarding partner. Detailed and constructive discussion of proposals is undertaken through a range of forums, including the Higher Education Programme Committee. There is particular scrutiny by the Higher Education Course Approval Panel (which is a subgroup of HEASC with delegated responsibility to examine new programme proposals), including resource allocation and quality assurance arrangements. The HEASC recommends programmes for approval to the Academic Board.

13 The College's management information systems provide reliable data on retention, achievement and progression to inform the production of the annual programme self-assessment report (SAR) and QIPs. Programme-level SARs and QIPs are then used to inform the overall College higher education SAR and the College QIP, which are used constructively for monitoring and enhancement purposes by the HEASC, Academic Board AHCs and Programme Review meetings. These review processes make use of a range of data including destinations data and surveys, including the National Student Survey (NSS), which are used inform programme and College-level reporting and actions. The College effectively discharges its responsibilities for the maintenance of academic standards through HEASC, which undertakes detailed scrutiny of programmes and considers the College's assurance statement before discussion at TL&ASC, prior to submission to HEFCE.

Rounded judgement

14 The College's governance arrangements, its internal policies and procedures, and its adherence to the awarding partners' requirements ensure that academic standards are set at a level that is consistent with UK threshold expectations and that the College meets the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards.

15 There are no areas for development or specified areas for improvement in this judgement area.

16 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)

17 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is centred on the quality of the student experience, ensuring student success and progression. There is a small section devoted to higher education although there are no references to the Quality Code. The priority is to develop higher level academic skills, independence and confidence in self-evaluation. The Higher Education Programmes Committee provides the forum for discussion of staff development and approaches towards teaching, learning and assessment.

18 The TL&ASC interrogates data, including the NSS results, which have seen falling levels of satisfaction in some areas. One of the resulting reports produced for 2016 lacked critical analysis; however, the team was informed that actions were included in QIPs and were monitored through the reporting structures, back to the governing body.

19 The College ensures that teaching staff and those supporting learning are appropriately qualified through academic and/or vocational and industry experience. Students value the industrial experiences of their teachers and referred to 'excellent' tutor support. A range of support mechanisms are provided for teaching staff, including the role of Advanced Practitioners, who develop performance and promote good practice, although the College has not built HEA membership into its staff development strategy. Staff development activities, including the higher education away days, are promoted through the Higher Education Programmes Committee. The learning environment is supported through graded observation, which is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework and the Common Inspection Framework but uses standard documentation rather than being adapted for a higher education-specific context. Outstanding or good practice is used to continually enhance the learning experience.

20 Students commented favourably that the standard and quality of teaching meets their expectations, and they have opportunities to provide feedback through evaluation forms, internal surveys and the NSS. Students are involved in feedback on the learning and assessment process through module reviews, which inform the SARs and QIPs.

21 Learning resources are allocated strategically following executive-led performance reviews and the learning environment overall is fit for purpose. A strategic aim is to ensure the provision of specialist accommodation that meets industry standards. The College has developed some dedicated higher education learning and social spaces, which students appreciate. The review team confirmed the positive steps taken to improve access to specialist resources following dissatisfaction levels among Engineering and Computing students. Students spoke positively of the role of the VLE in supporting their learning and staff engage enthusiastically with it.

22 The review team confirmed that assessment arrangements are effective; assignment briefs clearly indicate the expectations and criteria against which students need to perform. Formative feedback opportunities are facilitated using electronic media, upon which external examiners and students have commented positively. The team confirmed the positive steps taken to address the low scores for assessment and feedback in the NSS for Engineering: this included moving away from agency staffing and strengthening the team's approach towards supporting students.

23 The College's deliberative structure provides an effective mechanism for the reporting and review of the student academic experience. QIPs produced at both subject and organisational levels provide summaries of student feedback, external examiner comments and teaching and peer observations as part of the annual reporting process. Oversight is provided through the HEASC meetings. The review team heard that the remit of the Higher Education Programme Committee had been strengthened to test the evidence produced for annual reporting. The senior management group review process was invoked to scrutinise the below satisfactory performance of Engineering and Computing programmes.

24 Student performance and progression is carefully monitored through robust data management and tracking through the Health Checks. Retention strategies have led to improved performance, particularly through the integration of study skills into the learning experience. A focus is maintained on the individual student through the effective use of tutorials and discussion of progress logs. The College staff have relationships with several universities to prepare students to promote transition into degree programmes. Guest lectures delivered by university staff and industrial practitioners enhance the learning experience.

25 Student engagement is evident through questionnaires, the annual review of programmes and the NSS. Students are engaged at programme level and institutional level through their attendance at Programme Committees, course team meetings and the potential for representation at the Board of Governors. The team noted, however, that there is no higher education student governor. Student representatives meet with the Higher Education Coordinator and produce a summary paper for the Higher Education Programme Committee meetings. The annual student submission, which is presented by the two Year Student Representatives at the HEASC, provides the opportunity to develop employability skills.

26 Following an area for improvement identified in the 2015-16 QIP, the team heard that student representation at programme-level meetings was increasing. Although the College clearly involves students, most examples provided by students demonstrated resolution of matters at an informal level and there was some uncertainty over attendance at formal meetings. The review team was, however, satisfied that the College is addressing these issues. With the exception of the lack of higher education student representation on the governing body, the College takes steps to engage all students, collectively and individually, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

27 Before commencing their studies, students are provided with handbooks and information relating to support services. A cross-College higher education induction introduces a guide to assessment practices in higher education. Students confirmed satisfaction with the recruitment, selection and admissions processes.

28 The review team confirms that the College has effective systems in place for assuring, reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and student academic experience, including processes for reviewing the learning environment and for supporting staff development.

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

29 Student involvement in governance is through two main routes: the academic route that feeds into the HEASC, and the Student Council route that feeds into the governing body. Higher education-specific student representation is primarily through the HEASC, with no higher education student representation on the main board or the Teaching, Learning and Assessment subcommittee on the Student Council route.

30 The Student Affairs subcommittee supports student voice and involvement in academic governance, with student governors and student president in attendance; the current student governors and president are further education students. The College has recognised that there is an opportunity to enhance higher education student involvement in academic governance and the review team advises the College to ensure that higher education students are represented throughout the academic governance structure, identifying this as an **area for development**.

31 To ensure that student complaints are dealt with effectively, the governing body receives a summary of complaints. The Safeguarding Committee produces the Safeguarding and Prevent reports for the governing body annually and audits its policies and practices every two years, with audits presented to the Governing Body Audit Committee, allowing for the welfare of students to be secured.

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

32 The College's prospectus and website provide clear and detailed information about the College and its higher education programmes so that prospective students are able to make an informed decision, including accessible links to PDF versions of the course fact sheets, programme handbooks and the Terms and Conditions.

33 The College's Admissions Policy applies to both further education and higher education applicants and is easily accessible to applicants on the College's website. Offer letters provide applicants with links to the factsheets, programme handbook and the Terms and Conditions. Applicants are advised in writing on changes to programmes that occur between application and enrolment through a revised offer letter, including their rights to cancel a previously accepted offer. However, while the Admissions Process clearly states that applicants may write to the Principal if they wish to complain or appeal an admissions decision, there is no clearly defined process or timeline to support this. The review team was advised that the College would ensure formal acknowledgement of the complaint or appeal and, in line with other processes, adhere to a 10-day turnaround to respond to an applicant. However, the review team found that the procedure is unclear and advises the College to explicitly articulate its procedures for applicants to submit complaints or appeals about admissions decisions, identifying this as an **area for development**.

34 The College's Higher Education Public Information and Course Changes Procedure ensures that the College has effective mechanisms in place for checking the accuracy and consistency of information provided to applicants and students. The Higher Education Assessment Health Checks confirm that information within programme handbooks and student induction is consistent with the awarding organisation's definitive information. The Higher Education Co-ordinator collates information on behalf of the Director Vocational, who has responsibility for ensuring that the College's Terms and Conditions incorporate the correct information regarding fees and associated costs from the Finance Department, and are published on the website by the Marketing Department.

35 The Marketing Department has responsibility for creating course handbooks that contain the definitive programme information for applicants and enrolled students, in liaison with curriculum teams, the Higher Education Co-ordinator and the Academic Standards Officer, and the relevant higher education partner. Regular liaison between higher education programme leaders and the Marketing Department ensures that the website, factsheets and marketing literature remain accurate and up to date and are reported to Higher Education Programme Committee meetings and HEASC. The Director Vocational has the final sign-off of all information before it is made available in electronic format to applicants and to students at induction and via the College's learning portals. Changes to website sections are managed by the Marketing Department through the content management system, which enables instant updates, if required, following institutional sign-off.

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

36 Terms and conditions relating to programme closures and changes are available online and in the offer letter to prospective students. The Admissions Department communicates in writing to prospective students any programme changes occurring between application and enrolment; for students who have commenced a programme, the College communicates changes at the earliest opportunity. The College accepts students from other providers who have had programme closures.

37 The complaints and appeals policies detail the procedure a complaint follows, with specified timeframes. A complaint framework is completed during the investigation by the Curriculum Director, who sends the completed form to the Academic Standards Office, which then informs the complainant of the outcomes with associated actions identified and tasked to the relevant Director to oversee. Appeals against decisions on complaints are submitted in writing to the Principal/Vice-Principal for final consideration and students are informed of the right to take appeals to the OIA if they are not satisfied with the College's response.

38 Complaints records are kept centrally by the Academic Standards Manager and recorded in a Complaints Register that is held in the Principal's office and monitored at Performance Review and Boards of Study. Senior Management Team (SMT) and Governors receive regular evaluations of complaints that inform the College's improvement strategies.

39 The College's Complaints Policy and Procedures and the Procedure for Appeals against Assessment Decisions are approved by SMT to ensure clarity and fairness to students before they are published on the intranet for ease of student accessibility, as well as within the College handbooks. The College's Complaints Policy and Procedures are designed for both higher education and further education students, with signposts to the relevant external adjudicator once the College's formal procedures have been completed. However, the review team found that a single procedure for both groups of students has the potential to be misleading, particularly for those progressing to higher education from further education. The review team advises the College to ensure that the Complaints Policy sufficiently differentiates, where appropriate, between higher education and further education students, and identifies this as an **area for development**.

Rounded judgement

40 The review team concludes that the College is meeting the baseline regulatory requirements in this judgement area through its governance arrangements, internal policies and procedures and adherence to its awarding partner's frameworks and regulations.

41 The review team identified three areas for development. These relate to minor omissions or a need to amend or update processes and procedures that will not require or result in major operational or procedural change. No specified improvements were identified.

42 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

QAA1931 - R9444 - Aug 2017

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