



Quality Review Visit of Accrington and Rossendale College

May 2018

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Accrington and Rossendale College

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

Areas for development

The review team identified the following **areas for development** that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards at Accrington and Rossendale College. The review team advises Accrington and Rossendale College to:

- further strengthen the arrangements for programme and module level evaluation to contribute to the identification of academic risk at institutional level (Academic Standards, Code of Governance)
- further develop the process for communicating APL requirements for prospective students, including providing more clarity in the way that this is applied to Pearson programmes (Academic Standards, Quality Code)
- consider how Performance Management Panels might better support the systematic identification and dissemination of good practice to enhance the student academic experience (Quality Code).

Specified improvements

The review team identified no **specified improvements**.

About this review

The review visit took place from 15 to 16 May 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Lynne Braham
- Miss Elizabeth Shackels
- Mr Benjamin Hunt (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 Accrington and Rossendale College

Accrington and Rossendale College is a general Further Education College located in Pennine Lancashire. The College mission is to raise access, aspiration and achievement and their vision is to be the first choice College for a career-focused education.

The College has provided Higher Education (HE) courses for twenty five years. It aims to provide local HE for both young people and adults to widen participation and increase higher level skills within the local workforce.

It caters for 205 full-time and 45 part-time higher education students, and holds validation or partnership arrangements with:

- Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)
- University of Huddersfield via the Education and Training Consortium (ETC),
- Buckinghamshire New University
- University of Bolton
- Pearson.

The College offers sixteen HE programmes at Cert Ed, Foundation Degree, HND, HNC, BA, BSC (Hons), and PGCE levels. It is the largest provider of Higher Apprenticeships in Lancashire. The College intends to grow this provision significantly in the future in order to facilitate progression to HE for students and trainees from Level 3 programmes.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 Higher Education at the College is delivered under collaborative arrangements with four awarding bodies and one organisation. Some programmes have been designed and developed by the University for the College to deliver and some have been designed and developed by the College. Arrangements for managing the provision are according to Partnership Agreements and each awarding partner confirmed that the College is operating according to its expectations.

2 College approval processes ensure that programmes are aligned with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, and Characteristics Statements and these are clearly referenced in programme specifications.

3 External examiners and verifiers are appointed by the awarding bodies and organisation and reports confirm that academic standards are comparable with those of other UK higher education providers.

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

4 The College's governance arrangements in maintaining oversight of academic standards are effective and transparent. The College's Executive Team and HE Curriculum and Standards Board is responsible for the review of the academic curriculum which reports to the Corporation Board through the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee for scrutiny. The Assistant Principal of HE and Business Development is responsible for making recommendations to the Governing Body about the HE strategy within the College such as its mission, vision and aims.

5 The Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee considers and recommends to the Governing Body areas for development, areas of positivity and issues for consideration within the college. The Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee is responsible for advising the Governing Body on the academic performance of the College, which delivers the HE Strategy, Strategic HE Review and Evaluation of Provision reports that is produced by the Head of Division after consideration by the HE Curriculum and Standards Board. The Head of Division has academic oversight in an operational capacity.

6 The College has effective arrangements for monitoring academic risks identified from a strategic level, and, to a more limited extent, at operational level. The Governing Body monitors risk through the Audit Committee via the scrutiny of HE evaluation reports in alignment with the HE Strategy. The review team identified capacity to improve the process for monitoring academic risk from programme levels arising from programme reviews and modules, and more clearly communicate potential academic risk to the Head of Division for HE. The review team identified an **area for development** and advises the College to further strengthen the arrangements for programme and module level evaluation to contribute to the identification of academic risk at institutional level.

7 The responsibility for the arrangements for of academic freedom and collegiality lie with the Governing Body and Executive Team. The College has an Ethics Policy, which monitors the ethical boundaries of student research. There is also the checklist for Guest

Speakers Form, which is scrutinised by the Health, Safety and Security Committee. The College Learning, Teaching and assessment Policy encourages the sharing of good practice among programmes. The College's staff and students have presented scholarly research in HE conferences at the College.

8 The review team judge that governance arrangements are clear and robust, and there is evidence of issues and reports being effectively passed through the various levels of governance.

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

9 The College has partnership agreements with a range of awarding bodies including Liverpool John Moores, Buckinghamshire New University, University of Bolton, Huddersfield University and the awarding organisation Pearson. The College, therefore, operates according to the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation. The frameworks and procedures ensure that the academic standards of awards and qualifications are set out in agreements with the College.

10 There is a clear process for the approval and re-approval of the programmes delivered by the College that follow the frameworks, regulations and procedures of the awarding bodies and organisation.

11 The College HE Office maintains a record of all definitive documents for university awards are maintained by each university, and by the College for Pearson awards, and constitute the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme.

12 Where changes to programmes are requested or new programmes proposed, the College has an internal sign-off process, which is completed in advance of the awarding body or organisation procedure and ensures managerial oversight of any proposed changes.

13 The College carries out assessment in accordance with assessment policies, regulations and processes of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and is informed by UK threshold standards and the academic standards of the relevant awarding body or organisation. College staff work effectively with the various University Link Tutors to ensure that the assessment and feedback strategies for awarding bodies are implemented in accordance with the respective academic frameworks and regulations. For example, Buckinghamshire New University have devised an operations manual for the College that provides clear guidance on regulations and assessment processes.

14 The College has responsibility for setting assessments for its programmes, which are subject to an internal verification process within the College and approval is also sought from the external examiners. On completion of marking and feedback processes, samples of work are sent to the Link Tutor at the University of Bolton for cross moderation, and for all awarding bodies, samples are sent to the external examiner as outlined in the regulations of each awarding body. Programme Leaders in conjunction with the Head of Division for HE attend annual exam board meetings with the respective awarding bodies. Internal exam boards are scheduled for Pearson programmes.

15 Staff provide developmental feedback on marked work and students were very positive about the information provided on assessment and the feedback offered to inform future learning. Students could clearly articulate that work is marked in a timely manner and how they are supported in their development in meeting the challenges of higher levels.

16 The College admission policy describes the requirements for accrediting prior learning with responsibility resting primarily with the awarding bodies. From the meeting held

with Academic Staff they were clear about the responsibilities of the awarding bodies in relation to accrediting prior learning. Staff also stated that prospective students are requested to complete a 1,000 word essay to ascertain their fitness for the programme and that this process was also used as a means of accrediting prior learning. While this process is able, to some extent, to assess a prospective student's prior learning, it has the capacity to be strengthened to assure greater clarity with regard to what is being assessed, and consistency in the way the assessment is used, in particular around admission to Pearson programmes. The review team identified this as an **area for development** and advises the College to further develop the process for communicating APL requirements for prospective students, including providing more clarity in the way that this is applied to Pearson programmes.

17 External examiner reports confirm that the management of academic standards is effective; that assessment processes are appropriate, contain clear feedback to students, are internally moderated in accordance with assessment policies; and that the standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which they are familiar. The College makes good use of external examiner reports, actions that are incorporated into the Programme Monitoring Panel reports (PMPs) and into annual monitoring reports (AMRs) for its awarding bodies. Students confirmed that external examiner reports are available for them to access and are discussed at Programme Meetings.

18 Arrangements are in place for work placements, which are organised between tutor, student and employer, who follow the guidance and the college is currently working towards developing a college Fitness to Practice Policy to safeguard both students and clients when on placement with vulnerable individuals.

19 The College has an effective structure in place to manage its higher education. The Assistant Principal has strategic oversight while the Head of Division for Higher Education has an operational role through monitoring provision and delivery. There are a number of committees established with oversight of higher education, in particular the HE Curriculum Standards Committee, Executive meetings, HE Curriculum and Standards Board and also Programme Leaders meetings all of which have responsibility to quality assure, scrutinise and monitor the delivery of higher education within the College.

20 The PMP reports are a relatively new reporting process devised by the College whereby Heads of Division provide the Senior Executive with a statistical analysis of performance for their respective area. Consequently, the HE PMP report is produced by the Head of Division for HE and presented to the Executive Team. Common themes emerging from these reports are incorporated into staff development days. PMP reports focus on academic standards and use key data such as retention, attendance, teaching and learning profiles. Annual monitoring reports also feed into the Performance Management Panel Reports that are received by both Executive Team and the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee. Annual monitoring reports are submitted to awarding bodies for their scrutiny, an Annual Report is compiled by the Head of Division for Higher Education and Pearson presented to the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee of the Corporation.

21 A range of qualitative and quantitative data is used to monitor academic standards. Data is drawn from a variety of sources to track progress, monitor key performance indicators, generate actions and feed into higher education committees and quality assurance processes. This is evident through PMP's that also take account of NSS data and TEF metrics.

Rounded judgement

22 The College's quality assurance arrangements are appropriate in enabling it to fulfil its responsibilities to its awarding bodies and organisation, and to align with the main baseline regulatory requirements in the maintenance of academic standards. The review team identified two areas for development. These were to do with the further strengthening of the arrangements for programme and module level evaluation to contribute to the identification of academic risk at institutional level, and the further development of the process for communicating APL requirements for prospective students, including providing more clarity in the way that this is applied to Pearson programmes.

23 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

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

24 All programmes undertake annual monitoring using templates provided by the relevant awarding body. The College uses programme monitoring reports module reports, external examiner reports and key performance indicator data to produce the Strategic Annual Review and Evaluation of Higher Education, which is considered by the HE Curriculum and Standards Board, the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee and the Corporation Board.

25 The College works closely with students to involve them in learning and assessment processes and Students who met the reviewers were positive about the quality of teaching on their programmes. The College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy includes specific targets relating to formative and summative assessment and module handbooks include clear assessment and grading criteria linked to learning outcomes.

26 Students are further supported to prepare for assessment and reflect on their progress through the tutorial system and via the provision of tutorials on assessment regulations and good academic practice. Students who met the reviewers indicated that they are supported effectively, including through formative feedback and available learning resources, and that feedback on assessed work is timely, constructive and allows them to identify opportunities for improvement.

27 The College operates an effective HE Student Council with a system of elected representatives and there is an HE Student Governor who represents students on College committees. Student representatives are supported by the HE Senior Lecturer to engage in programme meetings and training is provided by NUS.

28 Formal and informal opportunities exist for students to provide feedback on a range of issues. Informal opportunities for providing feedback work well and students gave examples of action being taken as a result of their feedback. Formal feedback is via programme and module evaluation questionnaires and students have additional opportunities to raise an issue at the HE Student Council, through student representatives at programme meetings, with their personal tutor or via a non-academic concerns form 'Getting it Right'.

29 Approval and monitoring processes, including student feedback, are effective in ensuring that adequate learning resources are in place.

30 In addition to team continuing professional development activity, for example in response to good practice identified by external examiners, staff are enabled to take up development opportunities internally, for example the College's HE conference and via awarding bodies' Teaching and Learning Conferences. All teaching staff who met the reviewers had achieved a teaching qualification with some having attained, or working towards, HEA Fellowship.

31 The College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy aims to embed a culture of sharing good practice and staff who met the reviewers explained that this could be evidenced through HE Review outcomes and annual monitoring processes, facilitated by the HE Curriculum and Standards Board and reported to the Performance Management Panels.

32 The College monitors the quality of teaching through HE Review, a peer observation process that has been developed to ensure consistency with the HE strategy in providing a high quality HE experience and to align with the UK Professional Standards Framework for HE. HE review outcomes are used to inform staff appraisal and staff development. A stated aim of the HE Review process is to identify and disseminate good practice, and reviewers were able to confirm that some staff development had taken place as a result of outcomes from HE reviews.

33 Reviewers were provided with examples of reports that contribute to the Performance Management Panels, and identified that HE Review outcomes could contribute more effectively by more formally identifying and recording good practice highlighted in, for example, lesson observation reports. The review team identified an **area for development** and advises that the College considers how Performance Management Panels might better support the systematic identification and dissemination of good practice to enhance the student academic experience.

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

34 The College has in place effective arrangements to engage students in its governance through the appointment of student representatives and a Higher Education student governor who is also a member of the Governing Body. There is a designated student Charter within the college which can be accessed via the college VLE. The College has a designated HE Student Council Committee.

35 Student Representatives are elected invited to attend a range of meetings such as HE Curriculum and Standards Board meetings, Programme meetings, HE Student Council College meetings and programme validations. The College also uses other feedback processes which include NSS surveys, module feedback reports and the student perspective of the College reports. Student representatives have appropriate training opportunities within the College.

36 The Governing Body has effective oversight of complaints, and any submissions to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The College produces annual reports on complaints that are compiled by the HE Head of Division and HE Curriculum and Standards Board which is then scrutinised and considered by The Curriculum and Quality Standards committee and Corporation Board.

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

37 There is a clear auditing process within the College for ensuring that all information is accessible and trustworthy. Responsibility and oversight of this process rests with the Head of Division for Higher Education. The College Academic Support Officer reviews all HE information to ensure it is accurate and involves both academic and support staff. College HEI are also responsible for signing off on all promotional material that the College wishes to use, for example, information for HE Open Evenings. Staff in meetings were clear about how the process operates in practice.

38 Responsibility for student recruitment and the admissions process lies with the College. The Higher Education Office works closely with the awarding body to ensure that all information and admission processes align to that of awarding bodies.

39 The College's Admissions Policy explains the entry criteria for different types of higher education programmes and is accessible on the College's website. It also describes how unsuccessful students can appeal. The College has developed a clear internal process for admissions. The HE Admission and Progression Officer who will work in conjunction with higher education curriculum staff, to ensure that an efficient admissions process is in place, initially process all applications. All admissions decisions are the responsibility of the relevant programme leader at the College. The College has sufficient mechanisms in place to ensure that the approach to admissions is consistent and transparent.

40 Potential applicants can access information about programmes through a variety of media including the VLE. The website contains a section about the College along with key policies such as the Admissions Policy, the Higher Education Complaints and Appeals Procedure, and the College's Higher Education Terms and Conditions. Information provided about programmes and study at the College is consistent with Competition and Markets Authority guidelines.

41 All staff receive an annual update on admissions and staff are fully aware of the stages of contact with prospective students. The College's Terms and Conditions are easily located on its website and students are fully aware of them. Information is also provided to prospective students regarding the relevant awarding body Terms and moving forward this information will also be available in the HE Induction Pack.

42 The College admission policy describes the requirements for accrediting prior learning with responsibility resting primarily with the awarding bodies. From the meeting held with Academic Staff they were clear about the responsibilities of the awarding bodies in relation to accrediting prior learning. Staff also stated that prospective students are requested to complete a 1,000 word essay to ascertain their fitness for the programme and that this process was also used as a means of accrediting prior learning. The review team feel that this current practice under the admission policy should be reviewed. This is addressed as an area for development in the previous section under the Quality Code.

43 The Complaints Policy is accessible and fair and clearly outlines the various stages a student will take within the process. It was clear from the meetings held with staff and students the policy is rarely used with students and staff engaging in informal processes such as 'corridor talks' or using the 'Getting it Right' form.

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

44 The College has a designated Complaints Policy, which functions robustly. The College complaints procedure is in line with the good practice framework of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. All students are made aware of both academic appeals and complaints during induction and in programme handbooks. Academic Appeals are dealt with by the relevant awarding body, which is clearly outlined to students.

45 The review team found both staff and students knowledgeable regarding how a student could access the academic appeals procedure and to make a complaint.

46 Oversight of the College's complaints process rests with the Head of Division. The approach adopted by the College is to attempt to resolve all complaints informally through discussion between the student and Programme Leader. However, in situations where this is not the case the College's procedure clearly outlines the stages students will

progress through and the point at which the awarding body becomes involved. In their meeting with the review team both staff and students were aware of the process that take place. All formal complaints are recorded, actioned and reported through to the Head of Division and the Governing Body.

47 The review team found that students were very clear about the admission process and that course changes may be made before, during and after their enrolment via the college's Terms and Conditions document. Any material changes are communicated to students by Programme Leaders, and by the HE Admissions and Progress Officer. All course amendments are communicated to staff and students in a timely manner.

48 The College follows its own course closure policy which is fair and transparent. The College and awarding body work closely together to ensure that students will be able to complete their programme. The College has arrangements in place to contact students in a fair and timely manner. The College assists the wider sector by accepting students from local institutions when a programme closes.

49 The College's complaints arrangements allow for the continual improvement of the student learning experience. There is evidence of the college making amendments to the student learning experience through the capturing and scrutiny of student complaints. Students commented that that the College had made improvements after informal and formal complaints had been made.

Rounded judgement

50 Arrangements at the College for the academic governance and management of the student academic experience are appropriate and effective in the context of the responsibilities delegated to it by its awarding partners, and the baseline regulatory requirements. The review team identified an area for development. This is to do with how Performance Management Panels might better support the systematic identification and dissemination of good practice to enhance the student academic experience.

51 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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