

Review of College Higher Education of Burton and South Derbyshire College

May 2013

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About this review

This is a report of a Review of College Higher Education conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Burton and South Derbyshire College. The review took place on 20-22 May 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor John Baldock
- Dr Gillian Blunden
- Ms Lucy Bannister (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Burton and South Derbyshire College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on:
 - whether the college fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding bodies
 - the quality of learning opportunities
 - the quality of information
 - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- 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 6.

In reviewing Burton and South Derbyshire College, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.¹ Background information about Burton and South Derbyshire College is given at the beginning of this report. A dedicated [page of the website](#) explains more about this review method and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.²

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/default.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about Burton and South Derbyshire College (the College).

QAA's judgements about Burton and South Derbyshire College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Burton and South Derbyshire College.

- The academic standards of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of information produced by the College about its learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at Burton and South Derbyshire College.

- the robust approach to the monitoring and review of higher education courses in support of academic standards (paragraph 1.18)
- the recent developments in the centralisation of all student data and its deliberate use for monitoring student and staff performance (paragraph 2.17).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Burton and South Derbyshire College:

That the College, by October 2013:

- makes more explicit procedures that ensure all assessment and feedback to students is appropriate and timely (paragraph 1.11)
- makes explicit the College's strategic approach to higher education resourcing in the context of the higher education strategy being developed (paragraph 2.6)
- takes a more consistent and proactive approach to ensuring that external examiners' reports are shared as a matter of course with the College's student representatives (paragraph 3.5)
- establishes a forum in which all higher education Course Leaders can meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest and share good practice (paragraph 4.5)
- makes an institutional approach to the enhancement of the higher education student experience an integral part of the new higher education strategy (paragraph 4.6)

and by January 2014:

- takes effective steps to ensure that the conditions necessary for the proper conduct of examinations are provided without exception (paragraph 1.14)
- raises awareness of the career services available to higher education students, with particular focus on the support available through the Learner Hub and the 'Career Coach' software (paragraph 2.31).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that Burton and South Derbyshire College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The plan for the Quality Office to routinely check that external examiner recommendations have been identified and acted upon (paragraph 1.9).
- The plan to produce a separate synoptic annual report of the College's higher education provision from July 2013 (paragraph 1.19).
- The plans to ensure the more systematic involvement of higher education students in quality assurance (paragraph 2.12).
- The steps being taken to make information about higher education provision more accessible (paragraph 3.4).

The First Year Student Experience

The team found that first-year students were generally well prepared for higher-level study, and understood what was required of them, but that the means of informing and supporting them varied in formality. The College is introducing a number of mechanisms to improve the consistency of information and support provided.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the [handbook](#) for Review of College Higher Education, available on the QAA website.³

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx

About Burton and South Derbyshire College

Burton and South Derbyshire College is a medium-sized General Further Education College which enrolls in excess of 10,000 learners over the age of 14 and employs over 400 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.

The College works collaboratively with Staffordshire University (the University) to offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, in addition to providing higher education awards directly. Through its partnership with the University, the College offers over 28 awards, which include HNCs/HNDs, Foundation Degrees and 'top-up' degrees to 406 learners, 135 of whom are full-time and 271 part-time.

The College has three Academies, each offering a number of higher education programmes which are taught by approximately 45 full-time and 15 part-time staff. In general, College staff teach on both higher and further education programmes.

The College's vision is to be 'Vibrant and Outstanding – a high performing College' and to achieve this through its mission of 'Inspiring and motivating all to achieve their maximum potential'. The College states through its strategic framework, core values and behaviours how it will interact with its learners, employers and staff to inspire and motivate all to achieve their career, learning and business objectives and make a positive contribution to society.

Major changes since the last review

Since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in May 2007, there have been significant changes in the College's leadership structure and the Strategic Plan (2012-15) has recently been revised to take into account the new challenges facing the sector. The College identifies the following main changes during this period.

- Extensive development of the estate, including a new University Centre dedicated to higher education delivery, a Learner Hub and a Learning Resource Centre.
- The opening of St George's Park and the establishment of a learning partnership between the College and the FA's National Football Centre.
- Further enhancement of the Governing Body, Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and College Management Team (CMT).
- A College-wide review of its ILT strategy, including the implementation of a new virtual learning environment (VLE) and progress tracking system.
- The enhancement of learner representation at all levels, through the 'Learner Voice' initiative and the introduction of a Student Council, led by a Student Union President.
- A major review and redesign of Learner Services and Quality Improvement to continue to secure high academic standards and learner support.
- The continued development of the framework for quality assurance and improvement to ensure that managers, staff and learners share responsibility for enhancing the quality of the learner experience.

Key challenges for the College

The challenges facing the College are to continue to develop learner-related systems and processes, with a particular focus on:

- realigning and further developing curriculum provision to meet local, regional and national priorities, particularly in response to 'New Challenges, New Chances'

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- ensuring continued improvement in retention and achievement rates for learners on higher education programmes
- continued improvement in the setting and monitoring of challenging targets based on learners' starting points
- continued improvement in the consistency, standard and timeliness of feedback to learners to support achievement
- ensuring a more consistent and high level of learner satisfaction and learning experience across all programmes
- ensuring the College is fully prepared to meet external changes with regard to public information releases, for example the Key Information Set
- implementing a new competency framework with an increased emphasis on staff development and performance.

Explanation of the findings about Burton and South Derbyshire 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 [handbook](#) for the review method, also on the QAA website.⁶

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at Burton and South Derbyshire College **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The team found that the qualifications offered by the College are allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

1.2 Since the 2007 Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER), the College has reduced the number of its awarding bodies: it now works solely with Staffordshire University (the University) to deliver Staffordshire University and Edexcel awards.

1.3 The University is responsible for ensuring that all higher education programmes delivered on its behalf at the College are allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ through its design, validation, monitoring and revalidation procedures. The programme specifications provided demonstrate that there is a sufficient volume of study for the learning outcomes to be achieved.

1.4 As part of its review of its quality improvement strategy, the College is introducing its own internal higher education award validation process to permit the development of new higher education programmes prior to submission to the University.

Use of external examiners

1.5 The team found that the College generally makes appropriate use of external examiners.

1.6 All external examiners are appointed by the University.

1.7 External examiners' reports are frequently drawn up in respect of awards delivered at more than one partner institution and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish issues that appertain to the College. Where it is possible, issues are considered at both course level and by the College's Quality and Information Services Unit.

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 See note 4.

1.8 External examiners' reports contribute to the College's annual course reports which are considered both by Staffordshire University and the College's senior managers and, where necessary, are built into the course action plan.

1.9 The College has recognised that a more consistent and timely approach is needed to responding to external examiner concerns by some course teams and in monitoring the effectiveness of responses. Additionally, the College has recognised the need for the production of a 'whole College' action plan in response to any college-wide issues identified through a joint consideration of all the external examiners' reports. The team **affirms** the College's plans that the Quality Office checks routinely that external examiner recommendations have been identified and acted upon.

Assessment and standards

1.10 Overall, the team found that the College's assessment strategies provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the outcomes of their awards.

1.11 Programmes are designed by the awarding body to enable assessment to contribute to student learning. The team found evidence of feedback provided to students, student satisfaction survey outcomes and course reports to confirm that this happens in practice. Greater consistency in the timeliness and utility of feedback to students on assessed work across all College higher education courses is listed on the action plan arising from a desirable recommendation from the 2007 IQER. The College confirmed that there are still issues to be overcome in this respect and the team **recommends** that the College makes more explicit procedures that ensure all assessment and feedback to students is appropriate and timely by October 2013.

1.12 Assessment boards and panels, assessment tasks, and the amount and timing of assessment are the responsibility of the awarding body. College staff are encouraged to attend the boards and subsequent committee meetings at the University whenever possible and the College is introducing its own assessment and award boards from 2013-14. Some degree of local interpretation of assessment tasks is allowed in respect of work-based projects and similar assessment tasks. Assessment briefs are clear and assessment tasks, incorporating live work-related briefs as appropriate, enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

1.13 Marking and internal verification of student work are the responsibility of College staff, working in accordance with University regulations. In line with the individual faculty procedures of the University, samples of College assessed work are sent to the University for standardisation and moderation. Staff new to higher education are offered support through the University's continuing professional development (CPD) activities and College mentoring in assessment at higher education level.

1.14 The conduct of assessment is the responsibility of the College. Security is effective through collaboration with the University. However, in the meeting with students, some commented on the noise outside their examination room during their final examination and in the meeting with support staff there was no indication to the team of plans to improve these conditions. It is therefore **recommended** that the College takes effective steps to ensure that the conditions necessary for the proper conduct of examinations are provided without exception by January 2014.

1.15 Recording and documentation of assessment is ultimately the responsibility of the awarding body.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.16 The team found that processes for the design, monitoring and review of programmes enable standards to be set and maintained and students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards.

1.17 Design, approval, monitoring and review of higher education programmes are the responsibility of the awarding body, with input at validation, annual monitoring and revalidation by College staff, employers and students.

1.18 The College has recently introduced a more robust system of management information to support course management and review across all levels in the College. As of 2012-13, the College Standards Committee considers a standing agenda item on 'In-year LR and HE retention'. This, together with subsequent managerial action, has contributed to greatly increased retention rates for some higher education courses. The review team identifies the robust approach to the monitoring and review of higher education courses in support of academic standards to be a **feature of good practice**.

1.19 Both the initial approval process for programmes and the Academic Review processes applied by the College and the University test the academic content and the learning objectives of courses.

1.20 Annual higher education course monitoring reports (University and Edexcel) contribute to the Self-Assessment Reports for each of the three College Academies. These reports, which are validated using both internal and external panel members, feed into the College's annual Self-Assessment Report. However, there are no sections of these College monitoring procedures and processes that deal with the College's higher education provision separately. Evaluation by the College of these monitoring and review processes for higher education courses has led to the decision that an overall synoptic report on the College's higher education provision will be produced for the first time in July 2013. The team **affirms** the plan to produce a separate synoptic annual report of the College's higher education provision.

Subject benchmarks

1.21 The team found that subject benchmark statements are used effectively to inform the standards of awards.

1.22 Rigorous use is made by the University of subject benchmark statements and qualification statements in drawing up programme specifications.

1.23 The College has recently introduced electronic information systems to give staff background information on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in support of its higher education work.

1.24 In summary, the College has recently reviewed and revised many of the procedures and processes it uses to assure academic standards, and has provided the review team with evidence to confirm this. In some cases it is too soon to evaluate fully the effectiveness of these processes, but the team found that adequate progress had been made to justify a positive judgement in this area.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at Burton and South Derbyshire College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The team found that appropriate and robust procedures are in place to ensure and periodically test that professional and academic standards for teaching and support of learning are upheld.

2.2 Both the College and the University have in place policies and procedures designed to ensure that staff teaching on higher education programmes are appropriately qualified and trained. The review team were able to examine a comprehensive suite of College and University policies on the approval of new staff, staff probation, staff development, staff mentoring and lesson observations. The team were also able to review the staffing requirements of the University when courses and staffing are initially approved, and when additional staff are recruited.

2.3 In 2012 the College adopted a competency framework to inform recruitment, and the team were able to examine a selection of course review and annual monitoring documents to evaluate the monitoring of staff competencies. The College recently revised its recruitment arrangements to allow for applicants to deliver a lesson during the selection process. The review team met higher education course and programme leaders who confirmed the implementation of the recruitment and selection policies. Staff new to teaching on higher education programmes confirmed that they were mentored by a more experienced teacher on the same programme.

2.4 The College requires all staff to maintain and enhance their academic knowledge, teaching skills and competencies through participation in relevant CPD. All staff must engage in at least 30 hours a year of CPD and evidence seen by the review team showed that most substantially exceeded this requirement. Staff reported significant use of CPD opportunities provided by the College, the University and other sources and this was confirmed by the team's examination of the College's CPD recording mechanism, 'Passport to Success'.

Learning resources

2.5 The College's approaches to ensuring that learning resources are appropriate for learning are an effective combination of formal approval and review mechanisms and more informal and frequent contacts between course leaders and professional services.

2.6 The College does not have an explicit strategy for the monitoring and deployment of learning resources for higher education programmes. The availability of appropriate staff and material resources is tested during module and programme approval and through the annual monitoring and periodic review processes managed by the University. The team was told by the College that a revised higher education strategy document was being written by the Vice Principal (Curriculum). The team **recommends** that the College makes explicit its strategic approach to higher education resourcing in the context of the higher education strategy being developed by October 2013.

2.7 In its meetings with staff responsible for estates, human resources and for learning and teaching resources, the review team was able to confirm that regular and effective formal and informal liaison arrangements were in place to ensure that library, IT, and equipment supplies were made available to higher education programmes. Higher education learning and teaching at the College takes place within a modern, purpose-built 'University Centre'. In its meeting with students, the review team was able to confirm that students were satisfied with their access to learning materials and the facilities within which teaching took place.

2.8 Since 2008, the College has invested in the upgrading and improved management of both its IT infrastructure and the capacity of its staff and students to use Information and Learning Technology (ILT) for teaching and learning. These improvements followed the recommendations of an ILT Review conducted by Jisc in 2009, and led to an upgraded IT infrastructure, and an ILT strategy overseen by a strategic group of senior management, curriculum staff and the Student Union President. Enhancements included upgrading and improved access to PC provision and support for the growing use of Moodle for learning and teaching. An internal audit in 2010 confirmed that the IT infrastructure had improved and staff and students met by the review team acknowledged the considerable improvements in IT provision and the use of learning technology.

Student voice

2.9 The small numbers on programmes and the small classes mean that students rarely see a need to use the formal structures for student representation and participation in quality management. There was good evidence that students were able to make their views known and that they did so.

2.10 The College has in place a formal structure, informed by a Learner Involvement Strategy and supported by the employment of two Learner Liaison Officers, for learner representation on most College decision-making bodies including the Governing Body, the College Management Team, Standards Committee, Finance and General Purposes Committee, and the Equality and Diversity Committee. The College operates a system called 'Learner Voice', under which each tutor group nominates one or two representatives who are commissioned to voice the views of the group at meetings of the Student Council. All committees have a learner voice agenda item at the beginning of each meeting. Students are also members of the College course review committees which contribute to the annual course reviews. The College conducts learner surveys for all courses twice yearly, leading to action plans and feedback to students. All final-year higher education students are advised on how to complete the National Student Survey (NSS) questionnaire.

2.11 Evidence provided to the review team showed that higher education students played a limited role in the Student Council and the Annual Learner Conference, and few of the students met by the review team had participated in programme committees or programme review processes. The students emphasised to the team that the small cohorts on all the College programmes meant that they had direct and immediate access to their tutors and they gave examples of the ways in which they were able to voice concerns immediately and obtain satisfactory responses. However, the students had little awareness of action plans or formal feedback mechanisms. The teaching staff met by the team explained that formal arrangements for student participation in the management and review of programmes were in place, but confirmed that the most frequently used and effective means of student participation was through one-to-one discussions between students and tutors.

2.12 The self-evaluation document as well as College managers met by the review team confirmed that in practice formal higher education student participation in quality assurance

varied in intensity across programmes. The College was encouraging programme leaders to find ways to ensure more systematic engagement in the processes, including periodic and annual reviews, by student representatives. The review team **affirms** the plans to ensure the more systematic involvement of higher education students in quality assurance.

Management information

2.13 The review team found that over the last year, the College had greatly improved the accessibility and timeliness of data on student performance and that this was allowing teaching staff to improve retention and progress on higher education courses.

2.14 The College collects and makes available to its governing body, staff, students and stakeholders a wide range of performance indicators (Critical Success Factors) as well as data on students including feedback from learners, external examiners' reports, data on applications, retention and progression, and data on gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation.

2.15 The College produces for its governing body an annual performance summary of a wide range of measures and indicators assessing the achievements of its students and the College's contribution to the local and wider economies. Part of this exercise is a course review and evaluation process. The results feed directly into Programme Area reports, constructed by Programme Area managers and Directors of Academies. In addition, Business Support Area (BSA) managers carry out self-assessments of their respective areas to evaluate the contributions the services make to the quality of provision for learners. These reports help managers at all levels to have a clear understanding of the quality and performance of provision across the College.

2.16 Until relatively recently, this data revealed low retention and progression rates in some of the higher education programmes. One difficulty reported by staff who met the review team, and recognised in the self-evaluation, was a problem with the timeliness of data, particularly that required by the recently developed process of 'Termly Review' of programmes.

2.17 The Assistant Principal (Quality and Information Services) has recently put in place a 'Quality and Performance Strategy' and as a consequence the Management Information Office is able to make data on the attendance, performance and progress of individual higher education students quickly available to course leaders. Management and staff are therefore able to monitor where students are either not attending regularly or are having difficulty with their learning. The most recent progression data made available to the review team demonstrated significant improvements in retention and progression across higher education programmes. The timeliness of data has been greatly improved to the extent that it is intended to pre-populate the 'Termly Review' forms with relevant data before asking staff to complete the reports. The review team notes as a **feature of good practice** the recent developments in the centralisation of all student data and its deliberate use for monitoring student and staff performance.

Admission to the College

2.18 The review team found that the College's policies and procedures for the admission of students were explicit, fair and consistently applied.

2.19 The admissions process for full-time programmes involves students applying through UCAS and to Staffordshire University, with whom the College liaises to complete the admissions process. In the case of students applying for part-time higher education

programmes, they apply directly to the College. The College website sets out clearly how students should apply and what the admissions process will involve. All applicants are interviewed by at least two members of staff.

2.20 The admissions process is managed by Learner Services who are responsible for ensuring applications are dealt with efficiently and impartially. The College offers advice, guidance and support on all aspects of the application process including how accreditation for prior learning and experience will be calculated.

2.21 The College provides all new students with an induction programme and screening tests to assess any skill or competency deficits. For full-time learners, and for learners on substantial part-time courses, an assessment of numeracy, communications and IT skills is carried out. Additional learning support, as diagnosed from the screening tests, is offered where appropriate. For full-time learners, a personal tutor is allocated on registration who will provide a tutorial programme designed to monitor progress and support students to manage their own learning. A signed learning agreement indicates target qualifications and expected completion dates.

2.22 A high proportion of students applying and admitted to higher education programmes have already studied at the College on further education programmes. Students met by the review team described how individual members of staff had suggested they apply and had guided them through the process. Students met by the review team confirmed that the admissions process was fair and rigorous.

2.23 At the time of the review visit, the College did not publish a separate higher education prospectus. Details of available higher education programmes could be found on the College website. However, in the view of the review team, discovering from the website what higher education provision was available was not a straightforward process. The review team supports the College's intention to publish a separate higher education prospectus for entry in 2014-15 (see paragraph 3.4).

Complaints and appeals

2.24 The College has complaints and appeals procedures that are appropriately advertised and regularly monitored and reviewed.

2.25 The College has in place explicit policies and procedures for complaints and appeals. These are contained within its broader 'Customer Experience Feedback Policy', introduced in 2012-13 and replacing the previous 'Compliments and Complaints Policy'. These policies set out the principles that govern how College staff will respond to students and other users. Information on complaints and appeals is described within the broader context of sources of support for students' learning and their wider welfare. Complaints and compliments, and their outcomes, are the subject of an annual analysis and report to the Standards Committee of the Board of Governors.

2.26 The Student Handbook and College website contain sections describing how to make a complaint. These explain that formal complaints will be acknowledged within five working days and can be followed with a full investigation and report within a further 15 working days. Students are asked to make formal complaints to the Customer Experience Team at Main Reception. However, it is emphasised that students can first raise matters informally with any member of staff, including tutors and course leaders, or by approaching learner services staff.

2.27 Students and staff met by the review team confirmed that complaints were almost always resolved through informal means. Students were able to give examples of how they had raised issues and how they had been dealt with.

Career advice and guidance

2.28 The College offers a range of career and progression guidance to students accessed through different routes.

2.29 The College hosts guest lectures by key members of staff, leading academics, business professionals and representatives from external agencies which are considered an important feature of College programmes. Examples from individual programmes of involvement of employers in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes were cited in meetings with students and staff.

2.30 There are varying practices across the curriculum with regard to information about career progression. Two students said that they had attended a session on 'What next/topping up'. Another student also mentioned that within their course curriculum, students work on a five-year plan which helps them develop and prepare for their futures.

2.31 The College has recently introduced 'Career Coach': a multifunctional career-mapping software application which can be used by learners to plan progression routes from their current level of programme to achieve their career ambition. The team also learned that there are two in-house members of staff dedicated to providing careers advice located in the Learner Hub. However, students who met the team stated that they had never heard of 'Career Coach' and that they had never used the Learner Hub. The team therefore **recommends** that the College raises awareness of the career services available to higher education students with particular focus on the support available through the Learner Hub and the 'Career Coach' software by January 2014.

Supporting disabled students

2.32 The College provides a range of support services to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

2.33 The College provides disability support, mental health wellbeing services and academic learning support services for all students. Information on the specialist support available is provided to all new learners at induction and through Learner Handbooks.

2.34 The College's Additional Learning Support and Disability statement documents provide clear information on different kinds of support and how to apply for it, including the Disabled Students Allowance and Examination Access Arrangements. Details on how to access this information and support are also included in the Learner Handbooks.

2.35 Learners are offered special examination arrangements based on their individual circumstances, and students who met the team identified dyslexia support as a particularly effective area of College provision.

2.36 Although the College offers a mentoring scheme, higher education students have to proactively access that support. However, peer mentoring is actioned informally at the course level for individual students. The College is currently making efforts to formalise this system to ensure a more robust process.

Supporting international students

2.37 The College has no international higher education students.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.38 The College has no postgraduate research students.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.39 The College has no collaborative arrangements beyond those already described in the report.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.40 The College does not offer any flexible, distributed or e-learning.

Work-based and placement learning

2.41 The team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is appropriate and effective.

2.42 Requirements and options for work placements are included in programme specifications with further specific detail within the module specifications. Practice in arranging placements varies across the curriculum, but staff expressed a preference for college-supported placements rather than those arranged by the students themselves. Those learners who attended placements as part of their courses said that they found the experience relevant to their course of study.

2.43 In meetings, students identified live briefs such as the design of high visibility vests, a performing arts festival and a graduate exhibition with industry professionals in attendance as examples of the benefits of employer links. Staff attributed the currency of the curriculum to the involvement of local employers in the validation of courses, the number of students already in employment, and the number of teachers in some curriculum areas, for example the Arts, who are also practising professionals.

Student charter

2.44 The College has a 'Respect Agreement for Learners' which is the equivalent of a student charter.

2.45 The Respect Agreement for Learners is inclusive of all students. It outlines three core values and is broken down into what is expected from learners, what the learners can expect from staff, and what the learners can expect from the course leaders. The Respect Agreement is reviewed and updated annually and the Student Council is involved in the review process.

2.46 The Respect Agreement is disseminated to students through Learner Handbooks and the College website. Students who met the team recognised the Respect Agreement, were aware that it applied to both higher and further education students and felt that it was appropriate to both levels of study.

2.47 In arriving at the judgement for this area, the team recognises that a number of policies and procedures have been recently revised or introduced. Learning resources have

been upgraded and there is evidence that considerable progress has been made in information management, which has had a significant impact on the quality of learning opportunities in a relatively short time. Other initiatives have the potential to achieve similarly rapid improvements when developed and promoted to students as planned.

3 Public information

Summary

Burton and South Derbyshire College makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate and up to date. Students find the information useful both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the College, and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The quality of information produced for applicants and students at the College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 In collaboration with the awarding body, the College has drawn up accurate Key Information Sets (KIS) for each higher education course which are accessed through the College website.

3.2 There is a College handbook for all students, which integrates general College information for both higher and further education students, with specific sub-headings where appropriate. Course and module handbooks are available for each higher education course and these follow an awarding body template. There is a clear procedure for updating and monitoring handbooks. However, in some cases, spelling and grammatical errors are not corrected during the updating procedure.

3.3 Students report pre-course and on-course information, both written and given verbally at interview, to be accurate, informative and sufficient. Information on progression is given in the KIS, on-course by both College and awarding body academic and support staff, and through 'Career Coach'.

3.4 The College is currently working closely with the awarding body to revise and make more accessible public information on its higher education provision, including higher education-specific prospectuses and course leaflets, to prospective students, parents and other key stakeholders. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to make information about higher education provision more accessible (see paragraph 2.23).

3.5 Information on how students may access external examiners' reports is contained in some, but not all, Course Handbooks and discussed at some course committees. However, student representatives have not been elected or appointed for all higher education courses and attendance by students at these meetings is not evident from the documentation provided. It is **recommended** that the College takes a more consistent and proactive approach to ensuring that external examiners' reports are shared as a matter of course with student representatives by October 2013.

3.6 The team concluded that adequate information about the learning opportunities provided was available to students and noted that the College is planning to make information about higher education courses more specific, and to encourage greater use of student representation systems.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at Burton and South Derbyshire College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 Since 2008, the College as a whole has undergone substantial and systematic development of its managerial structures, its academic provision and its arrangements for the support and involvement of students. These have included: the development and implementation of a new Strategic Plan (2012-15); a new academic structure of three Academies delivering both further and higher education programmes; a review and substantial upgrading of information and learning technology (ILT) provision; increased involvement of students in the management and review of programmes, particularly through the 'Learner Voice' run jointly with the Student Union; expansion of services and guidance for students, including a 'Learner Hub' providing advice and support; the building of a dedicated University Centre providing specialised accommodation and learning resources for higher education provision; the introduction of comprehensive systems for the review of provision, including the 'Termly Review' of programmes and student progression; and the strategic development of close links with local and regional employers to enhance the relevance of the curriculum. All of these college-level developments and investments have contributed to the quality of the learning experience for higher education students.

4.2 In a number of areas the College is implementing policies particularly focused on the enhancement of higher education provision. As described above (see paragraphs 2.1 to 2.4), the College has extended the provision and monitoring of CPD opportunities for its higher education teaching staff to ensure that these are focused on the skills and competencies supporting university-level teaching. Over the 18 months preceding this review, systematic improvements to the quality and timeliness of student data have allowed management to monitor and respond to student attendance and progression issues in ways that have very substantially enhanced student retention and attainment (see paragraphs 2.13 to 2.17).

4.3 The College acknowledges that there remain areas where gains in the quality of higher education provision could be obtained. The self-evaluation recognises that action plans following annual monitoring and other forms of review could be more consistently applied across programmes; that there could be more systematic sharing of good practice among higher education course leaders; and that higher education students could be more routinely involved in the quality management processes for higher education courses.

4.4 At the time of the review visit, the College was in the process of developing a new higher education strategy that would allow it to respond to current changes to the funding of higher education degrees and the consequences these may have for the College's provision. The review team is aware that a revised higher education strategy may significantly change the pattern of higher education provision that is the subject of this review.

4.5 As part of these strategic developments, the review team **recommends** that the College establishes a forum in which all higher education course leaders can meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest and share good practice by October 2013.

4.6 It is also **recommended** that the College makes an institutional approach to the enhancement of the higher education student experience an integral part of the new higher education strategy by October 2013.

4.7 Based on the initiatives noted above, their impact so far and the trajectory of improvement, the team was able to conclude that the College meets UK expectations for the enhancement of learning opportunities.

5 Theme: The First Year Student Experience

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Review of College Higher Education teams. In 2012-13, the themes are the **First Year Student Experience** or **Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**.

The review team investigated the **First Year Student Experience** at Burton and South Derbyshire College. The team found that first-year students were generally well prepared for higher-level study and understood what was required of them, but that the means of informing and supporting them varied in formality. The College is introducing a number of mechanisms to improve the consistency of information and support provided.

Supporting students' transition

5.1 The College provides an induction for all enrolling students, although students reported a varied experience of the induction process across the programmes. Students reported that they had generally been well informed of the differences between higher education and further education before starting their courses.

5.2 Peer mentoring is currently carried out on an informal basis and varies in its application across the College's programmes. The College recognises the benefits of peer mentoring for first-year students and is formalising structures for a peer mentoring scheme.

Information for first-year students

5.3 Information for first-year students is provided through the College website and the VLE, as well as verbally at interview. Arrangements for developing a higher education-specific prospectus and course leaflets for the next academic year are underway, with the clear support of staff.

Assessment and feedback

5.4 The College clearly outlines the requirements for assessment within the Learner Handbooks. Students who met the team reported that they understood their assignment briefs and accessed them via Moodle.

5.5 All students met by the team reported the use of plagiarism software for online submission of assessments and that this process was explained to them during induction.

5.6 An outcome of the learner conference was that students, although generally satisfied with their assessment feedback, felt that staff should try to include more positive comments in the feedback.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.7 In the last academic year, the College has seen a significant improvement in higher education retention and is continuing with what was described in the meeting with senior staff as a 'step change' in the College's culture in order to maintain this improvement.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).⁷

Academic Infrastructure The core guidance developed and maintained by QAA in partnership with the UK higher education community and used by QAA and higher education providers until 2011-12 for quality assurance of UK higher education. It has since been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (**Quality Code**).

academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by higher education providers for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standards**.

awarding body A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the **framework for higher education qualifications**, such as diplomas or degrees.

awarding organisation An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions which formed the core element of the **Academic Infrastructure** (now superseded by the **Quality Code**).

designated body An organisation that has been formally appointed or recognised to perform a particular function. QAA has been recognised by UKBA as a designated body for the purpose of providing educational oversight.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

enhancement The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. 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 manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

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*.

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

highly trusted sponsor An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources, and specialist facilities (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

learning outcomes 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 reviews and reports.

programme An approved course of study that 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.

provider A UK degree-awarding body or any other organisation that offers courses of higher education on behalf of a separate **awarding body** or **organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

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 being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements along with additional topics and overarching themes.

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

quality See **academic quality**.

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 standards The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national qualifications frameworks and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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

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