Review of College Higher Education of The Isle of Wight College

May 2013

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings	2
QAA's judgements about The Isle of Wight College	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
Affirmation of action being taken	3
The First Year Student Experience	3
About The Isle of Wight College	4
Explanation of the findings about The Isle of Wight College	5
1 Academic standards	5
Outcome	5
Meeting external qualifications benchmarks	5
Use of external examiners	
Assessment and standards	
Setting and maintaining programme standards	6
2 Quality of learning opportunities	7
Outcome	5
Professional standards for teaching and learning	7

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 The Isle of Wight College. The review took place on 15-17 May 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

Dr Elaine Crosthwaite Mr James Freeman (student reviewer) Professor Daniel Saunders.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by The Isle of Wight 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

- threshold academic standards¹
- 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 <u>key findings</u> can be found in the section starting on page 2. <u>Explanations of the findings</u> are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing The Isle of Wight College, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The <u>themes</u> 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 <u>about QAA</u> and its mission.² Background information about The Isle of Wight College is given on page 4

Review of College Higher Education of

Review

responses made to the awarding bodies. The College does not produce an overview of key themes arising from external examiner reports for strategic oversight and it may wish to consider the value of doing so.

Assessment and standards

1.6 The College agreements with awarding bodies set down procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment for their awards. These include regulations for the conduct of assessment, feedback to students, and approval of mitigating circumstances. The validation process ensures that assessment strategies are appropriate through consideration of course documentation prepared by the College.

1.7 The College has an Assessment and Internal Verification/Second-Marking Policy that complements the awarding bodies' policies and procedures. The assignment briefs for franchised courses are provided by awarding bodies, although the College can adapt these to local learning contexts. The College designs assignments for the three University of Chichester programmes that are not part of a wider franchise.

1.8 Assessment strategies and practices enable students to demonstrate the learning outcomes for their awards. These are confirmed by awarding bodies in annual monitoring reviews and meetings. External examiners' reports confirm that across the provision, a range of assessment practices is used and feedback on assessment enhances the student experience.

1.9 The College effectively monitors student achievement of learning outcomes. This is undertaken though annual course reviews and in internal assessment boards held prior to the relevant awarding body's formal examination board, which include identification of students at risk or in need of additional support.

1.10 The College provides information on assessment to students to assist them to achieve learning outcomes. This includes a briefing during induction and student handbooks, which contain information on assessment regulations, including mitigating circumstances and appeals processes. Some students reported a lack of understanding of assessment schedules and grading criteria, and a delay in receiving summative feedback, which impacts on their opportunities to achieve learning outcomes. The team concluded that there was a need for the College to pursue more robust monitoring of assessment practices. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College monitor assessment processes to ensure that students have clear information on assignment schedules and receive prompt and informative feedback, in accordance with the College's own policy.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.11 The setting of programme standards is the responsibility of the awarding bodies through the processes of validation and revalidation. The team saw evidence that the College made use of external expertise in designing programmes and obtained approval for programmes from its awarding bodies. The College prepares the documentation for the three non-franchised courses validated by the University of Chichester, which is submitted to the University for validation. The College is assisted in meeting University of Chichester regulations by the University's appointment of an external adviser with expertise in the subject area. All other courses are designed by the relevant awarding body staff.

1.12 Monitoring and review of programmes is undertaken in conjunction with awarding bodies. College staff have a sound understanding of the requirements and procedures of the

three awarding bodies. The review team is confident that measures are in place to meet the requirements of awarding bodies for the maintenance of standards.

1.13 Course reviews provide the means for annual review, with updating on a termly basis. Self-assessment reports at departmental and College level enable themes to be identified, and Quality Improvement Plans provide the means for monitoring action plans. The team noted that college-wide monitoring and review processes covered both further and higher education. However, Higher Education Team meetings and programme boards enable a specific focus on monitoring and review of higher education provision.

1.14 Subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of awards. Validation documentation for the three non-franchise University of Chichester programmes is required to show how the subject benchmark statements have guided content and learning outcomes. External examiners' reports confirm that subject benchmark statements are addressed in the delivery of the curriculum.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at The Isle of Wight College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 Delivery staff have a clear and consistent understanding of higher education student learning environments. The College defines learning environments through criteria and objectives set out in its Higher Education Strategic Plan.

2.2 The College's Higher Education Strategic Plan expects all staff teaching on higher education programmes to engage in scholarship. Samples of annual monitoring and review action plans included some application of research and scholarship, although this was not a consistent feature for all programmes. Lecturers and managers met by the team provided examples of scholarship within teaching activity. Such application of research and scholarship to teaching is not, however, recorded in any systematic way at subject/section, department or College levels. It is therefore difficult to identify an overall evidence base for guiding future staff development strategies that support scholarship activity. Staff are, however, encouraged to include details within their individual continuing professional development plans, and the team therefore **recommends** that the College produce and reflect on a review 0 1 237.89(i)5(dasc0(f)-g)3(et)-7(o)13()-3()-4(a)0ridas 1-[en) 0 .o Tm0 g0 Geview 0 1 (d.

2.4 Systems and procedures are in place for supporting less experienced staff through mentoring. The College has an established Observation of Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Support (OTLAS) policy covering all further and higher education delivery. There is evidence that OTLAS is being used and documented in course reviews and strategic planning. The Observation of Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Support policy, which uses peer support and critical friends in order to generate personal and professional development plans for higher education tutors is a feature of **good practice**.

Learning resources

2.5 Student survey data, the College's self-evaluation documentation, the student submission and revalidation minutes from awarding bodies confirm that the collective expertise of staff is suitable and available for effective higher education delivery.

2.6 The College has put in place the Higher Education Strategic Plan which expects all staff to participate in at least one continuing professional development or scholarly activity per year. Participation in continuing professional development is included within a personal development plan, with the delivery of support activity being planned and monitored though the Teaching and Learning Group, appraisal, and the departmental quality cycle. The review team agreed that appropriate development opportunities are available, and encourages the College's plans to include a schedule of workshops and conferences within a staff higher education handbook.

2.7 There is an overall strategy for the deployment of learning resources, with higher education provision being embeddedmenace tp

accordance with the Learner Involvement Strategy. There is also evidence of review demonstrated through updating of the content of student surveys and the use of student focus groups when difficulties or issues require more detailed exploration. The College is also in the process of introducing a consistent and universal student feedback system at module level.

Management information

2.17 The College has centrally-administered policies and systems to allow the collection of relevant management information. Quality and standards managers monitor performance indicators for higher education programmes, including attendance, retention, progression, outcomes and destinations. The collation and monitoring of information also includes resource planning and progress towards targets at various stages within the academic year. The senior management team referred to and demonstrated their regular use of a data dashboard in order to identify difficulties and initiate action planning. Furthermore, for higher education in particular, the Academic Standards Panel's terms of reference include oversight of retention and achievement data. The team concluded that the widespread and frequent consideration of management information by managers and tutors at appropriate intervals in order to facilitate early intervention and support for students is **good practice**.

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Complaints and appeals

2.23 The review team concurs that general principles for complaints and appeals are in operation, with consistent implementation of relevant regulations and procedures expected by awarding bodies, as well as the Corporation Board. The College has a staged process for the potential escalation of complaints and appeals, with the final stage involving an external agency. Appeals on academic matters are considered as part of the College Assessment and Internal Verification/Second-Marking Policy, and follow the guidelines set out by the respective awarding body. The team noted protracted discussions with some student groups about recurring staffing issues. These discussions were not at any point dealt with under the College in effect meant that the students were making a significant complaint and the College would have been advised to proactively direct them to the Complaints Policy. The review team **recommends** that the College revise the Complaints Policy to facilitate the prompt identification and resolution of issues in a way that fully protects the student learning experience, to include setting a time limit for the first informal stage of negotiations.

2.24 The College reviews and monitors complaints and appeals procedures on an annual basis for all provision, with an overall analysis being presented to the Corporation Board. Appeals procedures are reviewed and updated annually, following the guidelines of awarding bodies. Annual monitoring and revalidation procedures allow for the periodic consideration of complaints and appeals at departmental and course levels. The Academic Standards Panel includes a standing agenda item for complaints and appeals, thereby addressing higher education specifically.

Career advice and guidance

2.25 The College is successful in addressing the general principles of career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). Meetings with delivery staff confirmed detailed involvement in course planning in order to provide progression pathways from further to higher education and onwards into employment. The team further notes the College's plans for growing new curriculum areas alongside the provision of CEIAG, based on future career opportunities on the island.

2.26 The College employs a careers adviser and also benefits from support from other external careers agencies, including experts in the guidance of adult learners. All higher education students have opportunities to access CEIAG. The team noted positive feedback from revalidation panels, students and delivery staff for the quality of careers advice provided via Student Services. Delivery staff recognise that most part-time students require less CEIAG support because they are already in employment.

2.27 Measures are in place for CEIAG monitoring and feedback. The College has established strong employer networks through implementing objectives in the Higher Education Strategic Plan for using the Local Economic Partnerships and Employment Skills Boards, as well as industry forums and community groups. The team concluded that there is a strategic establishment of stakeholder relations by course teams with a wide range of local employers. The College includes the regular review of employer involvement and career opportunities within its Higher Education Strategic Plan, and includes careers support in its annual Teaching and Learning Survey.

Supporting disabled students

2.28 Institutional and strategic management of learning opportunities for disabled students enables entitlement to learning opportunities to be met. The College has a well

Review of College Higher Education of The Isle of Wight College

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at The Isle of Wight College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 The College directed the team to several documents to evidence its enhancement strategy. These contained examples of enhancement processes, aims and commitments, but the team found it difficult to identify a clearly articulated, overarching approach to enhancement. However, through discussions with staff, the team was able to identify a developing strategic approach. The College primarily views enhancement as one possible outcome of quality assurance processes. Staff stated that enhancement was led both from the centre and at course level.

4.2 A statement on quality assurance-led enhancement was produced during the review visit. This put forward the view that enhancement could be achieved through critical evaluation processes, Quality Improvement Plans, and various mechanisms for sharing good practice. However, the team formed the view that there was a risk that this approach could potentially limit opportunities for proactive enhancement in areas not identified as risks or good practice in quality assurance processes.1 281.9.67 Tm3(r)-e3(nti)13(f)-14(o)13(e(sses,)8())-4(t)-4(h)

4.6 There are a number of other quality assurance processes that the College identifies as providing opportunity for identifying improvements. These include course reviews, self-assessment reviews, Quality Improvement Plans and Quality Monitoring Meetings. The team saw evidence that these processes do identify areas for improvement. However, although there are some examples of enhancement-like initiatives being identified, this is not consistent. In particular, it is not clear to the team how good practice is consistently identified and formally shared.

4.7 The team is assured that the College has established a general ethos of continual improvement or enhancement, and was able to identify a quality assurance-led approach to enhancement. There is evidence that quality assurance processes result in the sharing of good practice and enhancement initiatives. However, the team felt that the College may benefit from supplementing this strategy with proactive enhancement initiatives independent of quality assurance activities. The team therefore **recommends** that the College review its definition of enhancement as applied to higher education, in order to raise the profile of proactive developments and further ensure that existing processes for sharing good practice are consistently implemented.

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 The Isle of Wight College. The College provides pre-entry information and support aimed mainly at school-leavers. This could be expanded to provide pre-entry support for higher education students who are from more diverse academic backgrounds. Induction programmes are provided for all students, but the opinion of students about the effectiveness of these programmes is variable. High-quality support is available from centrally provided services, including the Learning Resources Centre. The quality of information to support learning is variable and the College has recently taken action to audit the quality of information and to ensure it is provided promptly. The approach to providing support for assessment is not consistent and is being addressed through the development of a specific study skills module to be undertaken by all students early in their course.

Supporting students' transition

5.1 The College provides an induction for all students that includes a number of activities to aid their transition over the initial weeks. Most of the students' initial contact is with the course coordinator; however, the Admissions Team refer students to the Careers Officer for initial guidance if there is any doubt about their choice of study. Student SerE[q)-8(ua)3(l)5(i)5(t)-4

team reported that there was variation in receiving feedback on assignments within the timescales stated by the College (see recommendation in paragraph 1.10).

5.11 There is currently no college-wide provision for academic skills development that would help students in preparing for assessment at hi

programme specifications:

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House Southgate Street Gloucester GL1 1UB

 Tel
 01452 557000

 Fax
 01452 557070

 Email
 enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

 Web
 www.qaa.ac.uk

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