

About this review

The review visit took place from 20 to 21 March 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Diane Meehan
- Dr Jenny Gilbert
- Mr Conor Murray-Gauld (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
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Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

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6 The College's corporate risk register, which includes items relating to the maintenance of academic standards, is regularly updated and scrutinised by the Board of Governors. Further scrutiny of risks related to academic standards is undertaken by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC). This is the senior College committee that is responsible for ensuring higher education provision adheres to awarding body and awarding organisation policies and regulations.

7 The Vice Principal Curriculum and Information Services is responsible for curriculum development and chairs the College's ASC. ASC minutes demonstrate that this committee discharges its responsibilities appropriately in respect of maintaining standards and in accordance with its terms of reference.

8 Oversight of higher education provision is discharged effectively through the Head of Quality Enhancement and this role, along with the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU), is independent of curriculum teams. In addition, they drive forward a quality improvement agenda and support the LMT.

9 There is a quality cycle that sets out a process for all staff to follow and this demonstrates clearly how academic oversight is ensured through rigorous processes. Staff met by the review team talked positively and clearly about their role in securing academic standards. They highlighted how relevant processes and documents feed into the College's quality assurance mechanisms, such as periodic review, internal verification and the College's self-evaluation processes.

10 The College highlighted that it respects academic freedom and collegiality through the freedom it gives staff to design and develop specific teaching on courses that have been approved by awarding bodies and awarding organisations and the number of academic staff who have been encouraged to undertake higher level degrees within their fields of expertise.

the various awarding bodies and organisations, new assessors are mentored within their department and team meetings and quality checks take place during assessment. Consortium meetings are held for those programmes operating across a consortium of colleges in Northern Ireland, marking rubrics are agreed and cross-moderation occurs.

14 External examiners are appointed, supported and monitored by the relevant awarding body or organisation. Heads of Department consider external examiners' reports and the QEU provides departmental summaries of the reports, highlighting areas for action, good practice and staff development. External examiners confirm that the College's systems ensure rigorous internal verification.

15 The QEU leads on, and provides support for, the College-wide self-evaluation process. An annual course self-evaluation report (SER) is produced by the course team, submitted to the awarding body or organisation and to the Head of Department, to inform the departmental SER and contribute to the College-wide Self Evaluation and Quality Improvement Plan. The College Quality Enhancement Working Group meets bi-monthly to receive a range of reports and generate ideas for quality improvement. Awarding bodies and organisations produce regular reports and Ulster University has recently introduced a traffic light system (RAG) to flag problems. Course SERs are informed by student feedback and

primary overview of all public information. The College Document Review Diagram indicates that all public website documents are uploaded by the Marketing Team. While accessing student information published on the College website, the review team located the Admissions and Enrolments Policy still labelled 'draft'. Senior staff were able to describe the process for the review and approval of revised versions of policy documents and they provided a flowchart to elucidate the situation. Nevertheless, this oversight indicates a lack of adequate checking to ensure that the most recently approved version of a policy is made available to the public. The review team identifies this as an **area for development** and advises the College to clarify where responsibility lies for ensuring that all public information is accurate and up-to-date.

38 The College is committed to promoting equality and fulfilling its responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It has a set of terms and conditions that apply firstly to the application and enrolment of students, making reference to students with disabilities, to international students and to the disclosure of the criminal history of applicants. Secondly, the terms and conditions refer to programme changes and closures, fees, data protection, health and safety, the Compliments and Complaints Policy, the Disciplinary Procedure and the Student Charter. The Admissions Team ensures that terms and conditions are readily accessible to potential and existing students and reviews them regularly. The terms and conditions include links to signpost the College's policies and students commented that there were 'no surprises' and that they were fully aware of the College terms and conditions.

39 The College Complaints and Compliments Policy is reviewed by the LMT and approved by the Governing Body through the Education Sub-Committee. The policy details the process for complainants to follow and specifies timescales. Course and student handbooks document how to make a complaint and students are also briefed at induction. Complainants are encouraged to resolve issues informally and the College maintains a complaints log to report to the Governing Body. The policy applies to all further education colleges in Northern Ireland and is reviewed annually through the Northern Ireland Colleges Sector Working Group. Any unresolved complaints may proceed directly to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) or to the awarding body or awarding organisation if the complaint relates to an academic matter. The review team notes that complaint handling is accessible, clear and fair.

Student protection measures as expressed through the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's (NIPSO) Principles of Good Administration

40 The College has robust documentation mapped against CMA guidance to ensure student protection is met. The review team found effective processes in place in relation to consulting and informing current students of any changes to their course.

41 The College demonstrated that they consult with students on significant course changes as well as course closures. There is a clear process for staff to follow if it is decided that a course has to close with the focus on[(r)-6 (ob Tc 0.01)8.p-2 .6 ()11.3 (c)8.96 (c)-2 o11.2 (-6.6n70.00

provided to students at the pre-enrolment