



# Review of College Higher Education of Doncaster 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 Doncaster College. The review took place on 30 April-2 May 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Jo Caufield (student reviewer)
- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Professor Clare Morris.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Doncaster 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 standards<sup>1</sup>
  - 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 5.

In reviewing Doncaster 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.<sup>2</sup> Background information about Doncaster College is given on page 4 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.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup>[www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>3</sup>[www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/default.aspx](http://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 Doncaster College (the College).

### QAA's judgements about Doncaster College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Doncaster 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 Doncaster College:

- the way in which the College has developed a distinct identity and ethos for its higher education provision, including the emphasis on staff scholarship and research (paragraph 2.4)
- the high quality of the placement handbook for the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies and the Relate Institute Code of Practice on Placement Learning (paragraph 2.23).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Doncaster College.

For the commencement of the academic year 2013-14:

- develop a policy applicable to all higher education for the consistent sharing of external examiner reports with students (paragraphs 3.2 and 1.5)
- ensure that the information on complaints and appeals procedures is proactively brought to the attention of all students (paragraph 2.13)
- ensure that arrangements for work placements do not affect the students' ability to attend their other scheduled teaching (paragraph 2.25).

For implementation during the 2012-13 reporting cycle:

- review the action-planning elements of quality processes to ensure that responsibilities and timescales are clearly indicated (paragraph 1.11).

For completion by the end of the academic year 2013-14:

- review the approach to the involvement of students in quality assurance, including the College's Code of Practice on Student Engagement, to enable effective partnership working to take place at all levels (paragraph 2.10)
- revise the approach to quality enhancement to ensure that a strategic approach is taken, which includes clear links with the College's strategic priorities, explicit use of management information, and the effective capture of enhancement opportunities arising from quality monitoring processes (paragraph 4.6).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the recent engagement of students in the twice-yearly review of ongoing monitoring referred to as Quality Enhancement Plans (paragraph 2.8)
- the actions that the College is currently undertaking to address the problems relating to the information technology infrastructure (paragraphs 2.6 and 2.20)
- the actions being taken to ensure a consistent approach to the quality of work placement written guidance across all programmes (paragraph 2.24)
- the plans to introduce an Accuracy of Published Information Panel and the opportunity this presents to develop streamlined and transparent systems (paragraph 3.3).

## Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

A student representative system is in place and a range of approaches is used to gather student feedback. The relatively small class sizes of the higher education provision results in many matters being handled through informal communication, and students provided examples of changes resulting from their feedback. However, the student engagement model is based on a rather passive view of the role of students, and the wider aspects of engagement are not yet fully embedded.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the [handbook for Review of College Higher Education](#), available on the QAA website.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx)

## About Doncaster College

Doncaster College is a large general further education college located in the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough. The College has two main campuses: the Hub, located in the centre of Doncaster, and the University Centre, located six miles to the West of the town in the village of High Melton. The College has 8,389 students on further education programmes based at the Hub campus and 1,220 students on higher education programmes, mostly based at the University Centre.

Doncaster College has been involved in the delivery of higher education programmes since the 1960s. The College has a well established relationship with its main validating partner, the University of Hull, and the delivery and range of its higher education provision was formally recognised by the University in 2004 by the establishment of the University Centre Doncaster at High Melton. The College also has a validating relationship with the University of Wales for its postgraduate Business provision.

In the context of the College Corporate Strategy, the University Centre has developed the following strategic aims for its higher education provision:

- to maintain and further develop a range of higher education programmes which reflect the higher level skills priorities of the region
- to provide a high-quality higher education experience which meets the needs and aspirations of the local, regional, national and international community
- to maintain provision in certain key subject areas able to recruit successfully at national and international level
- to develop a well founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community.

In 2010, the College underwent a significant restructure. In 2011, the College appointed a new Principal and Chief Executive, following which the College adopted an Academy structure, with the Academy of Higher Education being one of four new academies. In 2012, three Deputy Principals were appointed.

All higher education programmes of study (except Higher National qualifications in Construction Engineering and Computing) are now directly managed by the Director of Higher Education, supported by the Deputy Director of Higher Education who - in turn - line-manages four Assistant Directors managing the following Schools within the Academy: School of Arts; School of Humanities, Education, Sport and Social Sciences; School of Business and Management; and The Relate Institute.

The above are members of the Higher Education Management Team who, together with the High Melton site librarian, are entrusted with the operation of the overall higher education strategy.

The College currently faces significant challenges caused by the ongoing recession and significant reductions in funding streams for further education and higher education. However, the governing body and Executive constantly risk-manage all aspects of provision to maintain good financial health.

In response to the Higher Education Funding Council for England's full-time student number control, the Higher Education Management Team has worked to maintain a balanced curriculum portfolio while working within the student number control.

## Explanation of the findings about Doncaster College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>5</sup>

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](#)<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

### 1 Academic standards

#### Outcome

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

#### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 All higher education programmes within the scope of the review have been allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The majority of programmes are validated by the University of Hull, with a small number validated by the University of Wales.

1.2 Programme specifications are referenced to the FHEQ at the appropriate level and informed by relevant subject benchmarks. They are also informed by the University of Hull Learning Outcomes Tool, which specifies appropriate language for learning outcomes. Programme design and approval has clear internal and external processes.

#### Use of external examiners

1.3 The College makes comprehensive use of its external examiner reports at both programme and institutional level. External examiners are nominated by the programme teams, and nominations considered by the External Examiners Sub Committee (EESC). They are then forwarded to the relevant university for approval and appointment.

1.4 External examiners have oversight of assessments and marked work, and attend relevant Examination Boards. Following receipt of the external examiner report, programme leaders submit a response or action plan, which is scrutinised by EESC and recommendations returned to the programme leaders. Actions are embedded within the annual monitoring reports and the College Quality Cycle. Approved responses to external examiner reports are sent to the relevant university and the College Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), which carries out an overview and evaluation of all external examiner reports. Progress on action points arising from external examiner reports is also reviewed in the biannual Quality Enhancement Process (QUEP) and the Partner Quality Enhancement Report (PQER), which is submitted to the University of Hull every February. The University of Wales requires annual monitoring reports (AMRs) to be considered at its annual Joint Board of Studies, and Pearson Edexcel requires a response to the External Verifier. The College complies with these requirements.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> See note 4.

1.5 The method of informing students about the contents of external examiner reports is inconsistent and involves communication through the course representatives, who should be present at the course team meeting where the report is discussed. However, implementation of this process is variable and although the terms of reference of the relevant committees - including the EESC - make provision for a student representative, there is little evidence of their attendance. (See paragraph 3.2.)

### **Assessment and standards**

1.6 There is a clear College Code of Practice on Assessment Procedures, which is aligned with the regulations of the awarding bodies. The overall direction of the students' learning opportunities is guided by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which has recently been rewritten to align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. In addition, the relevant regulations of the awarding bodies underpin assessment design.

1.7 Module descriptors show module outcomes and these are mapped against the learning outcomes for the awards. The module assessment strategy assesses the module outcomes using a variety of assessment methods, and students are satisfied that assessment is fair and tests the learning outcomes that they expected. Assessment strategies at a module level are reviewed through the module review process

1.8 There is strong evidence that the College complies fully with awarding body assessment regulations in arriving at accurate grades for student performance. Module and Programme Boards have representation from the University of Hull.

1.9 Data is collated for retention, completion and achievement for each programme and is used to inform management decisions through the quality assurance process.

### **Setting and maintaining programme standards**

1.10 Standards are set through the programme design and approval processes operated by the relevant awarding body. Proposals for new programmes are considered at the Higher Education Strategy Group to ensure alignment with the College strategy. If approved, the relevant programme team submits a Developmental Consent to the Academic Development and Approvals Panel (ADAP). If approved, the proposal is submitted to the university and then follows their approval procedures. Major and minor amendments to programmes, recommended through the QUEP and AMR processes, are considered by the ADAP and submitted to the university for faculty approval. Programmes are subjected to five-yearly periodic review by the relevant awarding university.

1.11 A system of annual monitoring of programmes ensures that programme standards are maintained. However, the clarity of action-planning arising from monitoring could be improved. Programmes are all reviewed annually through the AMR, QUEP and PQR processes. The QUEPs are held formally twice per year and enable input from students, staff and external examiners to be considered. The QUEPs are thematically aligned to the AMRs and the PQR, which facilitates the transfer of information and actions through the process. There are not, however, specific action plans for each programme that summarise actions arising from all sources for the year. In one particular case, where there had been significant issues on a programme in the previous year, it was not clear how improvements had been put in place ready for the arrival of the next group of students. The team **recommends** that the College review the action-planning elements of quality processes to ensure that responsibilities and timescales are clearly indicated.

## Subject benchmarks

1.12 Subject benchmarks are used effectively in the design of new programmes as they go through the approval process with both the College and relevant university. Each awarding body expects all programmes to have been informed by the subject benchmarks and to reference the programme learning outcomes to these. This is checked formally through the ADAP. Programme teams are familiar with subject benchmarks and use these effectively when developing or amending programmes.

1.13 Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are also widely used in appropriate areas as additional accreditation, particularly in Counselling, Human Resources, Management and Music.

## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

### Outcome

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

### Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The College is committed to the support of professional standards for learning and teaching, and staff are fully conversant with their responsibilities for facilitating and supporting learning. All staff have recognised teacher status as required by validating bodies, and the majority are educated to master's level or beyond.

2.2 A new peer observation scheme has been implemented recently and was reported by staff to be working well and proving beneficial. A pilot scheme took place in 2010-11, with the new scheme operational in 2011-12. Participation in the scheme is high. There is a code of practice to guide and support those participating in observations. The team saw evidence that observations take place across subject boundaries. This facilitates clearer focus on learning and teaching matters rather than on subject-related matters. The Teaching, Learning and Scholarship Committee considers outcomes of the scheme.

2.3 The College has a clear culture of continuing staff development and encourages staff to participate in a wide range of opportunities. An annual budget is set aside for staff development activity. Part-time staff are able to access the same professional development opportunities as full-time staff. Staff are encouraged to apply for Higher Education Academy fellowship, with a number of applications currently in progress.

2.4 There is a well developed culture of higher education within the College. This is facilitated by a separate campus for the delivery of most higher education programmes and the fact that a large proportion of academic staff teach exclusively on higher education programmes. Discussions with students demonstrated that they have a clear view of themselves as higher education students, and of the distinctiveness of the higher education experience. There is a high level of scholarly output from staff; some members are research active and this is further encouraged through the College's well established internal research journal. The way in which the College has developed a distinct identity and ethos for its higher education provision, including the emphasis on staff scholarship and research, is an example of **good practice**.



## Learning resources

2.5 The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy for higher education includes direct reference to the importance of providing students with appropriate resources to enable them to meet intended learning outcomes. The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) at the University Centre is managed from within the Directorate of Quality and Learning Resources. Key LRC staff are given responsibility for each School. These responsibilities include matters such as programme area reports detailing expenditure, academic liaison, and library and information skills delivery. The College's self-evaluation stated that the LRC and other staff within the Directorate (for example, e-Learning and e-Media Resources) work collaboratively to ensure that resources are appropriate and accessible, irrespective of the student's geographic location. However, students met by the team highlighted problems with accessing up to date resources within the LRC. This was also commented on within a recent external report on the College's learning resources. The self-evaluation mentions a 'comprehensive stock revision process', but the team was unable to find confirmation of this.

2.6 The College's virtual learning environment (VLE) is accessible from anywhere with an adequate internet connection. There is a strategic commitment to placing as many learning materials on the VLE as possible. However, students met by the team were critical of the internet connection effectiveness at the University Centre site, making access to the VLE difficult. The team learned that the College was aware of these difficulties and was in the process of making a significant investment to improve connection between the main campus and the University Centre (see paragraph 2.20). The team **affirms** the actions the College is currently undertaking to address the problems relating to the information technology infrastructure.

## Student voice

2.7 The College has a student representative system that includes student membership of most College committees. Student representatives are chosen by their peers either through elections or through less formal selection processes. The Director of Higher Education and the Student Experience Coordinator undertake training for representatives. Student representatives met by the team were enthusiastic about their role and reported positively on their experience. Those who had attended college-level committees reported that they felt supported in their role. Staff and students acknowledge low attendance at committee meetings as a continuing issue. The College also recognises the difficulty of facilitating input from part-time students and is intending to address this.

2.8 Student representatives meet monthly with programme teams. Students can also raise issues or exchange ideas at meetings of the Student Council, which is held three times a year. The involvement of student representatives in biannual review meetings to discuss programme Quality Enhancement Plans, which subsequently inform annual monitoring reports, is a new initiative. It aims to encourage direct involvement of students in the ongoing monitoring of programmes and to provide for a dialogue between senior managers, programme teams and students. The team **affirms** the College's recent engagement of students in the twice-yearly review of ongoing monitoring referred to as Quality Enhancement Plans.

2.9 The College seeks feedback from students via a range of surveys. Students complete module evaluation questionnaires and results feed into the annual monitoring cycle. They are reported in narrative format within annual monitoring reports, demonstrating that student feedback is taken into account in programme quality assurance. Quantitative student feedback data, however, is not explicitly reported within annual monitoring reports or other quality monitoring documentation. As a result, the team was unable to determine how such data is used to identify trends and monitor progress at a

strategic level. The College may wish to consider how the reporting and utilisation of quantitative data could be enhanced.

2.10 In response to the publication of *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the College has introduced its own Code of Practice on Student Engagement. This document defines student engagement as referring to 'feedback, provided by students enrolled at University Centre Doncaster, on any aspect of their learning experience'. Having heard the views of students and staff, and having considered the College's Code of Practice, the team concluded that the College's conceptualisation of student engagement was not as positive as it could be in encouraging the development of genuine partnership. It does not sufficiently empower student representatives to develop ownership of the student engagement culture or to engage more significantly in strategic decision-making. The training of student representatives has previously been undertaken by staff only, but in 2012 student representatives were also involved. The training content consists of material about the College's quality systems, rather than equipping students to be effective representatives. The definition of student engagement is one synonymous with collecting feedback, which the team considers to be a narrow perspective. The team **recommends** that the College review the approach to the involvement of students in quality assurance, including the College's Code of Practice on Student Engagement, to enable effective partnership working to take place at all levels

### **Management information**

2.11 There is evidence that a wide range of management information that is collected and used. However, the approach to how this is drawn together to enhance learning opportunities at a strategic level is inconsistent. Retention and completion data is given the most prominence in the College's quality cycle, but it is unclear how this and other data are compared and used to identify trends for strategic enhancement processes (see also paragraph 4.5).

### **Admission to the College**

2.12 The College's admissions policy and associated procedures are aligned fully with *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The policy has been reviewed recently for effectiveness, with changes implemented as appropriate. An Admissions Officer oversees the implementation of the College's Admissions Code of Practice.

### **Complaints and appeals**

2.13 Complaints and appeals policies and procedures are appropriate, but the team found that the College could be more proactive in bringing information about these to the attention of students. The College's complaints procedure is referred to as a 'Customer Feedback Procedure' and details informal, written and formal appeal stages. It is accessible via the College's website. The information within the College's Undergraduate Handbook is not fully up to date - for example, links to the University of Hull's complaints procedure are not current. Students met by the team were aware of their right to complain but were less clear on routes for appeals against assessment decisions. The Undergraduate Handbook does not include a link or information on the College's appeals policy, which has to be collected in person from the Academic Office. The Student Charter also does not refer to information about complaints and appeals processes. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the information on complaints and appeals procedures is proactively brought to the attention of all students.

## **Career advice and guidance**

2.14 There is an effective careers service for higher education students. The careers service deals with approximately 150 individual enquiries from higher education students annually. It also caters for drop-in sessions arranged at the University Centre, as well as providing some online support. In addition to individual appointments with students, the service delivers bespoke workshops and works with academic staff to deliver these within the curriculum. Students who met with the team were aware of the careers service, with many reporting that they had used the service, and were positive about their experience. The service has recently achieved the Matrix award, a national quality standard award for organisations to assess and measure their advice and support services.

## **Supporting disabled students**

2.15 There are appropriate and effective services to support disabled students. Matters relating to the needs of disabled students are reported to the college-wide Equality and Diversity Committee and to the College governing body. There is a clear additional learner support policy in place, with annual review processes to assure quality. The College is proactive in the identification of students with dyslexia through a compulsory adult learner styles questionnaire for all students during induction. The good retention rates for disabled students provide evidence of the effectiveness of the support provided by the College.

## **Supporting international students**

2.16 The College has appropriate support services for the small number of international students recruited. The College has a dedicated International Office that organises specific induction activity for international students in addition to the College's standard programme induction.

## **Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements**

2.17 The College clearly understands, and is compliant with, the requirements of its validating universities. Relationships with the University of Hull, which validates the majority of programmes, appear to be strong at both institutional and subject level, with the College making use of material provided by the University - for example in relation to placements - and course leaders having contact with relevant subject specialists at the University. The University of Wales partnerships are shortly ending, and an alternative validating partner is actively being sought for this provision.

## **Flexible, distributed and e-learning**

2.18 The College has only one programme that is delivered by distance learning. However, a number of other programmes are delivered at off-campus locations; in the case of Relate Institute programmes, these locations are widely spread across the country. The University of Hull as the validating university has approved all of these locations.

2.19 Prominence has been given to e-learning in recent years and the corresponding investment has been made in both information technology infrastructure and associated training and development. It is clear that a number of courses are making full use of the resources offered by the VLE. However, use of the VLE is variable.

2.20 Students mentioned a range of problems that have arisen with the information technology infrastructure. Staff acknowledged that there had been problems; however, recent investment, particularly in upgrading the link between the city centre campus and University Centre, is intended to improve the situation substantially. A walk-in Helpdesk

facility has also been introduced. The team **affirms** the actions that the College is currently undertaking to address the problems relating to the information technology infrastructure.

2.21 Apart from the technical difficulties mentioned above, students - including those on distance learning and part-time programmes - indicated general satisfaction with e-learning support, in particular as a means of communicating course notices and announcements quickly and effectively.

### **Work-based and placement learning**

2.22 The College actively supports students in finding placements on those programmes where this is a requirement. Many placement providers have had a longstanding link with the College, and provide placements on an annual basis, which enables the College to have confidence in the quality of those placements. Students are also visited by academic staff during placement, which provides an opportunity to deal with any issues that may have arisen.

2.23 The Placement Handbook for the Early Years programmes and the Relate Institute Code of Practice on Placement Learning, together with associated documentation, were thorough and well organised documents. Documents provided comprehensive information, not only for students, but also for placement providers, which ensures that they are fully aware of the purpose of the placement and their role in supporting the student. The team identified the high quality of the placement handbook for the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies and the Relate Institute Code of Practice on Placement Learning as **good practice**.

2.24 The team was informed that work is underway to combine the good features of both of the documents mentioned in paragraph 2.23 into a more general placements code for the whole of the University Centre provision. At present, other programmes make use of the University of Hull's code in this area. The review team welcomes this and **affirms** the actions being taken to ensure a consistent approach to the quality of work placement written guidance across all programmes.

2.25 The team heard from students that in order to complete work placements in year 2 of some programmes, students were permitted to miss course module learning sessions such as lectures and tutorials. This is due to scheduling of the placement module in relation to other modules. The team **recommends** that the College ensure that arrangements for work placements do not affect the students' ability to attend their other scheduled teaching.

2.26 No employers or other workplace staff are formally involved in the assessment of students, though their views may be sought as part of the assessment process, particularly in programmes where there is a strong element of professional practice.

### **Student charter**

2.27 A Student Charter is in place and students are largely aware of its existence. It has been produced very recently and was prepared largely by a Student Governor. It is displayed on posters around the University Centre and is available via the VLE.

2.28 Students were generally aware of the existence of the Charter, but it is not yet embedded within the student culture. The College's self-evaluation document states that 'the Charter is reviewed annually by the student body', and the team noted the College's intention to adjust the document in the light of student views. In particular, the Charter makes no mention of the processes that are in place for dealing with student complaints and appeals (see also paragraph 2.13).

### 3 Public information

#### Outcome

Doncaster 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 Doncaster College, and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The quality of information produced for applicants and students at Doncaster College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

#### Findings

3.1 Students indicated that the information provided to them before registration was both accurate and sufficient, and was in line with their experience after registration. In one case where there was a significant change to a programme (Criminal Justice), the College went to considerable lengths to ensure that this was explained to students. Information provided during courses was also sufficient, accessible and very extensive. Students are clear about what they need to do in order to succeed. In those courses where VLE use was well embedded, this was generally their first point of access for information - though given the small group sizes, information gained directly from staff was also important.

3.2 The team found evidence of a lack of consistency in the way that external examiner reports are made available to students (see also paragraph 1.5). The College's self-evaluation document states that 'external examiner reports are shared with each programme area student representative according to the guidelines of the Quality Code, Chapter 7, Indicator 14'. However, this 'sharing' takes different forms. Some programme leaders disseminate the report to all students, while others give a copy to student representatives at a course meeting and rely on them to circulate the report to their constituency. The majority of the students whom the review team met were unaware of where they could find reports. Staff confirmed that there was no institutional policy as to how the sharing of external examiner reports was to take place. The review team **recommends** the College to develop a policy applicable to all higher education programmes for the consistent sharing of external examiner reports with students.

3.3 The team found the processes for assuring the accuracy and completeness of public information to be complex. They also noted a lack of clarity among College staff as to exactly how the processes worked. The team was informed that the College recognises the complexity of the current processes and is planning to set up a panel, to be called the Accuracy of Published Information Panel, to take an overview of all published information and its accuracy; a proposal to this effect has recently been received by the Higher Education Management Team. The review team **affirms** the plans to introduce an Accuracy of Published Information Panel and the opportunity this presents to develop streamlined and transparent systems.

## 4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

### Outcome

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

### Findings

4.1 The College has a range of initiatives in place aimed at improving the student experience. However, the team found these were not lodged within a particular strategic framework and were generally related to pursuing actions arising from standard quality assurance processes.

4.2 The College's self-evaluation document states that 'the College takes a strategic approach to improve the quality of student learning opportunities', but the Higher Education Strategy 2012-15 makes only passing reference to enhancement. Senior staff also expressed a commitment to promoting enhancement, particularly via the provision of staff development opportunities, the encouragement of scholarship, and the improvement of the student experience beyond the classroom via support services.

4.3 A document titled 'Strategic Enhancement at University Centre Doncaster 2009-present' was provided to the team; however, much of the activity listed in this document related to standard quality assurance processes such as periodic review or new course approval, or to activities such as mandatory training and resource allocation. A further document titled 'Enhancement at University Centre Doncaster' covered similar, though not identical, ground. It was not clear to the team to whom these documents were addressed, by whom they were produced, or whether they formed part of a systematic process of enhancement planning.

4.4 The team was informed that dissemination of identified good practice takes place through staff development events. There is a standing agenda item at School meetings where staff can share good practice. Peer observation of teaching was also cited as a mechanism in this regard. The team was informed that the Learning, Teaching and Innovation Task Group plays a key role in leading strategic enhancement, but found limited evidence of this in the notes of the Group's meetings.

4.5 A wealth of data is generated by the National Student Survey and several in-house surveys of students, together with information arising out of quality processes such as annual review. The team found evidence to suggest that this information is being used to identify and address specific problem areas, but its use to inform strategy in a systematic manner was less clear.

4.6 The team recognises that initiatives are taking place across the College to improve the quality of the student learning experience. However, the team **recommends** that the College revise its approach to quality enhancement to ensure that a strategic approach is taken, which includes clear links with the College's strategic priorities, explicit use of management information, and the effective capture of enhancement opportunities arising from quality monitoring processes.

## **5 Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

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 Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement at Doncaster College. A student representative system is in place and a range of approaches is used to gather student feedback. The relatively small class sizes of the higher education provision results in many matters being handled through informal communication, and students provided examples of changes resulting from their feedback. However, the student engagement model is based on a rather passive view of the role of students, and the wider aspects of engagement are not yet fully embedded.

### **Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement**

5.1 The College's Code of Practice on Student Engagement defines student engagement as 'feedback, provided by students enrolled at University Centre Doncaster, on any aspect of their learning experience'. The team concluded that this is a limited model of student engagement but that the College has taken steps to offer students numerous opportunities for providing feedback and for representation at various committees.

5.2 Minutes of committees show that student attendance is variable. Staff met by the team acknowledged this variability, and were aware of the need to ensure that all student groups - including part-time and distance learners - are adequately represented, while acknowledging that this can be challenging.

5.3 Training is provided for student representatives and is delivered by the Director of Higher Education and the Student Experience Coordinator. A Handbook for Student Representatives is also available. The students met during the visit were all aware of the student representative system, and knew who their representative was. However, none of the students at the meeting had seen the student submission, even though some of them had actually taken part in the video interviews that formed part of the submission. Some of the students met by the team were unaware of the existence of a student submission.

5.4 Students have been involved in some recent periodic reviews. They have also been involved in the recently introduced Quality Enhancement Plan review process (see paragraph 2.8). However, it is too soon to form a view as to the impact of this involvement, but the review team affirmed the intention to involve students in this way.

5.5 A range of feedback instruments captures student views. These include evaluation forms at module level, the National Student Survey (NSS), and in-house surveys based on the NSS questions for those students studying at levels 4 and 5. Outcomes of these surveys are reported in a narrative manner, but there does not appear to be systematic use of the quantitative data that they produce.

### **Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality**

5.6 Staff are aware and supportive of current initiatives, and the many informal contacts with students help to facilitate participation by students. Both students and staff made the point that, as class sizes are small and students have excellent access to staff, much of the feedback and 'loop closing' takes place informally via contacts inside and outside the classroom.

### **Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'**

5.7 Students met by the team provided a number of examples of cases where they had seen changes being made in response to their comments: one concerned overcrowding on the free inter-site bus service, another related to availability of software for Engineering programmes. Students indicated that they regard the College as generally open and responsive to their concerns. Staff also informed the team that the College as a whole uses the 'you said...we did' format to report its responses to student feedback.

5.8 The overall view that the team formed of student engagement with quality processes is that the student engagement model is based on a rather passive view of the role of students, and the wider aspects of engagement are not yet fully embedded. However, there is a great deal of goodwill on both sides, and a good start has been made on implementing the student representation system.



## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions; for example, pages 17-20 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities and enhancement.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx).

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx).

**academic standards:** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**credit(s):** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**enhancement:** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. 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 or college manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**framework:** A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

**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*.

**learning opportunities:** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome:** 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 reports.

**programme (of study):** An approved course of study which 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.

**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 the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

**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 standard:** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications **frameworks**. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standards**.

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

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