



# Review of College Higher Education of MidKent

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 MidKent College. The review took place on 13-16 May 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Seth Crofts
- Dr Sylvia Hargreaves
- Mrs Emma Hedges (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by MidKent 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 5.

In reviewing MidKent 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>1</sup> Background information about MidKent 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>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>2</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 MidKent College ('the College').

### QAA's judgements about MidKent College

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

- the College's strategic approach to enhancement of teaching in higher education provision, specifically mentorship, coaching and teaching observation (paragraph 2.3)
- the effective approach to e-learning across the higher education provision (paragraph 2.26).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to MidKent College:

- work with the relevant validating university to consider how external examiners' reports for awards offered across a number of consortium partners can be made more specific to the needs of the College, by the end of academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 1.6)
- make external examiners' annual reports available in full to higher education students by December 2013 (paragraph 1.7)
- develop and implement effective, clear and consistent policies for the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of the boards of examiners for Pearson Edexcel programmes by December 2013 (paragraph 1.10)
- ensure that the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy is implemented effectively to meet the needs of higher education students by the end of academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 1.12)
- consider extending the opportunities for all higher education students to provide feedback on modules, by December 2013 (paragraph 2.9)
- formalise systems for the election, training and ongoing support of higher education student representatives to ensure they are informed of their responsibilities and can more effectively represent their peers, by December 2013 (paragraph 2.10)
- promote the availability of the Job Shop service to all higher education students by December 2013 (paragraph 2.18)

- ensure that all higher education course handbooks provide students with consistent information about their programmes by December 2013 (paragraph 3.4).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the College's approach to monitoring students' satisfaction with feedback on assessed work, and to identifying and remedying any areas of deficiency (paragraph 1.11)
- the strategic approach applied to resource allocation, which recognises a need to develop resources at the Maidstone campus (paragraph 2.7)
- the College's approach to enhancing the student voice through the work of the HE Student Voice Coordinator (paragraph 2.8)
- the College's forthcoming appointment of a member of staff to lead on employability for higher education students (paragraph 2.17)
- the College's plans to gather and use detailed data on graduate destinations (paragraph 2.19)
- the College's plans, in partnership with the Students' Union, to revise the Student Charter and make it more relevant to higher education students (paragraph 2.28).

### Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College has been proactive in raising the higher education student voice, primarily through the appointment of the HE Student Voice Coordinator, which has also improved the process of gathering and responding to student feedback. Improvements could be made to the student representative system to enable those involved to carry out their roles more effectively.

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

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<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx)

## About MidKent College

MidKent College offers a mixture of further and higher education courses at its two campuses in Gillingham (Medway campus) and Maidstone. In July 2012, the College completed the purchase of the University of the Creative Arts centre on the Maidstone campus, with a view to developing the building as a bespoke higher education centre from September 2013.

The College's mission is to challenge and support every student to be the best they can be.

At the time of the review, the College had nearly 8,000 learners enrolled, of whom approximately 300 were higher education students.

The College works with three validating bodies: the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Pearson Edexcel ('Edexcel'). Programmes are offered at levels 4-6 in the following subjects:

- Biological Life Sciences
- Business and Management
- Chemistry
- Civil Engineering
- Construction
- Engineering
- Information Technology
- Childhood Studies
- Teacher Education
- Health and Social Care
- Hospitality and Events Management
- Performing Arts
- Production Arts
- Public Services (Security)
- Sport and Leisure Management.

The College's relationship with its main partner, the University of Kent, shifted at the start of the current academic year due to the College receiving direct funding for the first time. The College appointed a Director of Higher Education in June 2012, not only to reflect these changes, but also to lead the strategic development of higher education at the College.

The College last engaged with QAA Integrated Quality Enhancement Review in 2007. The review found that confidence could be placed in the College's management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of public information.

The key challenges highlighted by the College include: adapting its systems and procedures to meet the challenges faced by the change to direct funding, incorporating the requirements of Edexcel into the quality assurance processes of the College (Edexcel courses commenced in academic year 2012-13), and continuing to recruit and retain high-quality teaching staff for higher education courses.

## Explanation of the findings about MidKent College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>4</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>5</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>6</sup>

### 1 Academic standards

#### Outcome

The academic standards of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies **meet UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

#### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 It is the responsibility of the College's awarding bodies to allocate the qualifications they award to the appropriate benchmarks and to ensure there is sufficient volume of study to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved. These points are confirmed under the respective validation procedures of each awarding body.

1.2 Programmes delivered by the College on behalf of the two Universities have been designed and validated in partnership with them. Edexcel qualifications have been designed and validated in line with Edexcel's code of practice. Staff at the College confirmed their involvement in the design of new programmes and in the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Prior to programme approval, an initial business case approval must be obtained from the College's Higher Education Committee. While this process does not address directly the allocation of the proposed award to the FHEQ, it does incorporate consideration of the quality of existing provision, as well as programme philosophy, demand, employer engagement, staff and resources.

#### Use of external examiners

1.3 The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners. Although the selection methods vary, all external examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies. Edexcel programmes recruited the first cohorts of students at the start of the academic year 2012-13 and therefore Edexcel examiners had only recently been confirmed at the time of the review visit.

1.4 The College gives full consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports. The reports are sent both to the Quality Office and to the Director of Higher Education, and discussed at meetings with colleagues at the awarding universities. Actions taken at the College are formally recorded and disseminated to relevant members of staff. The review team also saw evidence of reports being discussed at course and faculty team meetings, and then being fed into appropriate and effective

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<sup>4</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>5</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> See note 3.

discussions at the Higher Education Committee. Matters arising from reports and their responses also feed into annual monitoring reports and faculty improvement plans, and the review team saw numerous examples of actions taken in respect to University of Kent programmes, including review of assessment load and more effective monitoring of assignment deadlines. The College stated that it intends to use similar processes for scrutinising and acting upon Edexcel reports.

1.5 The monitoring of ongoing action arising from examination boards and external moderators' reports is drawn together at institutional level in the Higher Education Improvement Plan, which has been established for the first time in the current academic year. Monitoring of the Plan falls within the remit of the Higher Education Group, which reports to the Higher Education Committee. At the time of the review visit, it was too early to assess the effectiveness of the Plan or the monitoring process. There is an opportunity in the reporting structure for Academic Board to maintain oversight of reporting by external examiners through receipt of Higher Education Committee minutes.

1.6 The two programmes validated by Canterbury Christ Church University are offered across a consortium of partners. External examiners' reports for these programmes are generic across the consortium and therefore offer limited feedback to colleges, as comments are rarely made regarding individual delivery partners. It has been noted at annual course review meetings with the relevant University faculty that individual reports for colleges would be beneficial and the review team endorses this. While recognising the value of the mid-year visits and reports by external examiners for the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS), the team notes that there is no such visit for the Foundation Degree in Childhood Studies. In order for the College to be able to take timely and appropriate action in response to reports, the review team **recommends** that the College work with Canterbury Christ Church University to consider, by the end of the academic year 2013-14, how external examiners' reports for awards offered across a number of consortium partners can be made more specific to the needs of MidKent College.

1.7 External examiners' reports are not made available to students. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College make external examiners' annual reports available in full to higher education students by December 2013.

## **Assessment and standards**

1.8 The design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards. The College complies with the assessment regulations of the respective awarding bodies. For the University of Kent and Edexcel programmes, College staff are responsible for writing assessment briefs, as well as marking, moderation and feedback in accordance with the policies set out by each awarding body. For Canterbury Christ Church University programmes, assessment briefs are set at validation, while responsibilities for marking, moderation and feedback are shared.

1.9 The assessment process is robust. The wide range of assessment methods helps to promote effective learning and allows students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. From external examiners' reports and a sample of student work, the review team found evidence of an effective process for second-marking and moderation, and marking being undertaken against clear assessment criteria. Students whom the review team met confirmed their clear understanding of assessment processes, plagiarism, and of staff marking against assessment criteria.

1.10 For provision validated by the Universities, boards of examiners are run in accordance with the processes set out by the awarding bodies. For Edexcel programmes,



responsibility for holding these boards lies with the College, subject to Edexcel guidance documents. At the time of the review, the team heard that the College intended to develop a protocol to be introduced for the 2013-14 boards of examiners. For this year's boards, procedures will be informed by best practice applied to the College's existing level 3 programmes. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by December 2013, the College develop and implement effective, clear and consistent policies for the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of the boards and examiners for Edexcel programmes.

1.11 Feedback to students on assessment is generally carefully considered, clear, comprehensive and of a high quality. This was endorsed by comments found in a sample of external examiners' reports. Satisfaction among students with the timeliness of feedback is less consistent. While students are generally satisfied with the policy of three weeks return for work handed in on time (five to seven weeks for Canterbury Christ Church University programmes), the review team found evidence of a variable situation, with some assessments not given back within the stated timeframe. Evidence regarding timeliness and quality of feedback is gathered through student representatives, student satisfaction surveys and focus groups led by the HE Student Voice Coordinator. The review team heard of examples where the College had clearly responded to negative feedback from students. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the College's approach to monitoring students' satisfaction with feedback on assessed work, and to identifying and remedying any areas of deficiency.

1.12 The College has completed extensive deliberations in relation to the formulation of a teaching and learning strategy that will drive the higher education provision. At the time of the review visit, a draft Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy had been completed and was due to be considered by the Quality Development Panel. The Policy is largely generic to meet the needs of students in further and higher education provision. The review team therefore **recommends** that the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy be implemented effectively by the end of the academic year 2013-14 to ensure that it meets the needs of higher education students.

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

1.13 The design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enables standards to be set and maintained and allows students to demonstrate learning outcomes of the awards. The College is required to follow the processes set out in the partnership agreements with its awarding bodies regarding the design, approval, monitoring and review of its higher education programmes. For programmes validated by the Universities, responsibilities for annual monitoring are shared between the awarding body and the College, with programme teams reporting to the respective Universities via annual monitoring reports. Annual monitoring and reporting comprises both University and College processes. The review team found evidence that useful quality assurance and enhancement information is incorporated into annual programme and module reports, which then feed into the University of Kent's internal annual monitoring processes and are copied to the College's Quality Office and Director of Higher Education. It was also clear that matters arising from a range of reports are considered at review meetings held with each University, providing further evidence of effective processes for the ongoing review of programmes by College teams.

1.14 For Edexcel programmes, responsibility for annual monitoring lies with the College. Edexcel does not require the submission of annual programme reports, but the review team heard that the external examiners will expect to see samples of reports during visits to the College.

1.15 At a faculty level, annual programme reports feed into self-assessment reports and the Faculty Improvement Plan. Academic staff also engage with the continuous cycle of programme and faculty reporting at staff focus days which are held twice a year. With respect to University of Kent programmes, reporting at a faculty level also pays due attention to comments made by external examiners and university liaison officers. The monitoring of faculty improvement plans is undertaken through various mechanisms, including the Higher Education Committee and quality health checks. Additional institutional oversight regarding monitoring and review of programmes is likely to be provided by the newly introduced Higher Education Improvement Plan and the emerging higher education self-assessment report. However, at the time of the review visit, it was too early to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives.

### **Subject benchmarks**

1.16 Subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of awards. The use of subject benchmark statements to inform standards is the responsibility of the College's awarding bodies. Through their involvement with the design of programmes, academic staff at the College have engaged with appropriate subject benchmarks, requirements of professional bodies, and national occupational standards. Close liaison with colleagues from each awarding body entails ongoing discussion about delivery, curriculum content and assessment.

### **Conclusion**

1.17 In reaching its positive judgment, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. All of the expectations for this judgement area were met. In all sections under academic standards, the College is also required to some extent to follow the procedures set out by its awarding bodies. The team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations in the following areas: working with Canterbury Christ Church University to make external examiners' reports more specific to the College; making external examiners' reports available in full to higher education students; developing and implementing policies for boards and examiners for Edexcel programmes; and implementing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy to meet the needs of higher education students. None of these recommendations was judged to threaten the management of the area of academic standards. The College is already taking appropriate action in its approach to monitoring student satisfaction with feedback on assessed work. Therefore, there are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area.

## **2 Quality of learning opportunities**

### **Outcome**

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

### **Professional standards for teaching and learning**

2.1 Professional standards for teaching and learning are upheld. Staff who teach on higher education programmes are appropriately qualified and have professional backgrounds that include relevant academic and practice experience in the fields relating to their courses. Staff are actively encouraged to maintain strong links with professional associations and colleagues based in industry. Awarding bodies approve teaching staff at the College to ensure they have an appropriate professional background before they are

permitted to teach on the programmes. Academic staff are also assisted to gain a broad range of teaching experience and to complete a formal teaching qualification. Students whom the review team met widely praised the quality of teaching. Students described academic staff as being innovative in their teaching methods, willing to engage formally and informally, and offering high levels of individual tutorial support and excellent support for assessment preparation.

2.2 The College has systematically developed resources to foster innovation and to encourage staff to be creative. For example, the College has created 'Inspiration Stations' at each campus which provide a protected space for teaching staff to think creatively and share ideas and resources with more experienced colleagues. Resources have also been allocated to assist the development of teaching and to support the development of high-quality delivery of e-learning. Resources praised by teaching staff include the availability of support from a team of e-learning technicians and the 'How 2 Teach' online resource.

2.3 The College has introduced a range of complementary strategies that support the development and enhancement of high-quality teaching and learning. Reflective practice and self-evaluation among staff are supported by an effective programme of teaching observation (which is supported by the Director of Higher Education) and the provision of mentors and observation mentors who assess supervised teaching experience. The College has also introduced a teacher coach system to support the development not only of recently appointed academics but also those teaching staff who have identified a need to refresh their practice. This system is supported by the senior management team and is put into operation by a designated team of senior practitioners. The College uses the coaching and observation processes to support professional growth and disseminate best practice in teaching. The review team considers the College's strategic approach to enhancement of teaching in higher education provision, specifically mentorship, coaching and teaching observation, to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.4 The review team has already made a recommendation for the College to ensure that the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy is implemented effectively to meet the needs of higher education students (see paragraph 1.12).

## **Learning resources**

2.5 Learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. The College has a systematic process in place to identify priorities for resource allocation to ensure that key academic and learning resources are available. There is an overall strategy for resource allocation which includes meetings with departments and the consideration of resources during course design. Heads of departments provide business cases for new programme provision and investment decisions are reviewed by representatives of the College Executive. A bidding cycle has been established through a 'STAR Chamber' process in which bids can be made for large-scale capital investment.

2.6 A wide range of subject-based and generic learning resources are available to support learning opportunities. Students whom the review team met generally praised these resources, although satisfaction with specialist resources and equipment was identified as an issue in the student submission. However, the review team heard examples of how the College responds to particular concerns raised by students regarding access to specialist resources. The review team also heard that facilities in some programme areas, for example engineering, are exceptional and regarded as being of industry standard.

2.7 Students have access to a wide range of e-books, e-journals and texts that have been purchased to support specific academic programmes, along with resources provided

by partner universities. For example, all students have some access to the Drill Hall Library, which represents a state of the art University Learning Centre. However, due to the geographical spread of the student population, access to off-site resources for some students based at Maidstone can be problematic. Students also commented on the inequity of resources between the Medway and Maidstone campuses. The Senior Leadership Team has put in place measures to address this imbalance and to ease students' immediate concerns. Currently, a major renovation is being completed at the Maidstone campus, including the creation of a dedicated centre for higher education, which is due to open at the start of the next academic year and will include the provision of new and improved library and IT facilities. The review team also noted that the introduction of a dedicated campus for higher education will support the development of a separate identity for those who are higher education students. The review team therefore **affirms** the strategic approach applied to resource allocation, which recognises a need to develop resources at the Maidstone campus.

## Student voice

2.8 Overall, the College provides students with a variety of ways to actively engage with quality assurance and to become partners in their learning experience. The appointment of an HE Student Voice Coordinator in November 2012 has already led to tangible improvements being made to the student experience. The Coordinator meets students on every programme and this has led to students giving detailed and qualitative feedback on their learning experience. The review team heard of several examples where student feedback was gathered and acted upon and the students were informed of the outcomes, thus 'closing the feedback loop'. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the College's approach to enhancing the student voice through the work of the HE Student Voice Coordinator.

2.9 The other ways in which students can provide feedback include direct email feedback on the quality of lessons, surveys, the Learner Voice Conference, and module evaluation questionnaires. The annual Learner Voice Conference offers student representatives the opportunity to discuss significant issues with relevant members of the management team and Senior Leadership Team. In the past, the focus has tended to be on the experiences of further education students, but there is an intention this year to have a dedicated section on the experience of higher education students and this will include input from the HE Student Voice Coordinator. Those studying on programmes validated by the University of Kent are asked to complete module evaluation questionnaires. Students on other programmes are not required to do this, therefore introducing inconsistency in whether or not students can provide feedback on individual modules. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College consider extending the opportunities for all higher education students to provide feedback on modules, by December 2013.

2.10 Student representation via the course representative system is inconsistent across the higher education provision. The review team met a number of course representatives, many of whom seemed unsure of their role. Course representatives are required to attend faculty meetings, but many of the representatives whom the review team met had never attended a meeting as a course representative and none had received training. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by December 2013, the College formalise systems for the election, training and ongoing support of higher education student representatives to ensure they are informed of their responsibilities and can more effectively represent their peers.

## Management information

2.11 There is effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities. The College has

robust systems in place to collect and utilise management information data and to track and monitor the progress of students in terms of attendance, achievement and retention. Information is collected, managed and distributed by a dedicated Higher Education Data Analyst and made readily available to all staff via the College's intranet. In addition, specific data sets are distributed electronically to academic staff who have been identified as needing this information. This data is used to undertake quality health checks each term, with a particular emphasis on those programmes with high attrition rates and problems with attendance.

2.12 The quality of data about specific categories of students is variable and at different stages of development. Student characteristics relating to issues such as age, ethnicity and disability are considered within annual monitoring, although the level of analysis in terms of the link between characteristics and student performance is limited. The Equality and Diversity Committee undertakes careful analysis of student profiles in relation to disability and tracks student performance and achievement in the context of individual disabilities. A specific Management Information Report is produced for the Committee to monitor the support available for students with disabilities. Data are gathered in relation to graduate employability and destinations for graduating students. The College is at a transitional stage in terms of implementing systems for the Destination of Higher Education Leavers (DLHE) survey and destination data to be published as part of the Key Information Set (KIS). The review team recognises that this is work in progress and recognises the importance and value of this development (see paragraph 2.19).

### **Admission to the College**

2.13 The College's policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. The Admissions Policy is supported by separate protocols for UCAS applicants and admissions of direct applications for part-time students. The review team found evidence of processes in place which allow students to commence their studies in a highly supportive learning environment. Students receive a briefing from their subject teams on the structure and academic requirements of their individual programmes and this is supplemented by written information in the form of module guides. Students with disabilities are identified during the application process and during enrolment. A member of the Curriculum Access Support Team then carries out an assessment to determine the type and level of additional support that may be required. Based on the assessment, an action plan is drawn up. While the nature and extent of student induction varies across programmes, students whom the review team met were generally satisfied with the information provided at this stage, including clear guidance in relation to the learning resources and academic support arrangements available to them.

### **Complaints and appeals**

2.14 The College has effective complaints and appeals procedures. Students whom the review team met generally understood how to go about making a complaint or appeal. Information is easy to find on the website and is also available on the virtual learning environment and some course handbooks. There is a recommendation in paragraph 3.4 regarding the need for consistency of information across course handbooks, and it is important that the College take into account information about complaints and appeals when addressing this recommendation.

2.15 The College has a robust system in place to deal with complaints. Complaints are 'held' and considered centrally by the Quality Office. There is a procedure in place on how to respond to and review complaints, and evidence suggests that they are dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner.

## Career advice and guidance

2.16 Most higher education students are already in employment and are required by their employers to study at the College for additional qualifications. Therefore, due to the vocational nature of the courses and effective links with local industry, employability is often directly embedded into the curriculum.

2.17 The College has recognised the need to improve the careers guidance and support that it offers to higher education students. The College has a draft Employability Policy in place which gives explicit consideration to higher education students. It is also seeking to recruit an HE Support and Employability Officer. The remit of this Officer will be to provide specialist careers advice to students, 'other' advice and information for students, and assistance in finding appropriate work placements. The review team **affirms** the College's forthcoming appointment of a member of staff to lead on employability for higher education students.

2.18 The College has a Job Shop that higher education students are able to use for careers advice and help with finding employment. However, most of the students whom the review team met believed that the Job Shop was only available to further education students. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College promote the availability of the Job Shop service to all higher education students by December 2013.

2.19 The College currently lacks evidence of the employability of its students due to the limited destinations data it has available for graduates (see also paragraph 2.12). The limited data that is available shows that students often gain immediate employment upon graduating. The College intends to partake in the DLHE survey, which would significantly improve and diversify the destinations data available. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the College's plans to gather and use detailed data on graduate destinations.

## Supporting disabled students

2.20 The College manages the quality of learning opportunities to enable the entitlements of students with disabilities to be met. The College is an inclusive environment and values equality and diversity highly. An appropriate level of support is provided for students with disabilities, and satisfaction levels among this group of students in the Higher Education Satisfaction Survey were very high. As well as the support available at the College through the Curriculum Access Support Team, students are also encouraged to use the disability support services available at the awarding universities. The current academic year is the first year that the College has provided support for students, as this was previously provided by the University of Kent.

2.21 The College makes effective use of management information to monitor the effectiveness of admissions and support for students with disabilities (see also paragraphs 2.11-2.12). The College makes a sustained effort to identify students who have disabilities. Contact is then made with the student to offer advice about the support available and the process for applying for the Disabled Students' Allowance. The performance of students with disabilities is monitored by the Equal Opportunities Committee to assess the impact of support measures put in place. The team regarded this as a strong commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities are effectively supported.

## Supporting international students

2.22 The College does not accept applications from international students as it does not have Highly Trusted Sponsor status.

## Supporting postgraduate research students

2.23 The College has no provision at postgraduate level.

## Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.24 The College is not responsible for any collaborative arrangements as they are defined by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

## Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.25 The College has made significant progress with the development of e-learning resources for much of its higher education provision. The systematic approach to support the roll-out of innovative resources is driven by the College's e-learning strategy. Teaching staff praised the support they receive as they seek to develop innovative ways of delivering e-learning. Examples include the employment of learning technologists to work on an individual basis with academic staff, and the creation of 'Inspiration Stations' (see also paragraph 2.2). This resource provides support to develop audio and video content, as well as advice on the design of resources to capture students' attention and engagement.

2.26 Senior managers demonstrated a clear and strategic vision for the application of new technologies as a means of meeting the needs of a diverse student population, some of whom were studying part-time and had extensive work commitments. Students whom the review team met confirmed the value of the online resources - such as course guides and lecture notes - in supporting their learning, and of the extensive use of virtual learning environments both at the College and also those used by the validating universities. Resources are available for each module, although some staff appear to be more skilled and more proactive in developing innovative material. Overall, the review team considers the effective approach to e-learning across the higher education provision to be a **feature of good practice**.

## Work-based and placement learning

2.27 Students participate in work-based learning as part of their Foundation Degree programmes. Even though numbers are small, the College recognises that, in recent years, students have found it difficult to obtain high-calibre placements. The College has stated that one of the central aspects of the role of the Higher Education Support and Employability Officer will be to assist students to find work placements. The review team has already affirmed this forthcoming appointment (see paragraph 2.17). The Job Shop is also there to support students to find work placements. The review team has already made a recommendation for the College to promote the availability of the Job Shop service to all higher education students (see paragraph 2.18).

## Student charter

2.28 Although the College has a Student Charter on its website, students whom the review team met had little knowledge of it and student representatives do not regard it as being a useful document for higher education students. As it stands, much of the language and the content of the Charter are more appropriate to further education students. As a consequence, the College has pledged to work collaboratively with the Students' Union to rewrite the document to make it more relevant to all students at the College. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the College's plans, in partnership with the Students' Union, to revise the Student Charter and make it more relevant to higher education students.

## Conclusion

2.29 In reaching its positive judgment, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. All of the expectations for this judgement area were met and there were two features of good practice: the strategic approach to the enhancement of teaching; and the effective approach to e-learning. The team identified some areas for improvement and therefore made recommendations in the following areas: extending opportunities for all students to provide module feedback; formalising systems to improve student representation; and promoting the availability of the Job Shop. None of these recommendations was judged to threaten the management of the area of academic standards. The College is already taking appropriate action in a number of areas where it was recognised further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience: the strategic approach to resource allocation; the enhancing work of the HE Student Voice Coordinator; the forthcoming appointment of a person to lead on employability; the plan to gather and use data on graduate destinations; and the revision of the Student Charter. Therefore, there are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area.

## 3 Public information

### Outcome

The information about learning opportunities produced by MidKent College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 The College produces information for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. It publishes clear information describing its vision, mission, values and overall strategy, which enables intended audiences to develop an understanding of its profile.

3.2 Since the change to direct funding for the University of Kent programmes, the College has been required to comply fully with the requirements of the Key Information Set (KIS) for the relevant programmes. Responsibility for the assembly of KIS data lies with the College's Data Analyst, who works in conjunction with programme teams. Responsibility for its updating, which is undertaken routinely on a quarterly basis or as required by substantial changes, lies with the Data Officer - a recently created post. It is a requirement of the College that KIS data be signed off by the Principal. Data from the National Student Survey are not currently incorporated into KIS information as this data has not previously been available to the College. At the review visit, the team heard that the College expects the data to be available for inclusion in the KIS in future years. Course pages on the College website explain why some of the KIS data is limited in scope and provide a direct link to the Unistats KIS website. Despite some initial challenges, the system for assembling, updating and checking KIS data seems to be working well.

3.3 Primarily through its online Higher Education Prospectus and course pages, the College makes available to prospective students information that is clear and trustworthy in terms of helping them to select their programme. The review team found evidence that application processes are clearly described on the website, as is information regarding the support and assistance available to prospective students. Some part-time students whom the review team met stated that they had been confused about pre-entry fees information. However, the review team was satisfied that the College had taken appropriate steps to ensure that this information is now accurate and up to date.



3.4 Although the College continues to develop pre and post-entry electronic information for higher education students that is useful and accessible, it acknowledges that more work is needed to ensure that information provided in student handbooks is complete and consistent across courses. Most students receive course handbooks which provide comprehensive information and/or clear links to electronic information about their programme of study, including curriculum and assessment details, arrangements for the submission of work, grade criteria, plagiarism, student support, resources, and opportunities for work-based learning. However, in some handbooks information is not provided at all, or is incomplete, notably with regard to information on plagiarism, complaints and the location of the full set of programme regulations. While it was reassuring to hear from students regarding their confidence in being able to find information about complaints and appeals and plagiarism, the review team **recommends** that, by December 2013, the College ensure that all higher education course handbooks provide students with consistent information about their programmes.

3.5 The College has in place robust procedures for the production, checking and monitoring of other publicly available information. These procedures include effective liaison with its awarding bodies and the College's programme teams. Final sign-off of documents is carried out by the Director of Higher Education. In addition, the E-marketing Officer, another recently appointed post, undertakes routine monitoring of information on the website.

3.6 The review team has already made a recommendation regarding the availability in full of external examiners' annual reports to higher education students (see paragraph 1.7).

## Conclusion

3.7 In reaching its positive judgment, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. The team identified one area for improvement and made a recommendation accordingly to ensure that all higher education course handbooks provide students with consistent information about their programmes. This recommendation was not judged to threaten the management of this area. Therefore, there are no current or potential material risks in this area.

## 4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

### Outcome

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

4.1 The College is making significant progress in developing and implementing a strategic approach to transform the learning environment for students. The review team found evidence of a consistent link between the aspirations to develop the academic portfolio and the enhancement of specialist teaching space and other technical resources. The College has gone about addressing the inequity of resources between the two campuses by building into its strategic plan the creation of a separate higher education centre at its Maidstone campus. The review team has already affirmed this development (see paragraph 2.7). As well as providing a specific new learning centre with improved library and IT facilities, its creation will also support the higher education student population to maintain a distinct identity.

4.2 The College has established a highly strategic approach to the professional development of high-quality teaching practice among all academic staff. The review team has already noted this as a feature of good practice, in particular mentorship, coaching and

teaching observation (see paragraph 2.3). Each of these processes is driven by clear strategies that are widely disseminated to staff at all levels. Senior managers place much emphasis on reflective practice and continuous self-improvement among teachers, which is facilitated by partnerships between academic staff with varying levels of experience and different areas of expertise in relation to innovation in teaching. A range of opportunities is also provided for academic staff to discuss key issues in relation to the development of teaching and learning during formal college-wide staff development events.

4.3 The College has built a strategic approach to its development of technology-supported learning that will continue to provide new opportunities for students. There has been a comprehensive drive to provide e-learning using the virtual learning environments from partner universities, and linking with their institutional strategies. The College is now extending this engagement with technology to develop an individual relationship with e-learning providers and to establish bespoke resources by bringing the expertise together from other local institutions. The College is linking this development to devising new strategies for using e-books and e-journals. The review team has already noted the effective approach to e-learning as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 2.26).

## Conclusion

4.4 In reaching its positive judgment, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. No significant issues were identified that threatened the management of this area. The team also identified some features of good practice that have been identified in earlier sections of the report. Therefore, there are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area.

## 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 MidKent College. The College has been proactive in raising the higher education student voice, primarily through the appointment of the HE Student Voice Coordinator, which has also improved the process of gathering and responding to student feedback. Improvements could be made to the student representative system to enable those involved to carry out their roles more effectively.

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

5.1 The major innovation in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement has been the appointment of an HE Student Voice Coordinator in November 2012. This shows a real commitment by the College to actively listening to the student voice. Students whom the review team met had a good awareness of the Coordinator and many had attended focus groups run by the Coordinator where they were able to offer feedback on their learning experiences. The team has already affirmed this appointment and its effect on the enhancement of the student voice (see paragraph 2.8).

5.2 Another innovative way in which students are involved in quality assurance and enhancement is through the annual Learner Voice Conference. The College is making a concerted effort to involve higher education students more fully in this year's Conference by

having a section dedicated to higher education and including input from the HE Student Voice Coordinator.

5.3 Further innovations in student involvement could be brought about by improving the student course representative system. Most of the student representatives whom the review team met had little understanding of their roles and none of them had been trained in how to carry out their duties. The team has already recommended that the College formalise systems for the election, training and ongoing support of higher education student representatives (see paragraph 2.10).

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

5.4 The College benefits from a productive working relationship with the Students' Union. A full-time paid Sabbatical Officer is in place, as well as an executive of unpaid student officers. The position of Higher Education Students' Officer is currently vacant. The President of the Students' Union sits on a number of senior boards and committees, ensuring that the student voice is heard at a strategic level.

5.5 The HE Student Voice Coordinator reports to the Director of Higher Education and liaises closely with the Students' Union. Staff, as well as students, had a good understanding of the responsibilities of, and the service provided by, the Coordinator.

5.6 Staff experiences of the learner voice system in relation to student representatives were variable. Some academic staff reported that they meet frequently with, and understand the responsibilities of, the class representatives, but this was not consistent across the College. Some student representatives said that they had been selected by academic staff rather than elected by their peers.

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

5.7 The College responds effectively to feedback from students. The primary way in which the College gathers feedback from students is via focus groups run by the HE Student Voice Coordinator. There is a robust system in place to ensure that this feedback is then responded to appropriately, and this is overseen by the Coordinator. Students whom the review team met were able to list several examples of improvements that had been made as a result of their feedback.

5.8 The effectiveness of the other ways in which students can provide feedback is variable. The review team has already made a recommendation for the College to consider extending the opportunities to all higher education students to provide feedback on their modules (see paragraph 2.9). Data from the Higher Education Student Specific Survey have been used to evidence the student submission and will feed into College self-assessment reports. The College might wish to utilise the findings from this survey more fully as a mechanism for improving the student experience. Overall, though, students whom the review team met indicated that the College listens to their views and generally acts upon their feedback.

## Glossary

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

**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*.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx](http://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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