



# **London Lea Valley College**

## **Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

September 2012

## Key findings about London Lea Valley College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in September 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **no confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the award it offers on behalf of the Institute of Administrative Management.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of this awarding organisation.

The team considers that **reliance cannot** be placed on the accuracy or completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

## Good practice

The team has identified no features of **good practice**.

## Recommendations

The team has identified a number of **recommendations** for the enhancement of the higher education provision.

The team considers that it is **essential** for the provider to:

- deliver the curriculum in accordance with the requirements of the Institute of Administrative Management (paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7)
- ensure that student portfolios have an emphasis on individual student's work (paragraph 1.8)
- implement effective procedures for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information (paragraphs 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5).

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- improve the effectiveness of the Academic Council and the Management Council's oversight of academic standards (paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3)
- ensure that students receive detailed written feedback in a timely manner (paragraph 2.4)
- improve the identification and uptake of opportunities for staff development (paragraphs 2.7 and 2.8)
- improve the provision of written learning resources (paragraph 2.9).

The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the provider to:

- develop its oversight of teaching (paragraph 2.3)
- progress the plans for a personal tutor system (paragraph 2.6)
- progress the plan for a virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.9)
- increase the amount of feedback from students on resource matters (paragraph 2.10).

## About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)<sup>1</sup> (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at London Lea Valley College (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to the programme of study that the provider delivers on behalf of the Institute of Administrative Management. The review was carried out by Professor Jenny Anderson and Mr Brian Sullivan (reviewers), and Dr Peter Steer (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).<sup>2</sup> Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the College, meetings with staff and a separate meeting with students.

The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

Please note that if you are unfamiliar with any of the terms used in this report you can find them in the [Glossary](#).

London Lea Valley College (the College) is a private provider located in Luton, 50 kilometres north of London. It was incorporated in 2009, although classes did not start until April 2011. Its mission is to provide 'quality education, career training and equal opportunities to students from all social and cultural backgrounds to enable them to achieve identity, personal development, diversity and a contribution to society.' The College has not yet completed a full cycle of its higher education programme. All students are from overseas. The College occupies two self-contained floors within shared commercial premises.

The management team includes the Principal, who also acts as the Quality and Compliance Officer, the Head of Business Studies, the Student Welfare Officer, who is also the Head of English for Speakers of Other Languages, and the Registrar and Administrative Officer. The Principal is responsible to the Director, who chairs the Management Council, and is the sole owner of the College. Enrolment in the academic year 2012-13 totals 57. All students are full-time and all are funded privately.

At the time of the review, the College offered the following higher education programme, listed beneath its awarding organisation:

### **Institute of Administrative Management**

- Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management (level 6)

## The provider's stated responsibilities

The College has the responsibility for recruitment and admissions, and also for the provision of appropriate resources, teaching and student support to successfully deliver the awards. The Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management is a three-year

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4).

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx).

programme. Most summative assessments are set, and externally verified, by the Institute of Administrative Management. The College will be undertaking some first marking and internal verification in due course. Students had only undertaken formative assessments set by the College at the time of the review. The Leadership Skills module is assessed by an individual portfolio produced by each student.

## **Recent developments**

Students were enrolled in April 2011 with the expectation of studying for the Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management. They undertook a preliminary language course until February 2012 when the higher education course started. Some additional students joined the course at that date. There were 15 more enrolments in June 2012.

## **Students' contribution to the review**

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team and did so in September 2012. A questionnaire was sent to all higher education students. Fifteen students responded. The results were collated and reported by a student representative. Students met the review coordinator at the preparatory meeting and the team during the review. Their involvement was helpful for the team and provided an insight into a number of topics, including the impact of their views in affecting the student experience at the College and also the usefulness of the website.

## Detailed findings about London Lea Valley College

### 1 Academic standards

#### **How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?**

1.1 College responsibilities concerning academic standards are clearly stated in the documentation provided by the Institute of Administrative Management. Summative assessment is the responsibility of the awarding organisation. Students have not yet completed any summative assessments, although, for one unit, the College has provided support for the development of the students' portfolios which will be graded.

1.2 Many quality procedures are yet to be implemented. The College has developed a range of policies and procedures to manage its provision. These are collected in a detailed Quality Assurance Manual, the latest revision of which is dated 2011. However, the team found that many of the processes articulated within the manual are not in operation. In addition, policies and procedures make reference to roles and committees that do not exist within the College structure. College managers advised the team that many of the processes are to be implemented over the coming months.

1.3 Oversight of academic standards by the Academic Council has been limited. Since the beginning of the higher education programme, responsibility for the management of academic standards lies with the Academic Council. The terms of reference for the Academic Council are well documented. They cover a wide range of responsibilities, including quality monitoring, academic planning, assessment regulation and programme design. The Academic Council reports to the Management Council. The Management Council is chaired by the Director, who is also the College owner. The terms of reference state that the Management Council approves and ensures the implementation of decisions taken by the Academic Council. While both the Academic Council and Management Council were referred to extensively in the self-evaluation and in discussions with staff, minutes of just two meetings were submitted into evidence. While the programme only started in February 2012, the number of meetings has been significantly less than the number indicated in the terms of reference. The management team is led by the Director and the Principal who has overall management responsibility for quality. It has used informal meetings to make some decisions assigned to the Academic Council. Staff indicated that this is because of the smaller than expected number of students. Staff provided verbal examples of how management action was taken, including the monitoring of admissions. However, several aspects of the Academic Council's remit, including detailed monitoring of programme monitoring, have not yet been considered. It is advisable for the College to improve the effectiveness of the Academic Council and the Management Council's oversight of academic standards.

#### **How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?**

1.4 The College uses the requirements of its awarding organisation, supplemented by some of its own policies, for guiding its management of academic standards. The Institute of Administrative Management incorporates the requirements of the Qualifications and Credit Framework into its guidance for colleges. Due to the early stage of the delivery of the programme, many of the assessment procedures have not yet been required. The College has developed a number of its own policies. For example, there is a procedure for approval of new courses that has operated since the setting up of the Academic Council and the

Management Council. A number of courses have been proposed, although none had been endorsed at the time of review. While staff have limited explicit knowledge of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), quality policies follow its general principles.

### **How does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?**

1.5 The College has yet to receive any reports from the awarding organisation on academic standards or to receive an external verification visit. Students are currently studying for an examination on two of their present units, which they will sit in December 2012. Internal verification will be first needed when the students finish the Leadership Skills unit, which is assessed by portfolio.

1.6 The College is delivering an inappropriately designed curriculum. The Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management consists of 24 mandatory units, involving study at levels 4, 5 and 6. Assessment is through examination, assignment and portfolio. The Institute of Administrative Management qualification handbook states that students will develop a holistic understanding of business over the duration of the course, which should be a three year period. Students commence with level 4 units relating to fundamental business principles and progress to level 6 units, where they are expected to demonstrate higher-order skills. The earlier units are utilised to aid the development of these skills. Based on staff expertise and the desire to offer students some assessment other than examination, the College has commenced with the delivery of level 5 and 6 units. This does not allow the students the opportunity to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge before attempting higher level units. The College indicated that the next intake in November will commence with level 4 units.

1.7 Delivery of the course does not follow the sequence required by the awarding organisation. The College has commenced the qualification with the delivery of Unit 667 Leadership Skills. Students are required to produce a portfolio that demonstrates knowledge, understanding and reflective practice. The awarding organisation's qualification handbook states that students should only commence this unit once they have completed the level 6 unit 'Dynamics of Leadership'. The College has not scheduled this unit until the academic year 2013-14. Students indicated that they had had some difficulty with the Leadership Skills unit. It is essential for the College to deliver the curriculum in accordance with the requirements of the Institute of Administrative Management.

1.8 On the Leadership Skills unit a number of student portfolios contained identical work, although assessment on this unit is on the basis of an individual portfolio. Staff indicated that this reflected group work and that students had been encouraged to produce their portfolios in this way. Staff have provided formative feedback on the work, which supports the students' use of material in this way. Staff are not delivering the Leadership Skills unit according to awarding organisation guidance. It is essential for the College to ensure that student portfolios have an emphasis on individual student's work.

The review team has **no confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding organisation.

## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

### **How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?**

2.1 The College is responsible for all aspects of its provision with respect to the quality of learning opportunities. The arrangements outlined in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 are also relevant in supporting the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. The Management Council is also responsible for the recruitment of staff and resource allocation, subject to final approval from the Director. Some useful feedback on the quality of learning opportunities is provided by the student representatives.

### **How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?**

2.2 Staff are aware of the *Code of practice* in relation to the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. While there has been little explicit mapping of the *Code of practice*, staff explained how College policies, for example concerning careers guidance and admissions, use its guidance. Staff indicated that they would be making use of the *Code of practice* in future.

### **How does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?**

2.3 The College has detailed plans for its oversight of teaching and learning, although at present not all procedures are in operation. Higher education teaching started in February 2012, so there has not yet been a full-year cycle of teaching and learning within which to put all plans into practice. At present, the College assures itself that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained through feedback from elected course representatives, student unit feedback questionnaires and a query box placed in reception. Students indicated that the course representative system works well and that staff respond positively to most issues they raise. They reported that lecturers are experienced, friendly and supportive, and that teaching is effective. Students receive effective support from staff if they do not understand some of the material in the lectures. Unit feedback forms were administered in March. Individual unit overview sheets with satisfaction scores indicated that students were satisfied with their units. The unit feedback form does not cover important areas of assessment and feedback. The lesson observation policy has yet to be instigated. While the College learning and teaching strategy is being fully developed, staff refer to useful guidance embedded within the individual unit guidance provided by the awarding organisation. It is desirable for the College to develop its oversight of teaching.

2.4 The return of marked work has been slow with staff providing only limited written feedback. The College does not have a prescribed timescale for providing feedback on student work. Verbal one-to-one and group feedback is provided on in-class activities. The students are undertaking the first three units of their course and are working towards summative assessments in December. Formative work submitted at the end of the first semester one in May will be returned at the start of the next semester in October. The feedback that will be provided on the portfolios, internal examinations and essays was considered by the team. It lacked detail and was not linked closely to the learning outcomes and will provide students with only limited guidance for their future learning. It is advisable for the College to ensure that students receive detailed written feedback in a timely manner.

### **How does the provider assure itself that students are supported effectively?**

2.5 The College provides students with some valuable support. Academic support is often on a one-to-one informal basis. This works well because of the small number of students. Students were positive about the welfare support available from an experienced practitioner. They appreciated their one-week induction at the beginning of their studies and signed a checklist to confirm its completion. Diagnostic tests to determine special support requirements in computing, maths and English led to the creation of individual learning plans, which the students find useful. These plans have not yet been revisited, although this is scheduled to occur at the beginning of the second semester.

2.6 Provision of a designated personal tutor for each student has been planned and advertised, although it has not yet started. However, the small number of students enrolled at present are receiving the valuable support detailed in paragraph 2.5. The self-evaluation and student learning agreement state that each student will get a personal tutor or mentor. The website indicated that personal tutors have a responsibility for providing academic support. Staff stated that the College is going to set up a system of designated personal tutors, which they recognise will be particularly advantageous if student numbers increase. It is desirable for the College to progress the plans for a personal tutor system.

### **What are the provider's arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?**

2.7 While the College has appropriate recruitment procedures, there has been only limited staff development. Prospective staff are interviewed and present a mock lecture to other lecturers. Academic staff are qualified to master's level. Two of the three lecturers have teaching qualifications and the third is undertaking a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. All have taught Institute of Administrative Management courses at other providers. All staff undertake an induction where the College's Academic Policy and Quality Manual are explained. The College staff development policy places responsibility for academic excellence with individual members of the lecturing staff guided by their head of department. Staff have attended awarding organisation training on managing assessments and others on UK Border Agency requirements. The College has plans for in-house teacher training seminars, which have yet to be activated. There has been little subject-specific, staff development nor pedagogic support. The College is looking to provide development opportunities for lecturers which are aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework. However, staff are unaware of the UK Professional Standards Framework.

2.8 Procedures for identifying staff development needs are not yet in place. The College aims to identify training needs through the annual appraisal system when it is started. Good practice will be identified through the lesson observation policy. It is advisable for the College to improve the identification and uptake of opportunities for staff development.

### **How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?**

2.9 Resource provision does not fully support the learning requirements in all areas. The library has multiple copies of two recommended texts which are available for loan. However, there is a limited number of reference books, which requires students to find other sources to support their studies. The College directs students to the nearby local library. However, students stated that the inter-library loan system can take a long time, especially when a number of students are trying to get the same text. The College provides no e-books



or e-journals itself, although some are available through links with the Institute of Administrative Management. It is advisable for the College to improve the provision of written learning resources. The College is planning to develop a virtual learning environment. Students indicated that they would benefit from a virtual learning environment to support their learning with additional teaching materials. It would also allow them to undertake more learning while they are off-campus. It is desirable for the College to progress the plan for a virtual learning environment. Computing and classroom facilities are suitable for the delivery of the award.

2.10 The College has collected only a limited amount of feedback on the resource provision. It regularly monitors the availability of learning resources through student and staff feedback. However, this is not comprehensive since the questionnaires given to students do not cover learning resources explicitly. Some valuable feedback is available from student representatives. It is desirable for the College to increase the amount of feedback from students on resource matters.

The review team has **confidence** that the College is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

### 3 Public information

#### **How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?**

3.1 The College is responsible for most of the information it provides for students, with the awarding organisation supplying some course material. It provides this information in a number of ways, including a website, a course fact sheet, the prospectus, and marketing handbills. These are supplemented by course-level guidance at least partly dependent on material from the awarding organisation including: the College student handbook; the course handbook; and unit guides.

3.2 An important source of guidance for students is the College website, although the information it provides is limited with some out-of-date material. Students reported that some information that would have been useful to them is missing, for example a detailed description of the course content. This had hindered them in making their decisions. At the time of the review, the website provided information about the Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management, including material on structure, assessment, certification and grading, course duration and fees. Mandatory units are listed, but there is little further detail. The website also included the prospectus, but this was labelled as relevant for the academic year 2010-11. The prospectus also has a limited amount of information on the nature of the awards offered. Moreover, it describes three separate courses, at levels 4, 5 and 6, each of one year's duration, rather than the combination of all of them into the three-year Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management.

3.3 Handbooks and guides provide useful information for students. The college-level student handbook contains a useful range of information about the College requirements and procedures and other information, including visa attendance requirements. Unit guides are produced by the awarding organisation and are comprehensive.

### **How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?**

3.4 The College has processes for checking that public information is accurate and complete, but they are not thorough. Individual members of staff undertake initial checking. The Director has overall responsibility for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information. He works with the Principal to manage the information and ensure that it is updated. However, there is no schedule for checking the whole of the website for inaccuracies or out-of-date material. Changes to the website have been hindered due to problems with the web designer used by the College. Staff reported that there are plans to review the effectiveness of public information through student evaluation and to develop an online survey to ascertain website user views.

3.5 Procedures for checking the information on the website are not effective. The team found a number of cases of out-of-date or inaccurate information on the website, in addition to the prospectus. For example, the website makes reference to Association of Chartered Certified Accountants programmes which the College is not presently running and cannot do so for overseas students, although information only relevant to these students is included in the guidance. The web front page in the 'Welcome' section states that the College is making an important contribution to the 'North East region' as part of a plan to become 'recognised as a world class research business institute.' The website indicates that the College facilities are designed to provide real working environments; however, such facilities are not available. It also indicates that the library has a wide collection of core reading texts, which were not evident at the review. The Extended Diploma in Business and Administrative Management course fact sheet indicates the delivery of units over the three years, which are not in the same order as the current delivery. A marketing handbill supplied as evidence with the self-evaluation included the logo of American Board of Physician Specialities. The College indicated that this was an error and reported that the handbill had not been used. In addition, the website included several statements where the meaning was unclear or there were typographical errors. It is essential for the College to implement effective procedures for checking the accuracy and completeness of public information.

The team concludes that **reliance cannot be placed** on the accuracy or completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

## Action plan

The provider was required to develop an action plan to follow up on good practice and address recommendations arising from the review. However, an action plan was not submitted to QAA and the report is therefore published without one.

## About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4).

## 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>3</sup>

**Academic Infrastructure** Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **UK Quality Code**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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

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

**awarding body** A body with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the **framework for higher education qualifications**, such as diplomas or degrees.

**awarding organisation** An organisation with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (these qualifications are at levels one to eight, with levels four and above being classed as 'higher education').

**UK Quality Code** The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**designated body** An organisation that has been formally appointed to perform a particular function.

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

**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 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:

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

*The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland.*

**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 **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.

**provider** An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically 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').

**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 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 standard**.

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

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