Review of College Higher Education of Kingston Maurward College

April 2013

Contents

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 Kingston Maurward College. The review took place on 22-24 April 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Ms Daphne Rowlands
- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Kingston Maurward 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 Kingston Maurward 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.[1] Background information about Kingston Maurward College is given on page 4. A dedicated page of the website explains more about this review method and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.[2]

---

[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[2] 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 Kingston Maurward College (the College).

QAA's judgements about Kingston Maurward College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Kingston Maurward 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 Kingston Maurward College.

- The enhanced Personal Research Dissertation Support Unit (paragraph 2.7)
- The Science Summer School that enables students to reach a suitable level required for their course (paragraph 2.14).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Kingston Maurward College. The review team recommends that by September 2013 the College:

- take responsibility for evaluating information from the awarding bodies to inform planning and enhancement at higher education-wide level (paragraph 2.12).

The review team recommends that from September 2013 the College:

- make external examiners' annual reports available in full to students as part of involving students in quality assurance processes (paragraph 3.5).

The review team recommends that by December 2013 the College:

- develop a planned approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities that is integral to College meetings and evaluated across the higher education provision (paragraph 4.3).

The review team recommends that for the academic year 2013-14 the College:

- develop a systematic approach to analyse the impact of teaching and learning, scholarly activity and staff development (paragraph 2.3)

- improve the quality and consistency of information provided on the virtual learning environment at unit level (paragraphs 2.8, 2.22 and 3.4).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- Continue to clarify and develop the role and functions of committees' policies and procedures for the management of higher education academic standards in the transition of awarding bodies (paragraph 1.12).
- Continue to develop the overarching enhancement strategy for higher education (paragraph 4.4).

The First Year Student Experience

The College is committed to supporting students throughout their first year as they develop the key skills of independent learning and intellectual enquiry. The College provides excellent pre-entry information and support. Academic and pastoral support provided throughout the first year is flexible and meets individual student needs.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook for Review of College Higher Education, available on the QAA website.[3]

---

[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx

About Kingston Maurward College

Kingston Maurward is a specialist college supporting individuals and organisations working in modern land-based industries, conservation and across the rural economy. The College was established in 1949 and is a major training provider based in Dorchester, Dorset. It describes its mission as 'to provide inspiring and challenging education and training opportunities to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to succeed in life and work.' It aims to raise learner aspiration and achievement and develop progression pathways to higher education with provision tailored to needs.

On average the College runs 25 full-time programmes and just over 650 part-time courses per year. There are approximately 900 full-time students, of whom at the time of the review 96 are higher education students and account for 11 per cent of the student body. There are 4,000 part-time learners, of whom 94 per cent are adults.

The higher education at the time of the review included the following programmes:

Bournemouth University
FdSc Animal Behaviour and Welfare
FdSc Marine Ecology and Conservation
BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour and Welfare
FdA Tourism Park Management
FdA Outdoor Adventure Management

Royal Agricultural University
FdSc Animal Behaviour and Welfare (due to be validated in 2013)

Pearson
HND Equine Management

Since its previous QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2008, the College higher education teaching team has increased to three full-time dedicated higher education teachers and a further eight full-time and three part-time staff members teaching a combination of further and higher education. In 2010 the College appointed the Head of Higher Education to take responsibility to develop a strategic higher education vision for Dorset and opened a new, larger dedicated Higher Education Centre. The role of the Higher Education Co-ordinator bolsters the College's management of its higher education quality assurance. The College is now in receipt of directly funded student numbers from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) via the Core and Margin process.

Bournemouth University (the College's main higher education institution), has stated its intention to phase out franchised provision and in 2012 the College established the Royal Agricultural University as a new partner higher education institution. The College now faces the challenge of transitioning its programmes to the Royal Agricultural University.

Explanation of the findings about Kingston Maurward College

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[4]

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[5] 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.[6]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

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

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The College's provision is delivered in close partnership with its awarding bodies, which are responsible for programme approval. The awarding bodies ensure that qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Each awarding body is ultimately responsible for the academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, development and review of the programme.

1.2   The approval mechanisms adopted by the awarding bodies are matched to the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and include an appropriate level of externality.

Use of external examiners

1.3   The College's use of its external examiners is scrupulous and ensures that the academic standards are maintained at appropriate levels. This makes a positive contribution to the assurance of quality and standards. An external examiner is in place for each level of each programme. Each external examiner is appointed by the awarding body or organisation, which is also responsible for training and induction. The external examiner oversees and approves agreed assessment tasks in advance and in the case of the awarding bodies normally attends the award board.

1.4   Within the College, the annual external examiner report is circulated to programme leaders, and discussed within Framework Team meetings and later at the Higher Education Academic Board. The Head of Higher Education, or Course Leader, responds directly to external examiners when their report is received, and required actions are discussed at Framework Team meetings and reported via the Annual Report on Framework Monitoring. This report is approved by the Head of Higher Education before being sent to the Higher Education Academic Board and then to the awarding body or organisation for scrutiny and approval.

---

[4] 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.
[5] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[6] See note 4.

Assessment and standards

1.5   Appropriate assessment policies are in place to secure standards of the College's provision. The awarding body or organisation assessment procedures, oversight of the partnerships and the College's own arrangements for assessment design and moderation are effective and understood by staff and students.

1.6   The assessment policies, regulations and procedures that govern each programme are the responsibility of the awarding body or organisation. The regulations have been mapped to the Quality Code. College staff participate in award boards and module panel meetings. Staff development and training in assessment matters is provided by the awarding body, via ongoing development activities at the awarding body and within the College. New staff are provided with appropriate training and are mentored.

1.7   The College is proactive in reviewing the assessment strategies adopted and internal moderation activities ensure the consistency of marking and grading. The arrangements for the assessment of students are implemented consistently, and are effective in the maintenance of academic standards. Examiner reports confirm satisfaction with the quality of feedback.

1.8   The awarding bodies and organisation policies on all aspects of assessment and subsequent feedback are maintained or exceeded. Information and guidance for assessments is provided to students in their handbook and assessment timetables, and further reinforced in taught sessions. The prior explanation by tutors of the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria was found to be helpful. Written feedback was reported to be constructive, and a further explanation in tutorials was made available.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.9   Programme design and development is undertaken in accordance with awarding body or organisation procedures. These have been developed in alignment with the Quality Code, and include an appropriate level of externality. Procedures for approval, monitoring and review are governed by the awarding body or organisation, as specified in the Memoranda of Agreement, and work well.

1.10   Programmes are reviewed by the awarding body or organisation on a regular basis and monitored annually. An annual Framework Leader's Report is completed for each programme. This is informed by aspects such as student achievement statistics, student feedback, unit monitoring reports and external examiner comments. These reports are discussed at Framework Team meetings before submission to the Higher Education Academic Board and are signed off by the Head of Higher Education. The reports are then sent for approval to the awarding body or organisation and the outcomes inform the continuous action plans, the achievement of which is monitored at Framework Team meetings. The Higher Education Academic Board has oversight of both the Framework Leader's Reports and continuous action plans. The Higher Education Academic Board reports to the Quality and Standards Committee through the Principal.

1.11   Student representatives are involved in the annual review processes through their membership of the Framework Team meetings. Students receive training in the representative role. Their issues inform the annual review process. Students report satisfaction with the way in which their feedback is incorporated into continuous action plans.

1.12   In light of changes to the external environment and the decision of an awarding body to withdraw from the partnership, the review team **affirms** that the College is clarifying

and developing the role and functions of committees' policies and procedures for the management of higher education academic standards in the transition of awarding bodies.

Subject benchmarks

1.13   The Colleges' programmes have been approved according to the awarding body or organisation procedures, and the documentation for these events includes reference to subject benchmarks and the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark. University staff provide support for College colleagues during and beyond the approval processes and the partnership meetings allow the awarding body opportunities to advise colleges of updates to the Quality Code. There is one professional statutory and regulatory body requirement relevant to the current provision and adequate consideration has been made of this.

Conclusion

1.14   All expectations in the area of academic standards have been met. There are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area. There is evidence that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring standards; previous responses to external review provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   Teaching is contextualised and is of an appropriate standard and staff are knowledgeable, helpful and supportive. Staff are well qualified in accordance with the College's higher education strategic plan and are required to possess a qualification one level above that which they are teaching. Qualifications are checked by the awarding bodies, but not the awarding organisation.

2.2   Experienced teachers support and mentor less experienced colleagues. New staff are allocated a mentor and mentoring takes place both formally and informally. In addition, new staff receive informal training within their team and are supervised when marking to ensure consistency and accuracy of practice. New staff working towards a teaching qualification which includes a research project are encouraged to relate this to their teaching practice to aid their personal development and enhance the learning experience.

2.3   There is no systematic approach for measuring the impact of the teaching and learning, scholarly activity and staff development that is taking place. A comprehensive teaching observation system exists. While the College recognises that the most important aspect of the observation scheme is that it leads to change, it does not currently analyse its higher education teaching profile overall. Remission is allocated to some staff for the purpose of research and though research is undertaken, remission is not used consistently. Staff keep up to date by attending conferences and continuing professional development sessions, reading around their subjects and through liaison with employers. The appraisal system reviews how effective training has been at individual level, but the College does not measure the impact of staff development overall. The review team **recommends** for the

academic year 2013-14 that the College develop a systematic approach to analyse the impact of teaching and learning, scholarly activity and staff development.

Learning resources

2.4   Staff are suitably qualified to deliver their programmes. Learning outcomes are more than adequately covered in teaching. The staff development programme is developed annually by Human Resources with input on content from staff and needs arising from appraisals and lesson observations. Individual staff development requests are supported where financially viable. The College offers 1.5 days of higher education specific continuing professional development.

2.5   Resource allocation is decided by the Senior Management Team with input from relevant teaching teams through their line manager and the Head of Higher Education. Resources are decided at validation and are allocated at academy level. Reading lists are sent to the library to ensure adequate stock. Monitoring of resources is reported in the Framework Leader's Report and reflected in subsequent continuous action plans.

2.6   Learning is effectively facilitated by the provision of resources. Students are able to access a new, larger designated Higher Education Centre resulting in part from Student Unit Evaluation surveys. Students confirmed that resources, the book stock and journals are mostly good and have improved, the exception being some e-resources which are less accessible. One awarding body online library is used and viewed as satisfactory. Library staff and lab technicians are seen as supportive. Natural resources are used where applicable, for example the coastal areas, caravan parks and Dartmoor.

2.7   The recently enhanced personal research dissertation unit provides excellent support to students. Students receive a two-hour introduction in June that allows them to start collecting data over the summer. Then, throughout the academic year students receive additional tuition in research methods, statistics and writing. Regular supervision takes place until the dissertation is complete. The enhanced Personal Research Dissertation Support Unit is a **feature of good practice**.

2.8   Most staff use the virtual learning environment and the College has a minimum requirement for material to be uploaded. A new position of a Learning Technologist has recently been introduced, part of whose remit is to report the usage of the virtual learning environment. Support is offered to staff to incorporate information learning technology into teaching. Students expressed mixed views on the use of the virtual learning environment as it is used inconsistently by tutors but overall adequately (see paragraph 3.4).

Student voice

2.9   The College's higher education strategy recognises the need for student involvement in quality assurance. Students are encouraged to sit on committees at different levels. Students understand and contribute to the student representative system. Part-time students are less involved although contact is maintained through e-mail and one representative is a part-time student. A University of Bournemouth representative sits on Framework Team meetings and supports the College's student representatives. This support is of a high standard and is welcomed by students. Student representatives receive training from both the College and the University of Bournemouth. The College uses the University of Bournemouth's model to train its student representatives. Students confirmed they are familiar with the Framework Team meetings but did show some confusion about the remit of committees.

2.10   The College actively gathers feedback from students and students' voices are heard in decision-making bodies. Student views are used to inform the annual monitoring process and feed in to the College's continuous action plans. Surveys take place during lectures and are made available on the virtual learning environment. Surveys are completed on entry to the College and at the end of each unit. Students also complete surveys on behalf of the partner higher education institutes and the results are fed back to the College. The student council exists as a forum for views. Student representatives complete reports which feed in to Framework meetings. The student higher education ambassador has direct links to the principal who holds sessions with student representatives.

Management information

2.11   There are centrally administered policies and systems to allow the collection of relevant management information. Policies are up-to-date and are in line with the Quality Code. Programme information is collected by programme leaders and is sent to the Head of Higher Education. A summary is reported to the Higher Education Academic Board and is used as part of the self-assessment process outlined in the higher education strategy. For programmes managed by Bournemouth University the responsibility for collecting information is laid out in the partnership agreement. Student data is collected in line with the student data management policy. Student views are collected at the end of each unit and analysed to provide information for Framework reports and the self-assessment process.

2.12   The Higher Education Academic Board does not produce its own separate annual report on higher education. There is no analysis or evaluation of higher education teaching observation as findings are amalgamated with further education performance by academy (see paragraph 2.3). A synopsis of higher education performance is reflected in the College's self-assessment report, used primarily for Ofsted requirements. Summaries of higher education programmes are compiled for the purposes of the relevant awarding body and the College uses exit information extracted from data provided by the awarding bodies. Evaluation of student data at a higher education-wide level rather than at programme or awarding body level does not take place. The review team **recommends** that by September 2013 the College takes responsibility for evaluating information from the awarding bodies to inform planning and enhancement at higher education-wide level.

Admission to the College

2.13   The College's policies and procedures for the recruitment and admission of students are fair, clear and explicit and are in accordance with awarding bodies' and organisation's regulations. Decisions regarding admissions are made by the individual programme leader with the support of the Higher Education Administrator. All staff involved in admissions are equipped to make the required judgements and have received training either from an awarding body or internally. The College informs applicants of the obligations placed on prospective students at the time of a conditional or unconditional offer. All applicants receive a welcome letter outlining services, rules and financial support. Students undergo a three-day induction process which is well received. The College regularly reviews its admissions processes at both programme and college level and this feeds into Framework Team meetings and continuous action plans.

2.14   The College uses innovative approaches to bolster the admission process. Students on the work-based learning unit have developed a promotional video. The higher education taster day supports applicants in making informed decisions. Prospective students have the opportunity to view examples of student work prior to selecting a course, with dissertation examples published on the College's website and the virtual learning environment. The Science Summer School provides students the opportunity to consolidate

and enhance their scientific knowledge to ensure they meet the required academic standard for the course. The Science Summer School that enables students to reach a suitable level required for their course is a **feature of good practice**.

Complaints and appeals

2.15   The College has fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals as set out in the College's Equality Policy. All complaints bar those delivered through the Royal Agricultural University are addressed by the College in accordance with its Views and Complaints policy. The policy is reviewed annually and ultimately is reported to the Governors' Quality and Standards Committee. Complaints are monitored at Framework Team meetings, inform continuous action plans and are reported to the Equality and Diversity Committee on a termly basis. Academic complaints and appeals follow the relevant awarding bodies' policies and procedures. For the Higher National Diploma, the College is responsible for appeals. Non-academic appeals are dealt with by the Views and Complaints Officer. The College has a complaints box which is available to staff, students and visitors.

2.16   Suitable advice and support is provided so that students know how to access and use the complaints procedures. Complaints procedures are clearly outlined in course handbooks which are given to students at the beginning of the academic year. The handbooks are discussed as part of the induction process and students are also advised that further information can be obtained from the Higher Education Coordinator. Procedures are also available on the virtual learning environment.

Career advice and guidance

2.17   The College is responsible for ensuring appropriate career education, information, advice and guidance is provided to higher education students and has satisfactory policies and procedures in place. Information is available to students before and during their time enrolled at the College. Career education is embedded in the curriculum, which contributes to the learning outcomes of the programme through the incorporation of work-based learning. Career guidance is driven at unit level by subject specialists and extensive industrial contacts. There is a dedicated careers information section in the Learning Resource Centre and information is available on the virtual learning environment. The majority of careers information is assured by the awarding institution. At college level, career advice and guidance is assured at programme level and referred to framework committee if necessary.

Supporting disabled students

2.18   The College ensures in its policies, procedures and activities consideration is given to the removal of barriers in order to enable disabled students to participate in all aspects of academic and social life at the College. Prospective students are made aware of available entitlements via the College website and through recruitment. Information for supporting equality in the College is outlined to staff in the staff handbook and on the virtual learning environment. Information and disclosure of disabilities is gathered at a cross-college level. The College conducts an equality impact analysis, which is effective in evaluating the provision for disabled students. Students are very satisfied with the provision and support given in relation to reasonable adjustments.

Supporting international students

2.19   The College has a Tier 4 licence and Highly Trusted Sponsor status but does not currently recruit international students.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.20   The College's higher education Strategy informs and drives the selection and implementation of collaborative arrangements. Clear agreements with each awarding body or awarding organisation set out roles and responsibilities. Staff are made aware of their responsibilities for programme quality through the induction pack and the mentoring process. Students are made aware of the respective responsibilities in the student handbooks, which contain the programme specifications. Marketing and publicity is managed according to which institution's programme is delivered and is managed in close accordance with the appropriate awarding body or organisation.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.21   The Foundation Degree in Tourism and Park Management is the only distance learning course delivered at the College, was established at the request of the industry and is delivered according to industry requirements. Learning is undertaken at various tourism parks around the country throughout the academic year and little to no attendance is required at the College. All other teaching is facilitated online.

2.22   While populated, the students on this course do not use the College's virtual learning environment; rather they use the awarding body's virtual learning environment and another external system (see paragraph 3.4).

Work-based and placement learning

2.23   Work-based learning is an integral part of the College's higher education provision and a core unit to all Foundation Degree and Higher National Diploma programmes. The relationship between work-based learning and the rest of the programme is made clear to students in the Learning Outcomes Matrix. The College provides students and employers with an extensive work-based learning placement guide. Information on work-based learning is also supplied on the virtual learning environment and the College's website. Support during the unit is the responsibility of the employer and Programme Leader though the College does not visit each work-based placement, but is considering increasing the number of visits.

2.24   All students are required to complete a work-based learning portfolio; completed portfolios are extensive and outline all learning outcomes expected from the unit. Students are aware of the assessment required for the unit and undergo formal teaching sessions as part of the work-based learning. The unit offers a positive experience for the students.

Student charter

2.25   The College's student charter, the Deal, is in the Student Handbook and clearly outlines what is expected of and by the College and its students. On enrolment all students are given a memory stick which contains information such as handbooks, code of conduct and complaint procedures. Students are required to sign the code of conduct and know how to make appeals and complaints. The student charter is reviewed by the student council.

Conclusion

2.26 All expectations have been met in the area of the quality of student learning opportunities. There are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area. Recommendations relate to analysing information across the higher education provision. There is evidence that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality; previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

3 Public information

Summary

Kingston Maurward College makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate and up to date. Students find the information useful both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to Kingston Maurward College, and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The quality of information produced for applicants and students at Kingston Maurward College **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 Responsibilities for the approval, monitoring and review of information are shared between the College and awarding bodies or organisation. The College operates guidelines produced by the universities. Internally the Marketing Manager is responsible for the development of marketing material together with the programme leaders. The materials are approved by the Head of Higher Education. The Head of Higher Education is also responsible for approving student handbooks which, when applicable, are produced by customising the awarding body template.

3.2 Upon beginning their course at the College, students are given a wide range of documentation. This is tailored for the diverse student body. Key information is also delivered verbally within induction to ensure points of clarification. Students felt that they fully understood the College's rules and regulations.

3.3 The information detailed in HEFCE 2011-18, and in particular the Key Information Set and the Wider Information Set, is up to date and accessible to the College's stakeholders. The Head of Higher Education is responsible for making returns to Higher Education Statistics Agency and for Key Information Set data for directly funded higher education provision. The information sets are readily accessible on the relevant web pages and carry appropriate logos.

3.4 The extent and quality of information provided for students at unit level on the virtual learning environment is inconsistent. The virtual learning environment houses a wide range of learning resources for students and responsibility for monitoring content and staff usage rests with the College Learning Technologist. The virtual learning environment contains relevant quality assurance information for staff, and unit leaders are responsible for ensuring that important information is available to students. Not all staff make full use of the virtual learning environment. Some use a wide range of features, but others provide minimal information. Moreover, some students and programmes do not make use of the virtual learning environment. The review team **recommends** that for the academic year 2013-14 the College improve the quality and consistency of information provided on the virtual learning environment at unit level (see paragraphs 2.8 and 2.22).

3.5 The College acknowledges that students would benefit from being able to view examiner reports, and intends to make them accessible through the virtual learning environment. Student representatives have access to the responses to examiner reports when they are discussed at the Framework Team meetings, when they attend. The College is not clear how student representatives report back to the rest of their cohort the outcomes of examiner reports. Not all students who met reviewers are fully aware of the external examination arrangements, or how external examiner reports are used within the College. The review team **recommends** that from September 2013 the College makes external examiners' annual reports available in full to students as part of involving students in quality assurance processes.

Conclusion

3.6 The expectation has been met in the area of the quality of the information produced by the College about its learning opportunities. There are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area. Recommendations relate to improving the quality and consistency of information on the virtual learning environment and the provision of external examiner reports. There is evidence that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality; previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

4.1 The College's Higher Education Strategy makes a commitment to maintain a management information system designed to improve target setting and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Reports are compiled from course teams and are reported upwards through Framework Team meetings and the Higher Education Academic Board. Continuous action plans monitor the improvements.

4.2 Students contribute to the enhancement of their learning opportunities by giving feedback both in surveys and verbally. Comments are incorporated into unit reports, which feed into continuous action plans.

4.3 Enhancement is not discussed as a standing item at committee meetings and discussions about enhancement are conducted in an informal way. The Head of Higher Education provides a conduit for upwards and downwards dissemination of good practice. The teaching profile is not measured to quantify enhancement of teaching nor is the impact of staff development. The review team **recommends** that by December 2013 the College develop a planned approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities that is integral to College meetings and evaluated across the higher education provision.

4.4 Although it is implicit in Framework Team meetings, there is no separate strategy for enhancement. The College's higher education strategy sets out the College's aims to enhance learning opportunities, although many are still aspirational. The College is in the process of writing an enhancement strategy. The review team **affirms** the development of the College's overarching enhancement strategy for higher education.

Conclusion

4.5   The expectation has been met in the area of the enhancement of student learning opportunities. There are no current or potential material risks to the management of this area. Recommendations relate to moving from a collection of examples of good practice, which might spring up across the College, to taking deliberate steps at College level to improve the quality of learning opportunities. There is evidence that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality; previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

5   Theme: The First Year Student Experience

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Review of College Higher Education teams. In 2012-13, the themes are the **First Year Student Experience** or **Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**.

The review team investigated the first year student experience at Kingston Maurward College. The College actively seeks and responds to the views of the students in order to continually improve the first year student experience. Information provided to students pre-arrival is good and students feel their expectations are met in their first year. Students are positive about their transition into higher education at Kingston Maurward and feel supported and valued throughout their studies.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   With students entering the College from diverse backgrounds, the College has implemented a number of flexible support systems to aid the transition into higher education such as higher education taster days and the Science Summer School.

5.2   Students are invited to attend an extended three day induction at the beginning of the academic year. The extension is a result of student feedback from previous years and has been received well by current students. Academic support is extensive and well organised. Additional support is given to students with alternative learning needs.

Information for first year students

5.3   Information for first year students is comprehensive and outlines expectations well. Students are aware of what is expected of them prior to enrolment and throughout the first year. Prior to enrolment the College ensures all necessary information is available to students through the website or prospectus. At induction students are given a College memory stick with detailed information. The College reviews the initial student entry survey results and feedback has stated that these days play an important role in decision-making.

Assessment and feedback

5.4   The College uses a number of assessment strategies throughout their higher education programmes. Some of the formative assessments interplay within the lesson design as student guided activities and others are linked to practical assessment. Previously marked work such as dissertation examples are available for viewing on the virtual learning environment and website.

5.5 The College acknowledges the importance of clear and developmental feedback; students have commented that the feedback given is useful. There is a three-week turnaround for marking, which appears to be adhered to and external examiners reports comment positively on the feedback given.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.6 Retention and progression data are considered at Framework Team meetings and used as part of the annual programme monitoring process. There is no overarching analysis of progression or retention as this is managed at individual programme level.

5.7 Official attendance monitoring is not undertaken on higher education programmes. Informal monitoring is taken and students with low attendance are contacted by a member of higher education staff. There are plans in place to make an official attendance monitoring system for 2013-14.

Glossary

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

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

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

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

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

enhancement: Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice: A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution or college manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

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

framework for higher education qualifications: A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

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

learning outcome: What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition: A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study): An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications: Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information: Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code: Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

subject benchmark statement: A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

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

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