



Quality Review Visit of Holy Cross College

May 2018

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Holy Cross College

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at Holy Cross College

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.**

Areas for development

The review team identified no **areas for development**

Specified improvements

The review team identified no **specified improvements**.

About this review

The review visit took place from 9 to 10 May 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Sarah d'Ambrumenil (Student Reviewer)
- Mr Mike Slawin
- Dr Carol Vielba.

The overall aim of Quality Review Visit is to:

- provide the relevant funding body with an expert judgement about the readiness of a provider to enter, or continue to operate within, the higher education sector.

Quality Review Visit is designed to:

- ensure that the student interest is protected
- provide expert advice to ensure that the reputation of the UK higher education system is protected, including the protection of degree standards
- identify development areas that will help a provider to progress through a developmental period and be considered 'established'.

Each review visit considers a provider's arrangements against relevant aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements, and in particular:

- the reliability of degree standards and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers
- the quality of the student academic experience, including student outcomes where the provider has a track record of delivery of higher education.

About Holy Cross College

Holy Cross College is a Catholic College offering further and higher education, situated on a single campus in Bury, Greater Manchester. The College took its present form in the late 1970s as a mixed, state sixth form college, and in 1999 added Higher Education provision.

Holy Cross has four Partner Organisations. The first of these is Liverpool Hope, and all of this curriculum is within scope, including provision taught at Holy Cross, or at St Mary's, Blackburn under Holy Cross numbers. There are 398 students studying under these arrangements, with two-thirds on the Holy Cross site, and the remainder at the St Mary's, Blackburn site. The Liverpool Hope-linked provision consists solely of honours degrees in Education, English, History, Early Childhood Studies, Special Educational Needs and Business Management.

In relation to the other three Providers (St Mary's Twickenham, Newman University and Edge Hill University) these have all been agreed as being 'out of scope'.

The Liverpool Hope-linked provision is embedded within the 'Network of Hope', which is a partnership between Liverpool Hope University and church sixth-form colleges sharing in a common mission in the North West, including Holy Cross College. The College, while taking full responsibility for its own students and the quality of the provision they receive, draws on and benefits from the strengths of the network in terms of collaborative arrangements which promote a shared ethos of the Network of Hope mission.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College's programmes are delivered in partnership with Liverpool Hope University (the University). While the College has some input into the approval process, through membership of the University Senate, the University takes responsibility for the approval of the programmes.

2 The University's approval process includes direct reference to the FHEQ in its definitive programme documentation and takes account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements for each programme, where appropriate. The University maintains the definitive record of the programmes and subsequent changes, which includes aligning learning outcomes to the relevant qualification descriptors of the FHEQ both in the documentation to propose and approve new provision and in the definitive record documentation.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

3 The College's Governing Body observes the Association of Colleges (AoC) Code of Governance, and is committed to the Principles of Standards in Public Life. The Governing Body has six Committees: Audit, Property and Finance, Personnel, Search, Remuneration, and Quality and Standards. All of these Committees are formally constituted with terms of reference.

4 The College's Higher Education Management Team provide regular updates to Governing Body, with arrangements for maintaining oversight of academic governance occurring primarily through the Quality and Standards Committee. The range of Governors Committees that consider aspects of the College's higher education provide information and assurance to the Governing Body through reports, the Student Governor and Principal's membership and, where required, presentations to Governing Body from key staff.

5 There is a College Risk Register which includes aspects relating to the College's higher education provision. Academic risk is discussed at Quality and Standards Committee. Each committee considers its designated part of the risk register, with the whole document considered as a standard agenda item at Audit Committee.

6 Principles of academic freedom and collegiality are supported through the College being part of the Network of Hope. This provides a commitment to the awarding partner's idea of the Collegium. This position is reviewed and if necessary challenged by governors through their consideration of the Centre's Annual Report.

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

7 The College has satisfactory arrangements in place for discharging its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards.

8 The University is responsible for the design, development, approval and modification of the provision delivered through the College. The College Principal, as a member of University Senate, participates in the oversight of academic standards and programme approval processes applicable to this provision. The University approves any

modifications to delivery needed to reflect the delivery model used at the College. It is also responsible for the maintenance of definitive records such as programme specifications. These are produced using the academic framework and approval processes of the University, which have been designed to meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

9 The external examining system operated by the University further assures the standards of the provision delivered through the College. External examiners are appointed by the University and comment on the standards of provision and student achievement. Their reports confirm that the College achieves comparability of standards with other UK providers. The College contributes to the dialogue with external examiners and discussion of their reports.

10 The College is not involved in testing that students have achieved the academic standards set. All assessment, first marking, and provision of feedback to students is undertaken by the University. However, the College actively supports the University's assessment practices both academically and administratively. The College offers students who lack recent formal educational experience a six-week preparatory course prior to commencing their studies, which includes techniques for undertaking assignments effectively and advice on good academic practice. Support tutors at both campuses where the provision is delivered direct students to appropriate study skills material available online and at the University; provide support to students to ensure that they complete assignments and have confidence to undertake examinations; and help them to interpret and apply feedback.

11 The University issues guidance on its assessment policies and procedures which the College follows. College staff attend the University's Standing Subcommittee on Assessment where policies and practices are discussed. Cross-college meetings ensure that similar practice is adopted at both the Holy Cross and St Mary's campuses. The College is responsible for ensuring that exam papers sent by the University are held securely. Invigilators receive training from the University. The College has processes which ensure the security of completed scripts and any assignments handed in locally. College staff attend exam boards.

12 The College organises itself around an annual quality cycle which includes the gathering and analysis of data. The quality cycle involves regular meetings of core groups within the College; across the colleges delivering this provision; and more widely across the Network of Hope. Minutes demonstrate that the cycle of meetings and activities involved provide effective oversight of quality and standards of the provision delivered through the College, as well as leading to enhancement of the student experience.

13 The College compiles an annual self-assessment report which includes an improvement plan with responsibilities and target dates for actions. Student data on admissions profiles, progression, completion and outcomes as well as survey results inform the report.

14 Provision delivered through the College is included in the University's Annual Review and Enhancement (ARE) process which examines both quality and standards. ARE reports are prepared by the University on a departmental basis using detailed statistical data on student progression and achievement, NSS scores, and external examiner comments. Actual scores are compared with University targets and RAG (red-amber-green) rated. The reports include trends over time and separate analysis of the performance of Hope campus students and those studying through the Network of Hope, which includes the provision delivered through the College. The analysis underpins a section on planned enhancement. Annual Review and Enhancement Reports are considered by the College, and within the University.

15 The Network of Hope Experience and Academic Quality Committee (EAQC) holds an annual review and planning day in July. The University provides the College with access to extensive data from its student records system and other data sources such as TEF. The College also uses external sources such as the College Based Higher Education Local Impact Service (CHELIS) analysis of higher education learners in further education colleges prepared by the Education and Training Foundation. The College uses these data sources to monitor outcomes and to inform enhancement.

16 The University operates a five-year periodic review process at departmental level which includes the review of provision delivered through the Network of Hope. The reviews are broad, covering undergraduate and postgraduate provision and both teaching and learning activity. The basis of the review is a detailed critical analysis of the quality and standards of the department's provision, drawing on statistical data and stakeholder perspectives.

Rounded judgement

17 The academic standards of higher education courses are set by the awarding body and the College has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards through its engagement with the Network of Hope and other governance structures; internal processes and procedures; adherence to the regulations of the awarding body; and engagement with the FHEQ. There are no specified improvements in this area, and no areas for development.

18 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

19 The College is involved in a tripartite agreement known as the Network of Hope with St. Mary's College, Blackburn, and Liverpool Hope University. Students and staff are fully engaged within this Network, and recognise the roles of the Colleges and the University within it.

20 The College's higher education provision is delivered in the evenings. The majority of students are described by the College as 'second-chance' learners. Students appreciate the evening mode of study, supported by online resources, which provides a flexible approach to study, work, and family.

21 The recruitment and admissions process is clear and transparent. All prospective students have an initial interview, and their suitability to study is assessed. Students confirmed that the information they received relating to the College is accurate and trustworthy, and that their experience of the admissions process is supportive and helpful.

22 As part of the Network of Hope, the College is represented by both staff and students in the Experience and Academic Quality Committee (NHEAQC). This is a key committee for the College within the Network of Hope. The Committee meets regularly with a comprehensive remit which includes monitoring and receiving minutes of Staff-Student Liaison meetings, the reviewing of qualitative and quantitative data relating to academic achievement and the student experience and consideration of and monitoring of actions relating to external examiner reports.

23 The College considers data that then informs their decisions and helps enhance the student experience. Data relating to attendance, success rates by level and classification and progression are discussed and scrutinised at NHEAQC as well as internal College meetings.

24 Student engagement is effective and extensive, with involvement in academic experience, quality, learning and teaching, and assessment. This occurs at a number of levels; students are represented at Staff-Student Liaison meetings, there are student representatives invited to NHEAQC, there is a Student Governor who represents higher education students at Governing Body, and there is student representation at the annual Planning Day. Staff-Student Liaison meetings are well attended by both students and staff, and discussions cover resources to support learning, assessment and wider issues such as car parking. Students confirmed that they are listened to and the College is effective in responding to their requests where possible. In addition to this, the College operates an open-door policy to students, with students confirming that they feel enabled and encouraged speak out when they feel the need to.

25 Students provide formal feedback through SSLs and questionnaires which are discussed at staff meetings. This includes feedback relating to teaching, learning and assessment as well as their experience of induction, support from staff and resources. This information is analysed and included in the annual Self-Assessment Report, the annual Higher Education Report, and contributes to the Annual Review and Enhancement process. These reports generate action plans based on qualitative and quantitative data, which are monitored by senior college staff, the University, and the College Governing Body. These measures contribute to assuring the College of the quality of learning, teaching and support being experienced by its students.

26 The College reviews and updates the resources for its programmes regularly. Staff are included in the Network of Hope library meetings which consider sufficiency and availability of resources. Students have access to the University library and resources as well as that of the College, and confirm that resources are easily accessible and plentiful, and when requested, regularly transported in from the University. In addition to this, there is a budget available to the College library in order to add to the resources should it be deemed necessary.

The relevant code of governance: such as the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) or the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

27 The College has robust governance arrangements which ensure that the student voice is heard at all levels and that the issues and complaints raised by students are addressed effectively.

28 A student governor is elected by the student body and is a full member of the Board of Governors. Students are invited to attend the Network of Hope Experience and Academic Quality Committee and can participate in periodic reviews of provision. From this year the student governor and the Lead Student Representative will be invited to attend the annual Planning Day. Staff-Student Liaison meetings occur regularly. An innovative feedback form has been developed to allow working students to contribute to meetings. Induction and training is provided to all governors including the student governor. All students receive training related to representation.

29 The Governing Body is made aware of any formal complaints that have been received. No formal complaints relating to higher education have been received in the last two years. The College prepares an annual higher education report which is seen by the Governing Body. This report contains a summary of action to be taken on issues raised by students through formal and informal feedback. Governors receive other reports and briefings on matters related to the welfare and experience of higher education students during the year.

Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met (Competition and Markets Authority guidance)

30 The College's arrangements in its approach to consistent and transparent admissions are effective. It has a detailed and robust approach to the admissions process, which includes providing prospective students with an Admissions Guidance document outlining the terms and conditions of admission and the admissions complaints and appeals procedures. The admissions process also includes at least one face-to-face meeting with a member of staff, which enables the College to assure itself of the prospective student's understanding of the course information and provides the prospective student with an opportunity for questions. Staff at the College annually review and make improvements to the information on the admissions process and the information they provide to students. All of these arrangements culminate in the prospective students being given the information they need in order to make an informed decision.

31 The College's arrangements for ensuring that terms and conditions are fair and balanced, clear and unambiguous and accessible are effective. Students are issued with a Student's Guide to Regulations and Policies, which clearly outlines the Network of Hope's terms and conditions; information is also included on the website and within the student handbook and staff are aware of their obligations. If students have any questions regarding formal processes they can ask their Support Tutor, who can then signpost and advise on issues that arise.

32 Complaint-handling processes are accessible, clear and fair. The College clearly outlines to students their rights and the processes for raising academic and non-academic complaints within the Student Handbook, on the website and through the Support Tutor role.

Student protection measures as expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) Principles of Good Administration, and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures

33 The College's processes for course changes and closures are those set by the University and these are effective. The processes include individual support offered by tutors for applicants where a course is changed or withdrawn before enrolment, or a teach-out plan where students are part way through a Network of Hope programme. The College undertakes risk management processes to ensure they are aware of potential risks.

34 Course changes involve consultation between the University and the College and may come about directly as a result of student feedback. Students are involved in the design and review of programmes through the University quality assurance processes and also have an opportunity to provide feedback through Student-Staff Liaison Committees and on the Network of Hope Experience and Academic Quality Committee.

35 The College has confirmed that it would attempt to provide support within the wider higher education sector in the event of a programme or provider closure elsewhere, if this was within the College's area of expertise.

36 The College's arrangements for ensuring that complaints and appeals processes are proportionate, fair, timely, independent and confidential are effective. It has engaged proactively with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and taken account of its guidance in relation to its complaints procedures. The College works closely with the University to ensure that academic appeals and complaints in relation to academic provision are handled appropriately and signpost to academic and non-academic complaint procedures through the Student Handbook, the website and through Tutors and Support Tutors. Students have confirmed that they are aware of the Complaints Procedure.

37 The College has effective arrangements in using outcomes for complaints and appeals processes to improve the student experience. The College has not received a formal non-academic complaint within the last two years but has processes in place for considering low-level student concerns, which are routinely considered at staff meetings, Student Support meetings and annual planning meetings. The College has processes in place to consider formal complaints if this were required. An annual report goes to the governors, which includes a summary of actions.

Rounded judgement

38 The College has demonstrated through its governance structures and internal policies and procedures, and its engagement with the University through the Network of Hope, that it meets all the baseline regulatory requirements in this area effectively. There are no specified improvements in this area, and no areas for development

39 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

QAA2165 - R9963 - July 18

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