



Initial Review: report of the interim monitoring visit at Holy Cross College, February 2015

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided before and during the interim monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the Holy Cross College is making acceptable progress with implementing the action plan arising from the recommendations of the QAA [Initial Review in March 2013](#).

Section 2: Background

2 QAA carried out an Initial Review at Holy Cross College (the College) in March 2013. At that time, the College published an action plan in response to the outcomes of the Review. The aim of interim monitoring is to provide information for the public on whether or not the College is making acceptable progress with implementing the action plan. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the College of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next review.

3 The interim monitoring visit was carried out by a review team (the team) consisting of Mr Ian Welch, Review Manager, and Professor Sue Frost, Reviewer, on 27 February 2015.

Section 3: Changes since the Initial Review

4 The College has received student numbers from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) under the Core and Margin funding arrangement. Holy Cross College is now the lead institution for numbers allocated to support higher education. St Mary's College in Blackburn also delivers aspects of some programmes by arrangement with Holy Cross College. This has stabilised the numbers studying through Holy Cross. Overall, there are around 367 full-time equivalent students.

5 New courses are being planned, including the consideration of a degree in Legal Studies in partnership with the University of Salford, with the College providing campus facilities. New courses are being planned, and a Law degree (LLB) has been agreed with the University of Salford, with the College providing campus facilities, student support and some teaching staff.

6 Minor curriculum development and modification to programmes has been undertaken, overseen by Liverpool Hope University (the University).

7 The College leadership has a new Head of Centre and a designated Senior Manager for Higher Education.

Section 4: Update on good practice

8 The close and effective working relationship among staff at the College, St Mary's College and the University remains a feature of the provision. Students shared a very positive view of their respective Colleges and the University. There is a number of examples of this close working relationship offering students extensive support and guidance. These

relationships continue to be a significant factor in the effective delivery of programmes delivered locally at the College and through St Mary's College.

9 The College has continued to collect data and monitor student engagement with the online learning platform. This data is matched with attendance and performance data to identify students who need additional support and guidance. The review team came to the view that this good practice could be extended to provide more systematic data analysis and information reports for the College Leadership Team. Such a development might support greater understanding of student progression and attrition, and new programme developments with other partners.

Section 5: Update on recommendations

That the College agrees with Liverpool Hope University and St Mary's College effective arrangements to enable all staff who support learning to see the reports of external examiners and to contribute to decisions about how to respond to those reports.

10 The Colleges and the University have reviewed the current arrangements and have recognised a need for consistency in seeking the contribution of College staff to the responses to external examiner reports. An action plan was established and the response to external examiner reports was reviewed by the University's Experience and Academic Oversight Committee (EAOC) and action taken to ensure that contributions from colleges are sought for each external examiner report.

11 Minutes of subsequent meetings show that this has been put into action systematically in 2014 and staff are playing an active role in responding to external reports. Illustrations from the College demonstrate the consistent process and effectiveness of these actions.

12 Senior Managers who met the review team confirmed that the outcome of external examiner reports are discussed and a report made to the Principal through the weekly meetings and periodic reports to the College Leadership Team and Governors. It was noted that there are rarely comments in reports that refer specifically to the College. The Holy Cross Leadership team recognised the value of discussing the reports with the University in order to receive feedback.

13 This recommendation has been addressed and the evidence suggests that actions arising have been fully implemented.

That the College agree effective arrangements with the awarding body and St Mary's College to share external examiner reports with students, taking into account the guidance provided in Indicators 14 and 15 of *Chapter B7: External Examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

14 The College agreed initial action with the University that students will have access to external examiner reports that will be made available through the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). Students are now informed at various times during their studies how to access the external examiner report on their study programme.

15 Students are informed initially how to access reports by means of a text message. Information is also available on notice boards. The Student-Staff Liaison (SSL) meetings also discuss the comments of external examiners. Examples of this appear in a report from the Registrar to students at the SSL in 2014.

16 Although students who met the review team confirmed that they were aware of external examiner reports being available through the VLE and how to locate them, none of the students who met the team had sought to access the reports. In the discussion with the team, senior managers recognised the value of these reports and the need for further action to ensure that students understood the value of reading them. Students also commented positively on the value of the personal feedback that they receive about their assignments.

17 This recommendation has been implemented. To ensure full effectiveness of the actions taken, further information could be provided to students to support their understanding of the value of examiner reports.

That the College ensure that the information provided to current and prospective students emphasises how much private study/independent learning is involved in undertaking the programmes of study.

18 The College and the University have explored a range of ways to ensure that current and prospective students have information about the demands of their study programme and are supported in accommodating them. A student profile and timetable is made available to prospective students to illustrate the demand of the programme and to give a sense of independent study requirements. More explicit requirements for study programmes have been developed in the course handbooks. Further work has been done to give advice and information about time management and study skills resources. Support is provided during induction.

19 Guidance has been developed for course leaders to ensure that they are aware of the need to specify the amount of private and independent study required by their programmes. This is overseen by EAOC.

20 Students who met the review team confirmed that they had access to the student profile and timetable developed in the post-review action plan, and that these had been helpful. Students who met the team indicated that many of them would welcome more specific guidance threaded through the programme to ensure information was provided in a timely way to support them at particular pressure points. One example was that of students who felt the need to take time off work to cope with the demands of their course. This had not been anticipated on admission. Many of the students are working in full-time jobs as well as undertaking their full-time degree programme. This produces significant pressures that could be addressed to ensure that key points in the teaching and assessment schedule are managed to reduce pressure where possible.

21 The action plan following the Initial Review put in place some additional mechanisms but the team feels that this work needs to continue to ensure that students fully understand the demands of full-time study, while employed, and can accommodate the pressure of major assessment. The Senior Managers who met the review team recognised the issue and indicated that work is ongoing to support information for students.

22 This recommendation has been partially met. Continuing action is appropriate and likely to meet the requirements.

That the College strengthen the opportunities for student engagement in decision-making bodies (such as the Experience and Academic Oversight Committee, and the governing body of the College), taking into account the guidance in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

23 A student-governor post was agreed but attempts to fill this in 2013-14 were frustrated by the resignation of the only candidate. However, a student governor has now been elected. St Mary's College has also successfully appointed a student governor. Plans are underway to ensure that Liverpool Hope University students studying at Holy Cross and St Mary's Colleges have the opportunity to raise issues with the student members of Senate appointed at the University.

24 Student representation is a standard item at staff-student liaison meetings, providing an important opportunity for the College to debate student participation in decision making and to explore ways of extending the current opportunities. The membership of the EAOC has been extended to include student representation from Holy Cross and St Mary's Colleges. A student representative has attended meetings and participated in discussion. Further discussions are underway to explore how to sustain and develop the student representation at key meetings.

25 At the Interim Review visit the review team met some students who were representatives. Students gave a positive account of their ability to give feedback and make a contribution to decision making at course level. Staff at both Colleges are highly responsive to student views and examples of major change were given. One example is the provision of a coffee shop that is highly valued by students studying in the evening and attending from work.

26 The review team came to the view that opportunities have been extended considerably for student representation and the College recognises that this work is emergent and that more needs to be done. As the representatives increase their participation and are supported into their roles this is likely to meet the recommendation by amplifying the student voice.

That the College consider how it might enhance the ability of support tutors to provide support to students which draws on an understanding, and reflects the specific nature, of the subject being studied

27 The College has worked with the University to ensure that support tutors fully understand their role in communicating information to students. Additional material has been provided for support tutors and information in the undergraduate handbooks has been clarified. Prospective students have a meeting with a support tutor and an initial advice form is completed. This provides an reminder for the support tutor that ensures all of the key information is discussed. 2014-15 handbooks have been developed further to include information on teaching staff, their roles and contact details. Support tutors have access to the virtual learning environment to supplement information for students. A support tutor appointment sheet is maintained which records meetings with students and confirms advice offered.

28 Students who met the review team were positive about the support offered. An arrangement is in place for lecturers from the University to attend the College in advance of the teaching session to meet students in groups or individuals, by appointment. Students feel supported and commented on the value of the subject support from lecturing staff. Email discussion and video tutorials over the internet are now used and students can access specialist help quickly and effectively.

29 The review team came to the view that appropriate action has been implemented to provide effective subject-specialist support for students and the recommendation has been met.

Section 6: Update on affirmations

30 No affirmations were made at the Initial Review.

Section 7: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

31 In its deliberations following the Initial Review, the College has worked with the University to take account of the external academic reference points. The Quality Code underpins all of the activity that is planned in the review action plan. This reflects practice at the University and provides a common point of discussion.

32 The College is cognisant of the Quality Code and takes responsibility for its implementation within the parameters agreed by the University. The Principal takes responsibility for analysing Quality Code updates and identifying action that relates to the College. The University takes full responsibility for its award standards and oversees academic quality.

33 The College uses the Quality Code to underpin the development of its resource systems and to give an account to the University of actions taken. Senior managers explained that this means a particular focus on sections of the Quality Code it considers relevant to its role, including *Chapters B5: Student Engagement, B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement, B3: Learning and Teaching and B7: External Examining.*

34 The review team noted that the College is funded by HEFCE and purchases its educational provision and academic awards from the University. The College also provides campus-based services for the University provision. The team came to the view that the College may need to consider the Quality Code more widely as its responsibilities may be wider than the College thinks, particularly in relation to its lead role with St Mary's College and potentially in relation to the new roles with other higher education providers. The relationships and responsibilities between the College and its partners are complex and not entirely clear to all staff. In the light of this complexity of roles, the College might helpfully review the Quality Code, for example, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*, to ensure that there is a clear understanding in the College of its roles and responsibilities as a lead institution, as distinct from the main role as a partner institution.

35 In relation to academic enhancement, the College actively seeks to improve the student learning experience and is responsive and reactive to student feedback and to direction from the University. The College does not have a strategic plan that drives its development of higher education but rather draws on a range of policy documents. The team came to the view, from meetings with the senior managers and with students, that the College is committed to improving the learning experience of its students. This could be strengthened by a more systematic, reflective approach that supports deliberate and measurable steps to implement a programme of continued academic enhancement for students. The College is developing its systems effectively and a more systematic use of information to analyse the student experience should supplement anecdotal evidence to provide an even more robust approach to quality management and enhancement.

36 In summary, the review team believes that the College has in place effective mechanisms to realise all of its intentions related to the post-review action plan and with

further work will significantly enhance the student learning experience that builds upon the extensive collaboration and investment in the action plan already in place.

QAA1174 - R4550 - Apr 15

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2015
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Email enquiries@gaa.ac.uk
Web www.gaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786