



Quality Review Visit of Craven College

March 2017

Key findings

QAA's rounded judgements about Craven College

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at Craven College.

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

Areas for development

The review team identified the following **areas for development** that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure the reliability and/or comparability of academic standards at Craven College. The review team advises Craven College to:

- develop formal training for its higher education student representatives (Quality Code and Code of Governance)
- further increase its activities to encourage higher levels of higher education student representative attendance and engagement in academic governance (Quality Code and Code of Governance)
- revise its student module evaluation arrangements to ensure a consistent approach to conducting student module evaluation that operates effectively across all programmes (Quality Code)
- fully document the scrutiny and oversight of annual monitoring by its deliberative committees to ensure there is robust evidence for the purposes of governance and audit (Quality Code)
- ensure that its own internal procedures for the sign-off of publically available information are fully documented (Consumer Protection).

Specified improvements

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

About this review

The review visit took place from 29 to 30 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sylvia Hargreaves
- Professor John Deane
- Mr Daniel McCarthy Stott (student reviewer).

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 Craven College

Craven College (the College) is a general further education college based at Skipton, North Yorkshire, and has centres at Leeds Bradford International Airport, Ripon and Seamer.

The College has 1,612 full-time and 2,345 part-time further education students.

The College does not have degree awarding powers and provides a wide range of higher education provision through validation arrangements with York St John University, The Open University, and Diploma and HNC provision awarded by Pearson and Ascentis, with 250 higher education students undertaking level 4-6 studies each year. Recruitment of full-time higher education students has risen between 2012 and 2015, while during the same period the number of part-time higher education students has declined, with the full-time equivalent count remaining relatively constant. All higher education programmes are delivered via a direct funding arrangement with HEFCE.

The College's provision falling within the scope of the Quality Review Visit consists of an HNC awarded by Pearson and a Diploma in Education and Training awarded by Ascentis, along with 11 foundation degrees and five bachelor's degrees validated by The Open University. In addition it offers three foundation degrees and one progression year bachelor's degree validated by York St John University. The higher education provision is in a range of subject areas from aviation management and operations, fashion, hospitality and business, to conservation and countryside management, animal science, and sports coaching.

Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 Ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the College's four awarding bodies.

2 The College makes effective use of a number of external reference points throughout the quality cycle, including in programme design, validation and revalidation. The College makes rigorous use of external examiner reports, local market information, local employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in ensuring that programmes are set at an appropriate level. Subject Benchmark Statements are used in programme design and regularly reviewed at revalidation and through annual monitoring. The College has effective processes in place for the use external reference points, including external examiner reports to ensure that academic standards are comparable to other higher education providers.

3 The College has effective internal verification procedures for marking students' work and has taken steps to strengthen these processes in recent years. Assessment criteria have been mapped against the FHEQ and standard criteria are used for each award level across the College's higher education provision.

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

4 The College has in place and implements effective arrangements for maintaining oversight of academic governance and risk, and respecting academic freedom and collegiality. The Board of Governors receives and discusses regular reports on higher education via the chair of the Higher Education Scheme Management Board, higher education annual reports and, periodically, reports from the Dean of Higher Education. The chair of the Higher Education Scheme Management Board and the Dean of Higher Education also report to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Governors which receives and discusses higher education annual reports and undertakes ongoing monitoring of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement action plan.

5 The College's risk register and risk management action plan, which include higher education provision, are regularly scrutinised by the Board of Governors and the Audit Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Governors. The annual risk report is reviewed by the Audit Committee and submitted to the Board of Governors for scrutiny and approval.

6 Expectations relating to academic freedom, set out in the Articles of Government, are reiterated in the Staff Code of Conduct, together with expectations of collegiality characterised by mutual support and respect in working towards a common purpose: quality service to students and the community. In meetings with the review team, senior, academic and professional staff demonstrated their clear commitment to meeting these expectations.

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

7 The College maintains the academic standards of its awarding bodies. The College has effective arrangements for testing that students have achieved the academic standards set and for the use of data in monitoring academic standards.

8 The College has in place an effective system for the use of external examiner reports. The external examining approval process is outlined in the provider submission. It is clear from the responsibilities checklist that the appointment of external examiners lies with awarding bodies. External examiner reports are discussed at the Higher Education Operational Group. Externality is also evidenced by way of the awarding bodies' revalidation events, which include external representation from other providers.

9 Systems for the use of data are effective in monitoring academic standards. The Higher Education Scheme Management Board has a calendar outlining which key data sets will come to the Board and when; it receives reports on recruitment, retention, student performance and feedback. Data go in different forms to the Higher Education Operational Group, including data on withdrawals, retention and applications. Data are effectively presented in the action plans developed from the annual monitoring reports.

Rounded judgement

10 Overall, governance and quality management of academic standards are effective and standards are comparable. The review team identified no areas for development or specified improvements.

11 The review team concludes that there can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.

Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

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

12 The quality of the student academic experience is managed and monitored in accordance with the fully documented Higher Education Scheme and institutional oversight rests with the Higher Education Scheme Management Board which, along with its subcommittees, operates within clear terms of reference.

13 Recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures are fair, inclusive, well managed and informed by strategic priorities. Roles, responsibilities and deadlines are clear; selection tests applicants' suitability for study; and processes enable disability support needs to be identified and appropriately addressed.

14 Learning opportunities and teaching practices are reviewed and enhanced, enabling students to develop independent learning, analytical and critical analysis skills. College strategy prescribes academic rigour and vocational relevance. Tutors are appropriately qualified and many hold masters' qualifications. Staff development and appraisal maintain, review and enhance competence in research, scholarship and pedagogy. Autonomous and work-related learning and higher-level skills are incorporated into curricula and effectively delivered. External input feeds into programme and assessment design. Arrangements for using the workplace as a site of learning are implemented securely and managed effectively. Systems ensure appropriate assessment of risk, clarity of responsibilities and regular monitoring.

15 The College has in place arrangements and resources enabling students to develop their academic and professional potential. The higher education estate has been developed and needed improvements have been made to IT systems. Students are highly satisfied with the Learning Resource Centre. In line with its strategic intentions for higher education, the College provides centralised disability, counselling, finance, study skills and careers support. Students greatly value the one-to-one tutor support, the benefits of small groups, and the institutional-level support.

16 Overall, effective steps are taken to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience through student representation, focus groups, module evaluation, internal course surveys and the National Student Survey. Focus groups, course surveys and the National Student Survey are used effectively to identify and follow through enhancements.

17 Course representatives, in place for most programmes, receive support from tutors in their role. While formal training is available to all College student representatives, the College has recognised a need to provide training designed specifically for higher education student representatives. Good practice shared from one of the awarding bodies is informing the development of bespoke training, and the College has facilitated the Lead Student Representative's attendance at external briefings on national quality review processes. The Higher Education Scheme Management Board and Higher Education Operational Group include student representative members, and a student representative has attended and participated in some recent meetings. The review team therefore advises, as an **area for development**, that the College develops formal training for its higher education student representatives.

18 The College has taken steps to improve levels of student representative attendance at formal meetings, which it recognises as a continuing challenge. The challenges presented

with respect to student engagement at Board of Governors level are referred to in paragraph 23, below. The review team therefore advises, as an **area for development**, that the College further increases its activities to encourage higher levels of higher education student representative attendance and engagement in academic governance.

19 Focus group feedback and some programme annual monitoring reports indicate that the completion of module evaluation is inconsistent. The standard template may be completed individually by students or, for smaller groups, completed by tutors based on group discussion. Some evaluations are not completed. The College plans to improve the procedure and is considering using online module surveys, now being investigated by IT services. The review team therefore advises, as an **area for development**, that the College revises its student module evaluation arrangements to ensure a consistent approach to conducting student module evaluation that operates effectively across all programmes.

20 Overall, the College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for programme monitoring. Annual monitoring reports inform the Annual Institutional Overview report and Higher Education Quality Enhancement action plan. The Higher Education Scheme Management Board is charged with oversight of annual reporting and, together with the Higher Education Operational Group, with monitoring the Higher Education Quality Enhancement action plan. Annual monitoring reports and action plans are scrutinised by Higher Education Sector Tutors and the Dean of Higher Education meeting in October; March meetings review progress on action plans. The Annual Institutional Overview report, completed by the Dean of Higher Education and presented to the Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality), is circulated to Higher Education Scheme Management Board and Higher Education Operational Group members, with a request that comments be brought to meetings. The finalised Annual Institutional Overview report and annual monitoring reports are submitted to the respective awarding bodies.

21 Annual monitoring reports and the Annual Institutional Overview report are generally detailed and comprehensive. Together with well-documented action plans and updates, they demonstrate the effectiveness of programme monitoring and continuous review. However, while Higher Education Scheme Management Board and Higher Education Operational Group minutes record discussion of annual monitoring processes, reports and action plans, the minutes are insufficiently detailed to provide a full record of scrutiny and institutional oversight within the College's deliberative committee framework. The review team therefore advises, as an **area for development**, that the College fully documents the scrutiny and oversight of annual monitoring by its deliberative committees to ensure there is robust evidence for the purposes of governance and audit.

22 Retention, progression and completion data are analysed in annual monitoring, discussed at higher education deliberative committees and the Board of Governors. In response to the outcomes of data analysis, the College has taken effective action to improve student retention, particularly in year 1.

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

23 The College has in place arrangements that encourage student involvement in academic governance but the review team identified that the College does not systematically record the student voice as there is not a consistent student presence in formal committee and governance structures. The formal legal Instrument of Government mentions student members of the Board but encouraging student representation and regular student representative attendance is a challenge, particularly because many of the College's higher education students have employment and other commitments. The review team is aware

that the College plans to further develop bespoke training of higher education student representatives, which will include aspects relating to engagement in academic governance (see paragraph 18) as an area for development.

24 The College has effective governance arrangements for ensuring students' complaints are effectively addressed and the welfare of students is secured. The Higher Education Scheme Management Board terms of reference state that it has responsibility for oversight of student complaints and the review team saw evidence that complaints reports are presented to the Board. The College's Higher Education Complaints Policy and Higher Education Appeals Policy and Procedure are written with reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework and both are available on the College's website.

25 The College has effective systems in place for the welfare of students and safeguarding is discussed at each meeting of the Higher Education Scheme Management Board with an annual report being submitted to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. There is significant information on student support in the Student Handbook and the Higher Education Student Support Leaflet outlines further support that is available to higher education students.

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

26 The College has clear policies and procedures in place for student admissions and these are effective in ensuring consistent and transparent approach across higher education provision. The College has a clear and fair set of terms and conditions that are accessible and sent to students at the time of an offer to study at the College being made. Students have the right to appeal an admissions decision and this is clearly articulated to them through the terms and conditions document.

27 The review team heard that the College has a number of processes in place relating to the approval of publicly available information. In meetings staff were able to highlight specific documents, such as the higher education prospectus, that has a clear and documented procedure for sign-off. For other publicly available information, such as some of that on the College's website and some other non-digital material, although there are clear procedures in place that staff understand, and a responsibilities checklist, the procedures are not fully documented. The College highlighted that its awarding bodies have rigorous and fully documented procedures in place for checking the College's publically available information, including the College's website. The review team therefore advises, as an **area for development**, that the College ensures that its own internal procedures for the sign-off of publically available information are fully documented.

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

28 The College makes effective use of its Accreditation of Prior Learning policy and has admitted students through this procedure.

29 The review team heard evidence relating to complaints and met students who had lodged both informal and formal complaints. Complaints and appeals are considered at a number of committees by the College and trends are monitored and used to improve the

student experience. The policies and procedures relating to complaints and appeals are fair, clear and accessible.

30 The College has processes in place regarding course closures for both prospective students and for current students. The College has a number of courses with small student cohorts and the College has in place specific teach out commitments for all current students where a course closes for new entrants. The College has used its teach-out processes and has a small number of programmes with small student cohorts where the course has been closed for new entrants. The review team found these procedures to be effective as staff had a good understanding of their responsibilities and students who had been affected spoke positively of their own experiences.

31 Specific actions to support students studying on programmes that have closed or have small cohorts due to student withdrawals include reassuring students that their programme will be honoured until they complete; ensuring that allocation of delivery time is sufficient; and identifying opportunities to introduce variety through the use of external speakers. The review team found recent evidence of these procedures being used effectively with the phasing out of BA Fine Art, where the College had protected teaching hours and provided full access to resources and studio space for the remaining four students who spoke positively about their experience.

32 The College has seen a contraction in student numbers, particularly in part-time students due to a strategic decision taken to offer more programmes on a full-time basis. The review team are satisfied that the contraction in student numbers does not present any risk to the student academic experience as the procedures in place relating to teach out are appropriate.

Rounded judgement

33 Overall, governance and quality management of the student academic experience are effective. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that consumer marketing guidance is met and there are effective student protection measures. The review team identified as areas for development student representative training, attendance at formal higher education meetings and engagement in academic governance; an improvement in the formal recording of committee meetings; and enhancements to the module evaluation system.

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

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