

# Quality Review Visit of Easton and Otley College

April 2017

## Key findings

### QAA's rounded judgements about Easton and Otley College

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

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.**
- **There is limited confidence requiring specified improvements before 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 Easton and Otley College. The review team advises Easton and Otley College to:

- expedite the development of the peer observation process to ensure that it contributes effectively to the improvement of teaching and learning (Quality Code)
- further develop the training and support for student representatives (Code of Governance, Quality Code)
- further develop and monitor processes to ensure that work experience meets College requirements (Code of Governance, Quality Code).

### Specified improvements

The review team identified the following **specified improvements** that relate to matters that are already putting, or have the potential to put, quality and/or standards at risk at Easton and Otley College. The review team recommends that Easton and Otley College:

- ensures that prospective students have access to a full range of information, including terms and conditions, to enable them to make informed decisions (Consumer Protection, Quality Code, Student Protection)
- ensures that the requirements for publishing Key Information Set (KIS) data are met (Consumer Protection).

## About this review

The review visit took place from 25 to 26 April 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Emerita Professor Diane Meehan
- Mrs Alexandra Day
- Miss Sarah Bennett (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 Easton and Otley College

Easton and Otley College (the College) is a medium-sized specialist land-based college which was formed by a merger of two colleges in 2012. The College delivers higher education across two campuses: Easton campus is located on the outskirts of Norwich in Norfolk and Otley campus is situated close to Ipswich in Suffolk. There is a College farm and countryside estate at each campus with the farm currently undergoing restructuring and reinvestment in addition to the introduction of additional livestock. The catchment area for the College is primarily the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk: however, due to the specialised nature of provision, students can come from as far away as Essex, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. There is comprehensive transport provision coupled with residential accommodation available to students. At the time of the review visit the College had 239 higher education students.

The College's higher education provision is delivered on behalf of two awarding bodies, the University of East Anglia and the University of Huddersfield. Provision delivered on behalf of the University of Huddersfield is exclusively initial teacher training. There are 15 higher education programmes which include full honours undergraduate degrees, a level 6 top-up degree and foundation degrees. All of these cover a range of subject areas including agriculture; agri-bioscience; equine science; animal science; land-based studies; ecology and conservation; wildlife management and conservation; fishery management and sustainable aquaculture; landscape and garden design; and sports coaching science. In addition, the College delivers a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education and a Certificate in Education.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The College does not have degree awarding powers. It is an Associate College of the University of East Anglia (UEA) and delivers the majority of its higher education provision under partnership arrangements with UEA. In addition, initial teacher training education is delivered as part of a training consortium validated by the University of Huddersfield. Under its arrangements with UEA, the College operates its own agreed academic regulations; these govern programme design and include module level descriptors which have been prepared in accordance with the FHEQ.

2 The College designs and writes its own degree programmes under the arrangements set out in the UEA Partnership Handbook. The Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements and FHEQ are used when developing programmes for validation or periodic review. UK threshold standards are met by aligning programme learning outcomes with the appropriate qualification descriptor. Programme teams are responsible for ensuring that students achieve the learning outcomes through the assessment criteria for the level of their programme. Comparable standards are achieved through cross-moderation events under the University of Huddersfield programmes, and confirmation from external examiner reports that standards of the College's programmes delivered under its arrangements with UEA are comparable with those of other UK higher education providers.

3 The Director of Higher Education has managerial oversight of higher education within the College. Monthly higher education review meetings between UEA and College staff are instrumental in monitoring provision and staffing at a comprehensive level. UEA representatives sit on the College's Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) and there is a Joint Board of Studies (JBoS) chaired by UEA, which monitors and reports on higher education provision. The College fulfils its responsibilities for academic standards by producing programme Self-Assessment Review and Evaluation (SARE) and Annual Evaluation Reports (AER) for its awarding bodies. Approval for the majority of the College's programmes, and ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards for those programmes, lies with UEA. For initial teacher training, the University of Huddersfield is responsible for defining its own academic standards and ensuring that UK threshold academic standards are met.

### 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 Governors have a broad and wide-ranging expertise. The Search Committee assesses the needs of the Board of Governors annually and recruits governors with a range of vocational, business and management knowledge. The last Ofsted report for the College remarked that governance was good.

5 Oversight of data and information is strong and operates under a Carver model of Policy Governance. The Board of Governors and College Leadership Team (LT) receive and inspect comprehensive monthly reports relating to higher education, including destinations of leavers, degree outcomes and National Student Survey (NSS) results. Recruitment and progression data are monitored monthly through scrutiny by the Board of Governors and annually within the internal SARE process.

6 Oversight of academic risk is satisfactory. Proposals for new programmes are discussed at Curriculum Performance Review (CPR) meetings. Proposals detail the financial information for the programme, delivery hours and overall costs. The Audit Committee works with internal and external auditors to direct a programme and examines potential financial risks.

7 Staff are included as active members of committees. A whistle-blowing procedure has been instigated and is available on the College virtual learning environment (VLE), in addition to arrangements for safeguarding and counter-terrorism. The principles of academic freedom and collegiality are understood by the LT and facilitated by a number of committees; however, teaching staff are unable to articulate or confirm what these principles mean to them in practice.

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

8 Overarching responsibility for the standards of the College's higher education provision rests with its university partners. Responsibilities of the College and its partners are clearly set out in agreements. The College underwent UEA institutional review in 2014, resulting in its re-approval as a partner of the University for a further period of five years. The 2016 Ofsted report on initial teacher training graded the University of Huddersfield's Consortium provision as good overall.

9 Effective oversight of the partnership with UEA is achieved through a JBoS. There is reciprocal reporting of minutes and relevant items between the JBoS and the College's TLC. A Steering Committee maintains strategic oversight of the University of Huddersfield provision and an Operations Group deals with operational issues.

10 Programme approval and re-approval follow the requirements of the partner universities. These processes ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with relevant academic frameworks and regulations. Definitive programme documents are approved at validation and may only be amended through a clearly defined procedure.

11 External examining arrangements are effective. For UEA awards, there is in place a Code of Practice for External Examining which aligns with the UK Quality Code. The College considers external examiner reports and associated actions through the JBoS and TLC. The University of Huddersfield oversees external examining arrangements for its awards; reports apply across the Consortium and are considered at meetings of the Steering Committee. External examiner reports for both partners are generally positive and confirm that standards are comparable to other similar programmes elsewhere.

12 The University of Huddersfield is responsible for the assessment arrangements for its awards. Assessment, progression and awards for UEA programmes are governed by a variant of UEA regulations which students confirmed are made available on the VLE. Programme specifications are also provided on the VLE; these include detailed mapping showing how, and in which modules, learning outcomes are assessed. Staff confirmed that credit is awarded only when all learning outcomes are met. Claims for credit under recognised prior learning regulations are made through the College and approved by UEA.

13 There is in place a comprehensive system for the monitoring and review of the academic standards of UEA awards. Individual programmes produce an annual SARE, which feeds into a Centre event and the production of a Centre SARE. Programme SAREs consider a range of data including student enrolment, retention, agreement, satisfaction, and completions and final destinations, as well as feedback from external examiners and programme committee meetings. The Centre SARE reviews and compares the same range

of performance indicators with the previous year's data, for higher education provision as a whole. The review of University of Huddersfield awards is in accordance with University requirements.

## **Rounded judgement**

14 The College has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards through its governance structures; internal processes and procedures; adherence to the regulations of its awarding bodies; and engagement with the FHEQ. There are no areas for development or specified areas for improvement in this judgement area.

15 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)

16 The College has a robust quality assurance process to manage and monitor the quality of the student academic experience and ensure that academic standards are maintained. These include rigorous analysis and use of a range of data such as module evaluations, monthly student satisfaction surveys and other key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor and improve the student academic experience. The LT analyses KPIs weekly and there is monthly scrutiny by the Board of Governors.

17 The student voice is heard through student representatives attending quarterly programme committee meetings and the newly formed Higher Education Forum. For University of Huddersfield students, there is a programme committee. Student representatives also sit on a variety of College and higher education committees.

18 There is a tutor open door policy and students value the openness and honesty of tutors and being able to contribute to programme development. Students were able to identify changes made as a result of their feedback and confirmed they had input to annual monitoring through programme committee meetings.

19 Arrangements for training student representatives have been changed; students stated that there had been no formal training this academic year and that the quality of student representatives is variable, especially in terms of giving feedback to the whole group. This is formulated as an area for development in paragraph 28 of this report. The College closes the feedback loop through a 'You said, We did' system on the VLE and notice boards.

20 The review team noted that the satisfaction metrics for the 2015 National Student Survey (NSS) data were significantly below benchmark. The team reviewed the evidence base presented and discussed the issue with the College. The College had comprehensively analysed its NSS results and demonstrated a positive approach in addressing the issues raised through taking decisive action to establish the reasons for the poor performance. Overall, the team considers that the College has taken appropriate steps to address the issue.

21 Although issues regarding feedback and its quality, timeliness and consistency from one marker to another were raised by some students, external examiners confirm that marking is fair and that regulations are followed. External examiner comments regarding the quality of feedback on marked work are positive and highlight that feedback is good, developmental and supportive. They also confirm that the standard of internal verification and moderation is good. Students are aware of where to find information about assessment regulations and were able to give examples of a range of innovative assessment methods utilised by staff. Students are engaged in peer teaching and peer assessment and there is a buddy system, enabling students to support each other.

22 The College ensures that there are adequate learning resources available to all students and responds to student feedback regarding resources. There are positive comments from external examiners about learning resources and students remarked upon the excellent support structure for students with additional needs. Support for students is appropriate and there is a dedicated Higher Education Support Tutor. Student progress is regularly monitored through Individual Learning Plans, progress reports, key metrics and attendance, and staff track how student grades change over time.

23 The College has a range of well qualified staff, with both academic and relevant vocational qualifications and experience, and makes use of additional academic and vocational specialists. The student submission to this review raised some concerns about the variety of delivery in classroom teaching; however, this is not a common theme emerging from the external examiner reports viewed, and in meetings staff provided examples of good practice in teaching and learning.

24 The slowness in the introduction of higher education peer observations has been identified by the College as a weakness, particularly as some of the teaching team are new to higher education and would benefit from seeing higher education teaching being delivered by more experienced teachers. Programme SAREs contain action plans to ensure that a peer observation takes place; however, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this approach, although there is some evidence to suggest that there is sharing of the good practice emerging from observations in programme team meetings. Poor teaching and learning is identified through student feedback, lesson walk-throughs and risk-based formal lesson observations. Action plans, in line with College policy, are put in place as appropriate. However, not all staff are involved in some form of lesson observation. The review team therefore identifies an **area for development** and advises the College to expedite the development of the peer observation process to ensure that it contributes effectively to the improvement of teaching and learning.

25 The College's commitment to developing and supporting staff is articulated in the Higher Education Strategy. Systems to support new staff are appropriate and staff obtain UEA approval to teach by submitting an associate teacher status form (ATS). The ATS process ensures that staff are appropriately qualified, competent and up to date. Evidence that this process is working effectively is provided through external examiner reports. The higher education core team has scholarly activity timetabled, and a Research Committee to support related scholarly activity has recently been introduced. A higher education-specific continuing professional development (CPD) programme was introduced in 2015-16. Existing teaching staff without a postgraduate-level qualification are supported to achieve this, and a small number of staff are preparing applications to the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The College has a cross-college teaching and learning strategy and staff articulated a higher education perspective to this in meetings. College higher education away days and the Higher Education Forum are valued by staff at both College sites and their effectiveness evaluated. The review team considered that, collectively, these approaches will further develop the higher education ethos and research-based teaching and learning within the College.

26 An analysis of programme SAREs shows that a wide variety of programmes have good employer links, with practical work being carried out in conjunction with local businesses; student attendance at industry events; employment opportunities during the programme; support from industry bodies; and local veterinary practices and rescue centres providing work experience. Staff provided further examples of industry body and employer involvement including consideration of employer panels to assist in the annual programme review process. Students are responsible for finding their own work experience, with College support. The College states that it ensures that all relevant health, safety and suitability checks are carried out, and work experience providers are contacted regularly to ensure that any potential issues are dealt with quickly. Student feedback raised some issues in the provision of work experience and this is covered in paragraph 30 of this report.

27 There is an internal process to sign off information and UEA carries out an annual audit of the information relating to its programmes. Information for students once they enrol is comprehensive, and the College has a VLE strategy which sets minimum requirements for the information that should be included in subject areas. The process of auditing VLE subject areas and grading them as either bronze, silver or gold has started. However, there are gaps

in the completeness and accessibility of information for potential applicants, and this is covered in paragraphs 37 and 39 of this report.

### **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**

28 Student representatives are members of the TLC, the JBoS programme teams and Higher Education Forum, a subgroup of the UEA Students' Union. Students confirmed that representatives had access to a committee meeting every three months. Although previous cohorts had received training from UEA in their role as student representatives, this year's cohort had not received any formal training at all. Therefore, the review team advises that the College further develops the training and support for student representatives, and identifies this as an **area for development**.

29 The College has complete appeals and complaints procedures relating to UEA and College provision. Student complaints are reported to the College JBoS and minutes from these are submitted to the Board of Governors and the TLC. The Vice Principal has responsibility for reviewing appeals and complaints, which are tracked by the Principal's personal assistant to resolution. While none had made a complaint, students feel that their feedback is addressed effectively.

30 Staff confirmed that visiting lecturers were reviewed using the Safeguarding and Prevent Policy and gave an example. Academic staff stated that student work experience was supported by robust checks and a database of approved work experience providers; however, students reported that health and safety checks regarding their self-sourced work experience had not been conducted and although they had work experience handbooks, students disclosed that these were not always followed up or signed off. The review team saw evidence of completed work experience documentation for a number of programmes and noted inconsistencies in terminology, completion and variability in the documentation. The review team therefore advises that the College further develops and monitors processes to ensure that work experience meets College requirements and identifies this as an **area for development**.

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

31 The College has recently embarked on a review of its policies and procedures in relation to consumer protection measures to ensure compliance with CMA requirements. This review, presented to JBoS in February 2017, concluded that the College has yet to confirm compliance. UEA has recently produced guidance for partners in relation to provision of information for applicants and students, which is being utilised by the College to support its review and associated actions.

32 The University of Huddersfield has overall responsibility for the admission of students to its awards and the College recruits and interviews students in line with its agreement with the University. The College is responsible for admitting students to UEA programmes.

33 The College's Higher Education Admissions Policy supports a consistent and transparent approach to admissions and, together with the associated complaints and appeals procedure, is available to applicants on the College website. However, the review team noted that these policies appear under a general list of College policies, which potentiality limits their accessibility to applicants. A document setting out students' registration and admission rights and responsibilities is made available to current students



through the VLE and signposted at induction. Standard offer and rejection letters are provided to applicants. These letters, while suggesting that applicants should contact the College if they have any queries, do not signpost applicants to its Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Complaints and Appeals procedures.

34 The College publishes a range of information about its provision for prospective and current students. Appropriate procedures are in place for checking the accuracy of the information provided. Publicity and other materials relating to UEA awards are audited annually by the University.

35 Prospective students are sent additional information relating to enrolment, induction and timetables; and for individual programmes, reading lists and equipment requirements are provided. However, prospective students do not receive the College's terms and conditions, rules and regulations, or full information about the modules they will study and information about additional costs.

36 Students raised several issues regarding information provided about their programmes prior to enrolment, including the need for more detailed information in relation to modules to be studied and more accurate information about the number of tutors teaching on their courses.

37 The review team concluded from the evidence provided, and from discussion with staff and students, that the information supplied to prospective students does not fully align with CMA guidance and therefore represents a weakness in the College's approach to this aspect of the baseline regulatory requirement. The review team recommends that the College ensures that prospective students have access to a full range of information, including terms and conditions, to enable them to make informed decisions, identifying this as a **specified improvement**.

38 For current students, information including regulations, relevant policies and procedures, student handbooks, programme and module specifications and learning materials is made available on a USB stick and through the College VLE. Students spoke positively about the information provided once they had enrolled.

39 At the time of the review visit, Key Information Set (KIS) data was not available on the College's website; the review team was told by the College that the website was in the process of being updated and that the KIS link had yet to be uploaded. The review team concluded that the College was not fully aware of the significance of this aspect of the baseline regulatory requirement and recommends that the College ensures that the requirements for publishing Key Information Set (KIS) data are met, identifying this as a **specified improvement**.

40 Appropriate arrangements are in place for handling and monitoring academic complaints and appeals in relation to the awards of both partner universities.

### **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**

41 Course closures are considered at JBoS meetings, with course approval and closure policies and procedures set out in the Partnerships Handbook. Staff at review gave examples of course closures in 2014, where students on closing courses were supported to completion. In the event of a provider closure or failure elsewhere, College staff affirmed that

they would support those students affected.

42 While College staff acknowledged that any changes to courses would be communicated to students by letter, students at review gave examples where they had not been informed of changes or closures to their courses prior to enrolment. While the College has course closure policies in place for UEA programmes, there are no College procedures in place to inform students of course changes or closure prior to them beginning their course of study. Therefore, the College should make terms and conditions clear to potential students. This issue has been addressed in paragraph 37 of this report.

43 Links to College and UEA Complaints and Appeals procedures are available to staff and students on the VLE and in College handbooks. The policies are proportional, fair and follow published timescales, and confidentiality is respected.

44 Oversight of complaints and appeals data is effective. Summary data is reported to the JBoS and TLC, and College staff attend appeals and complaints training at UEA.

## **Rounded judgement**

45 The review team makes two recommendations for specified improvements in this area. These relate to the need for prospective students to have access to a full range of information, which includes terms and conditions, to enable them to make informed decisions, and the requirement for the College to publish Key Information Set (KIS) data.

46 The review team considers that the College has not demonstrated sufficient awareness of its responsibilities as a higher education provider for aligning with the baseline regulatory requirements. The College's priorities suggest that it may not be fully aware of the significance of these issues and that, without action, they could lead to a serious problem over time.

47 The review team also advises the College on three areas for development. These relate to expediting the development of the peer review process to ensure that it contributes to the improvement of teaching and learning; further developing the training and support for student representatives; and further developing and monitoring the processes for work experience to ensure that they meet College requirements.

48 The review team concludes that there is limited confidence requiring specified improvements before there can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

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