



# Quality Review Visit of Richard Huish College

March 2017

## Key findings

### QAA's rounded judgements about Richard Huish College

The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the higher education provision at Richard Huish 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. The review team advises Richard Huish College to:

- ensure that it reports on all aspects of its higher education provision to its deliberative committees and governing body (Code of Governance)
- ensure that all information for prospective and current students is complete and consistently presented (Consumer Protection).

### Specified improvements

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

- develop and implement a formal academic complaints procedure that aligns with the degree-awarding body's regulations for early resolution and the College's internal Quality Policy (Student Protection).

## About this review

The review visit took place from 8 to 9 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Sally Dixon
- Dr Alan Howard
- Mr Craig Best (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 Richard Huish College

Based in the county town of Taunton, Richard Huish College (the College) is a sixth-form college that was originally established in the 1870s as a grammar school for boys. In 1979 it became a sixth-form college offering an extensive range of A Levels, vocational courses, professional training, apprenticeships and degrees for students across Taunton, Somerset and neighbouring Devon. There are 2,500 students studying at the College, supported by 283 teaching and support staff.

Its strategic vision is 'To provide exceptional education and training through the delivery of a holistic academic and vocational curriculum'.

In 2007 the College began offering its first degree programme: the FdA Business and Management. Originally validated by the University of West of England, the programme is now delivered on behalf of the University of St Mark and St John (Plymouth Marjon University). The College is also approved to deliver the following programmes, all based on a franchise agreement with Marjon: FdA Sport Development and Coaching; BA (Hons) Sport Development and Coaching level 6 top-up; and BA (Hons) Applied Professional Studies (Leadership and Management) level 6 top-up.

At the time of the review visit the College had 25 full-time students studying on its Sport Development and Coaching programmes and 32 students (25.25 full-time equivalent) across its Business and Management/Applied Professional Studies programmes.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

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

1 The review team found that the College has in place arrangements that meet its degree-awarding body requirements to ensure that the academic standards of the programmes offered meets or exceeds the UK threshold standard set out by the FHEQ.

2 The College works with one degree-awarding body, the University of St Mark and St John. The University sets the standards of the College's programmes through the application of its own academic frameworks and regulations, to which the College is required to adhere through the franchised and validated agreement set out in the Memorandum of Agreement and Collaborative Provision and Regulation Procedures, which ensure that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level and that awards are made on the achievement of learning outcomes that students demonstrate through assessment.

3 The University is responsible for the production of definitive programme specifications, and the design, development, modification and approval of programmes as set out the relevant regulations, procedures and templates.

4 The University is also responsible for the appointment and briefing of external examiners. The assessment arrangements and responsibilities are set out in the relevant Memorandum of Agreement. External examiners appointed to each programme confirm that the standards set out are appropriate and being maintained, and are comparable with similar programmes of other higher education providers.

### 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

5 The College has a Corporation, which is supported by a range of deliberative committees, including the Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC), which has oversight of its higher education provision. The College has adopted the AoC Code of Good Governance.

6 The College has a formal Risk Management Action Plan, which is subject to review by the Corporation's Audit Committee. In addition, the College has a detailed risk register that includes risks associated with teaching and learning.

7 The Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Quality is responsible for developing the annual calendar of reports for the Corporation and its committees on the College's higher education provision. Reports on the higher education provision are submitted to each of the APQC meetings. The reports cover a range of aspects, including comments from external examiners, student focus groups and individual student performance. However, they report low-level information rather than oversight of the College's higher education provision as outlined in the College's Quality Policy. The review team advises the College to ensure that it reports on all aspects of its higher education provision to its deliberative committees and governing body, identifying this as an **area for development**.

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

8 Effective arrangements exist that enable the College to discharge its responsibilities for helping to maintain the academic standards of the University's awards. Each programme is delivered in accordance with the University's approved definitive record, incorporating programme specifications and module descriptors. All programmes are franchised by the University except the FdA in Business and Management, which is a validated programme under the University's regulations. Design and development of this programme was undertaken by the College in 2012 in consultation with key stakeholders, including students and employers. Proposed modifications to the programme or its constituent modules are subject to the University's programme approval procedures.

9 The University's assessment regulations and processes apply, including the processes for marking and moderation of work. External examiners are appointed by the University in accordance with its regulations, and the requirements of the role are set out in an External Examiner Handbook. External examiners attend Module Assessment Boards and report annually on provision. Assignments and examinations are designed by the University for programmes in Sports Development and Coaching. For the FdA Business and Management and BA (Hons) Applied Professional Skills programmes the module leaders write assessments, which are then moderated by an internal verifier for coursework or external examiner for examination papers. Student work is submitted in hard copy or through Turnitin. Where poor academic practice or academic misconduct is suspected, stage 1 of the University's academic integrity policy is followed, with the course manager acting as the responsible officer.

10 Effective arrangements exist to test that students have achieved the academic standards set. Processes for marking and moderation of student work are consistent across programmes, and external examiner reports confirm that an appropriate paper trail documenting the first and second marker's input on grading decisions is maintained. Staff from organisations involved in delivery of work-based learning are not directly involved in assessment decisions for the award of credit. External examiner reports for 2015-16 confirm that the internal assessment of what students have achieved is consistent with the expected standard, and that marks awarded by the module team are in line with grade descriptors. These reports also confirm that programme aims are being met, and that the standards set and achieved are appropriate for the level and qualification.

11 Programme monitoring and review follows the University's regulations, policies and practices and is overseen by the University's Academic Liaison Tutor. An annual report is produced by the course manager for each programme, which reflects on relevant data for monitoring academic standards, including student performance indicators and external examiner feedback. Reports are discussed at biannual Partnership Board meetings prior to submission to the relevant University faculty. Partnership Board meetings include student representation and staff from the College and University. Student progress is also closely monitored by teachers and discussed in course team meetings. Effective use is made of data in monitoring academic standards, and College teaching staff and course managers demonstrate a good understanding of the responsibilities assigned to them by the University.

### **Rounded judgement**

12 The College delivers programmes on behalf of the University of St Mark and St John. The University sets the standards of the College's programmes through the application of its own academic frameworks and regulations, to which the College is required to adhere. The College, through its adherence to the University's regulations, its engagement with

the FHEQ, the relevant code of governance, and the Quality Code has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting the baseline regulatory requirements for academic standards.

13 The review team identified one area for development for the College, which relates to a need to update its approach when reporting on all aspects of its higher education provision to the College's deliberative committees and governing body.

14 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)

15 The peer observation scheme used by the College supports teaching staff. Scholarly activity, which is supported by the College, is undertaken for both the sport and business areas. Although there is a small teaching team for sport, there is detailed evidence of external activity and professional development. The College self-assessment report has a section that reviews teaching staff, their qualifications, development and performance.

16 Learning resources have been updated and informed by student feedback. Students are satisfied with the available resources and are able to feedback on the quality of these.

17 The review team found that the College has a strong pastoral and informal approach in supporting student needs. Students are supported in the transition to higher education through a range of mechanisms including study skills sessions, which are repeated throughout their programme of study. The College offers additional support to students to enable their achievement on the programme and staff, and Governors are impassioned about supporting student achievement.

18 Student representatives are appointed, as is a Student Governor. While the College acknowledges that it has found it challenging to recruit a specific higher education Student Governor, due to the small cohort and the external demands placed on its higher education students, the review team is satisfied that students have opportunities to feed into quality assurance processes. Students are engaged in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience through end-of-module questionnaires and focus groups, the outcomes of which are discussed at Partnership Board meetings, which student representatives attend, with the University.

19 The College follows the University's policies for assessment and the recognition of prior learning. The responsibility for assessments is shared, with the College being responsible for first marking, but with the University moderating work. Staff are aware of the assessment process and University requirements.

20 The College follows the University's process for annual monitoring. The College has a self-assessment report both at curriculum level and at provider level. There is a moderation process that incorporates externality and includes student involvement.

21 The College utilises data at programme level to review individual student performance and identify areas of risk across modules. There is a defined process for monitoring data that feeds into the annual monitoring process and self-assessment report. In addition, the College uses data to inform the demand for additional learning resources.

22 The review team heard that, while its Quality Policy sets out that the College will have a complaints procedure with clear timescales and allocation of responsibilities for resolving the matter, the College has made the strategic decision not to have prescriptive policies and procedures, and as a consequence does not have a procedure for handling complaints about the quality of learning opportunities that is fair, accessible and timely, and enables enhancement. This reinforces the specified improvement made in relation to Student Protection in paragraph 35.

23 The College provides placements for students on its sports provision. This provision is supported by defined documentation that is utilised for all placements. Students are aware of the work-based learning requirements at the application stage.

**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**

24 The College's arrangements for encouraging student involvement in academic governance are generally effective. College Governors demonstrate a close regard to the voice of its students and the quality of the student experience. Membership of the Corporation includes student representatives; however, none are currently enrolled on higher education programmes and the College acknowledges challenges in recruiting from this group, some of whom live distant from the College, are in employment or have other personal commitments. Student progress and feedback from student focus groups is reported and discussed at governance level at the APQC. Student representatives also attend Partnership Board meetings with the University. Students are satisfied with their opportunities to provide feedback and to participate in the College's governance structure.

25 Governors articulated the importance of effectively addressing student complaints, and a higher education Governor takes specific responsibility where needed for this. The College's Quality Policy states that the College will have a complaints procedure and that a log of formal complaints will be maintained and periodically reported to the Corporation. The review team found that there was no formal complaints procedure, although the Head of Higher Education informed the review team that if a complaint was raised it would be logged and reported to the Corporation, but this is not made explicit in the Quality Policy or associated documentation. The review team heard that no formal complaints have so far been logged.

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

26 The College is responsible for ensuring that prospective students are informed about arrangements with the University as the degree-awarding body. This includes information pertaining to the management of academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, complaints and appeals procedures, and students' rights and responsibilities.

27 Activities associated with the admission of students to the franchised and validated programmes delivered at the College are the responsibility of the University, as governed by the University's Admissions Policy. The University determines the admission requirements, acceptable entry qualifications and enrolment procedures. Applicants apply directly to the University. The University subsequently liaises with the College, which recommends any offer to the University's Admissions Office. Students commented positively on their experience of the admissions process, and that informal interviews for business programmes ensures individual students made an informed decision to proceed with their application.

28 The College is required to ensure that all publicity, promotional and marketing material, and teaching quality information concerning all franchised and validated programmes is approved by the University prior to publication. Information for prospective students is available through the College and University websites. The College website includes information on the College, course structure and content, financial cost and reference to the terms and conditions. Programme specific leaflets are provided in addition to the detailed information provided on the College website.

29 The primary source of information for prospective and current students is provided by the University. The College higher education course managers, Heads of Schools, the Deputy Principal and the Marketing Manager have shared responsibility for the accuracy of information. The review team found that, although the College provided a narrative in its approach to oversight of information approval, there was no formal process.

30 Information relating to entry requirements on the external website made a number of omissions and did not include Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) information for one programme, although the review team heard that a DBS check was a requirement. Student handbooks varied in how information was presented, including references to policies and procedures where two handbooks included out-of-date links to the relevant Student Regulations Framework. The review team advises the College to ensure that all information for prospective and current students is complete and consistently presented, identifying this as an **area for development**.

### **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**

31 The College is responsible for the implementation of an accessible, clear, proportionate and timely complaints procedure in respect to the early resolution of complaints.

32 Student complaints are initially made to the College. Should the complaint fail to be resolved by the College, the complaint may be referred to the University in accordance with University regulations which are referenced in the Student Regulations Framework.

33 As noted in paragraph 22, the review team heard that the College has made the strategic decision not to have prescriptive policies and procedures, and as a consequence does not have a formal College complaints policy, which sets out clear timescales and allocation of responsibilities as detailed in its Quality Policy.

34 Students are provided with limited information at induction on how to provide feedback on their degree and how to raise concerns or complaints. Student handbooks and the College's external website outline an informal stage and subsequent investigation by a member of the College Senior Leadership Team, which will normally investigate and chair a meeting of those involved in a further attempt to find an appropriate and timely resolution. If a resolution is not made, the University is responsible for the formal stage.

35 The review team found that, although issues and concerns raised by students are likely to be addressed, no clear and accurate guidance is made available to students. This includes information for students about how to access advice and support, indicative timescales, informal resolution, staff responsibility for managing complaints, and monitoring outcomes. The review team recommends that the College develop and implement a formal academic complaints procedure that aligns with the degree-awarding body's regulations for early resolution and the College's internal Quality Policy, identifying this as a **specified improvement**.

36 The requirements for course changes and closures is the responsibility of the University, which will use reasonable endeavours to enable each student to complete their programme in the event of termination of the franchised and validated agreement with the College. The College follows the process as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement and Collaborative Provision and Regulation Procedures.



37 The College follows the University's Programme Modification Processes and Procedures in respect to amendments to programme and module specifications and modifications are discussed at the annual Partnership Boards.

## **Rounded judgement**

38 The review team found that the College was meeting most of the baseline regulatory requirements in this judgement area.

39 However, the review team identified one area for development and one specified improvement. The area for development relates to a need to ensure that all information for prospective and current students is complete and consistently presented. The specified improvement relates to a need to develop and implement a formal academic complaints procedure in line with the University's regulations and the College's internal policies.

40 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.

**QAA1929 - R9434 - Aug 2017**

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