



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of ABI College Ltd, March 2017

### 1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that ABI College (the College) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the February 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 There are currently a total of 75 students registered for programmes leading to level 5 awards by Pearson Education (the awarding organisation) and level 6 awards by the University of St Mark & St John, Plymouth (the awarding body). They incorporate the HND in Business (21 students), HND in Health and Social Care Management (39 students) and the BA (Top-up) Leadership and Management (15 students). There have been changes to the senior management team since the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report in February 2016. A new Principal has been appointed and the College has combined the posts of Head of Teaching and Learning and Programmes Coordinator, appointed a new Director of Marketing and Recruitment (July 2016), and promoted an existing member of staff to the post of Registrar (January 2017). Roles and responsibilities for the management of the provision have been reviewed in the light of the recent staff changes.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 ABI College continues to develop and implement effectively its action plan from the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report 2016. The College makes effective use of action planning as an ongoing process, with modifications developed into a single extended action plan, incorporating additional good practice and recommendations from external examiners' reports and the Pearson Academic Management Review Report. The latest action plan seen by the reviewers demonstrates considerable progress in building on good practice and implementing recommendations. These actions are overseen and implemented by the Academic Board.

4 The two areas of good practice identified in the 2016 review report have been further developed by the College. The Version Control Policy is implemented fully, as is evident from the control page of all recent policy documents. The policy facilitates the systematic review and updating of the College's policies. The virtual learning environment, ABILearn, has been considerably improved and updated by the Head of Teaching and Learning, and monitored for staff and student satisfaction. Students confirmed that they appreciate ABILearn resources and use it routinely to access College policies, programme and module information, and to undertake surveys.

5 The College has implemented the four recommendations of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) action plan. The new formal agreement with work placement providers for the HND Health and Social Care Management is being piloted and will be modified in the light of employers' responses. The recommendation to produce annual staff

and academic calendars has been implemented for the current teaching year. Both calendars are accessible through ABILearn, and are comprehensive and helpful to staff and students.

6 The College's Admissions Policy is published on its website, including English language requirements, and is kept under regular review in the light of retention and achievement data. Students agreed that website information is clear and easy to access. For diagnostic purposes the College uses a language test published by the awarding organisation that is specifically aimed at assessing mature applicants. Successful completion of this test leads to a formal interview to assess oral skills, aptitude for a higher education programme, and a genuine commitment to study. Additionally, an interviewee is required to lead a discussion on an issue related to their chosen field of study. A substantial number of applicants are rejected; for example, there was a 70 per cent rejection rate in 2016.

7 For the last two years, recruitment has focused on the local market comprising mainly mature applicants rather than the international market, and is now more robust. The most recent Pearson Academic Management Review Report confirms that the implementation of revised admissions policies 'gives confidence in the integrity of the recruitment process'. Successful applicants are given a comprehensive induction to the demands of the programme of study, including consideration of special needs, potential additional learner support and recognition of prior learning. Attendance in class is closely monitored.

8 Staff confirmed that enhancement is a standard agenda item of College committee business and is included in the annual monitoring of programmes. For example, the College is reviewing the terms of reference of the Health, Safety and Facilities Committee at Academic Board to ensure that resource needs are improved effectively in order to enhance the programmes. Progress has been made in using a required format for written assignments, and stating the threshold for plagiarism detection software in assignment briefs. Students confirmed that they use the software to demonstrate that assessment work is not plagiarised. Students also commented that staff are approachable and helpful, and praised the detailed guidance provided by the Head of English in sessions during the first term designed to enhance their academic writing skills.

9 The College has a comprehensive annual monitoring policy which is reviewed regularly. All programme monitoring reports are considered by programme committees, and include analysis of student retention and achievement data and modular student satisfaction surveys. Annual monitoring reports identify good practice and areas of concern, with recommendations to Academic Board on matters raised by external examiners. Annual monitoring also consists of external monitoring reports to the awarding body and organisation, with recommendations from these reports incorporated into the College extended action plan. The College has recently implemented some enhancements to student learning opportunities by improving the consistency of the format of written assignments and stressing the plagiarism detection threshold in assignment briefs (see paragraph 8).

10 The engagement of students in quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience is well embedded in the College committee structure and feedback procedures. Students are represented on the Governing Council, Academic Board, the Health, Safety and Facilities Committee, and the Programme Committee. Student representatives are able to contribute to wider College management processes, including annual programme monitoring. The Head of Teaching and Learning is developing information for students on the ABILearn site to provide an interactive discussion forum in response to student requests.

11 Retention and achievement data continue to be somewhat variable. In the last year for which full data are available (2013-14) pass rates ranged from zero to 100 per cent, as did retention rates. Overall retention rates were 55 per cent for level 5 courses, and 80 per cent for level 7 courses (now phased out). More recent figures for courses that are still in progress show substantial improvement, with an overall rate of 77 per cent for the HND in Health and Social Care Management and 96 per cent for the HND in Business. Factors at work include more rigorous admissions and induction procedures (see paragraph 7), strict adherence to attendance and assignment requirements, and the ending of international student recruitment in 2015.

#### **4 Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education**

12 The Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report in 2016 confirmed that the College meets the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The College has mapped its policies and procedures to demonstrate their alignment with the Quality Code. The Principal and the Quality Advisor ensure that any changes in requirements are monitored for compliance. The College also complies with the external reference points set by its two awarding bodies, and has updated its HND in Business documentation in response to the new Pearson Regulated Qualifications Framework. Representatives from HEFCE met staff in April 2016 to discuss and review the College provision in the context of requirements for Alternative Providers. Following HEFCE consultations, the College has approved and implemented its Prevent strategy, with training for all staff.

#### **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

13 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Reviewer, and Dr David Taylor, Coordinator, on 7 March 2017.

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