



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of BPP University Limited, February 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 BPP University Limited (the University) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the December 2012 [Institutional Review](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 Since the last review in December 2012, BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd gained university title as BPP University Limited in August 2013. The University's main strategic priorities are to expand nursing and dentistry provision and to develop degree apprenticeships, online modes of its programmes and delivery opportunities through collaborative provision internationally. The University's delivery model for international online learners includes the option to access additional learner support through designated local collaborative partners. Approximately one tenth of the University's students are studying online at a distance, just over a quarter of this group access support from a collaborative partner.

3 Since December 2012, the overall student population has increased by 52 per cent or 3,498.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. The number of full-time students has increased by 2703 (46 per cent) and the number of part-time students has increased by 2,568 (132 per cent). At the last review there were 6,780 FTE students, comprising 5,808 full-time and 1,944 part-time students. During 2016-17 the University enrolled 10,278.55 FTE students, comprising 8,511 full-time and 4,512 part-time students.

4 There are 683 FTE members of staff, of which 54 per cent hold academic posts and 46 per cent hold professional and managerial roles. Over 98 per cent of all staff are permanent, and 60 per cent of academic staff and 84 per cent of professional and managerial staff hold full-time contracts. The University has added new master's degrees and the number of programmes has risen by 58 per cent from 58 to 92, since 2012. The University operates across 14 centres, half of which are based in Greater London. It has closed centres in Newcastle and Swindon and added three centres in London using BPP Group premises.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 This was the first monitoring review since the last full review took place in December 2012. The review team considered documentation and held meetings with students from representative programmes in London, Abingdon and Leeds, and with academic and support staff. Topics for discussion included strategic planning, collaborative developments, staff development for learning and teaching including online learning, student engagement and the management information system. The overall outcome has been informed by the following findings.

6 While the University has not continued to use live action planning based solely on the last review, the University maintains effective oversight of academic quality and standards through a series of annual reports (see paragraph 9). It signed off all recommendations and affirmations arising from the last full review in March 2013. The University has continued to sustain and develop the two features of good practice identified at the last review (see paragraph 7). Two of the four recommendations required the University to revise documentation, which it completed in 2013. In line with the remaining two recommendations, the University has continued to develop its policy and procedures for working with others and its arrangements for public information (see paragraph 7). The University has continued to enhance its approaches to programme design, assessment, student engagement and to securing robust management information, in line with the affirmations from the last review. The University diligently managed, developed and embedded procedures for the admission of students and annual programme monitoring (see paragraph 9).

7 The University has sustained good practice in the thoroughness of its approaches to supporting and developing staff and the detailed planning, design and approval of programmes. The University combines peer observation, performance reviews, and training needs analyses with relevant targeted staff development by the Faculty Development team. The University actively promotes participation in its Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Higher Education, which to date has led to Higher Education Academy Fellowship for a third of tutors. Having developed its policy and procedures for working with others, the University's current strategic priority is to develop online versions of its programmes. The University is currently developing new programmes for online learning using the systematic and detailed approach recognised at the last review. The University has systematically developed effective arrangements to ensure the accuracy and completeness of its public information. The University held two formal strategic reviews, firstly involving internal stakeholders including students and external experts and secondly an independent consultant. The reviews led to reorganisation and restructuring of the marketing function and the appointment of a designated quality officer to monitor public information. The University enhanced its Public Information Approval Policy and monitors its information against Part C of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and the Competition and Markets Authority guidance. The University met the recommendations to revise the 'overseas examinations request form' and the policy on timing and management of student offers.

8 The University has effective mechanisms for the fair admission of students. The relevant rules, policies and procedures are comprehensive and clearly specified in the General Academic Regulations and Manual of Policies and Procedures, 2016-17. The University takes care to ensure that the admissions team understand the nature of the provision on offer and to set standard admission criteria and tariffs. Academic staff consider individual applicants whose qualifications differ from the standard admissions tariff, to ensure their suitability to study. The University ensures the English language competence of students by requiring that students normally attain a standard overall IELTS score of 6.5. It interviews international students by video call to gauge their English language competence and subject interest. Additional English language support and peer mentoring enable students from diverse cultures to gain competence and confidence in the UK higher education system. The University assesses whether applicants have a genuine intention to study through the applicant's personal statement and interview.

9 The University has thorough arrangements for monitoring and review of its programmes. Programme teams complete Annual Programme Monitoring Reports which consider qualitative and quantitative information on programme performance. The reports include and evaluate student data, student evaluations and comments of external examiners. The University's Academic Council receives overview reports about the

outcomes of annual monitoring from the central Academic Affairs and Collaborations teams including an Annual Quality report, a Summary of External Examiners reports, a report on the Annual Programme Monitoring Process and an annual review of collaborative provision, all of which draw on the reports from Schools and programmes, as well as independent evidence. Students are involved at all levels in considering the annual monitoring reports and deliberations about related changes and enhancements to policy and practice. The University is taking deliberate steps to enhance the effectiveness of annual programme monitoring. It is introducing compliance checks and in-depth scrutiny within Schools and at institutional level, to enhance the accuracy of the overview report to Academic Council.

10 At the end of the academic year 2015-16, the University recorded 9,738 students on roll, drawn from 90 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In November 2016, numbers had increased to 13,023 headcount: 10,278.55 FTE. Of these 6,637 were new enrolments. Distance learning students account for 9 per cent (610) of total new enrolments. The University has 1,497 students currently enrolled in collaborative provision, with 510 of these on an apprenticeship or other work-based learning programme in the UK. The University has a diverse student population, with many mature and part-time students. A number of programmes offer students the flexibility to change modes or rates of study. However, such transferred students are treated as discontinued on data returns, which impacts negatively on the University's performance data on account of the flexibility built within programmes for students to accelerate and decelerate, move between University sites, transfer between full-time, part-time, and online, also day, evening and weekend, and additionally between streams in the early stages. These factors affect retention data. For the provision as a whole, taken over the period 2012-13 to 2015-16, the University's headline retention rate is 89 per cent. Within this figure, the retention rates on individual programmes vary between and 33 per cent and 100 per cent, with 109 of the 283 (38.52 per cent) programmes for 2014-15 showing a retention rate of 100 per cent. The overall pass rate for the University stands at 80 per cent, for the period 2012-13 to 2015-16.

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

11 The University is making commendable progress in using the Quality Code. The University reviews the General Academic Regulations and Manual of Policies and Procedures annually and maps them against the Quality Code.

12 The University has given further detailed attention to reviewing individual policies and procedures in relation to external reference points for UK higher education. In addition to the Quality Code, it makes reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework, the Equality Act 2010 and the Competition and Markets Authority Guidance for higher education providers. The University also refers to professional body regulations and requirements such as the Bar Standards Board, Nursing and Midwifery Council, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and the publications of employer representative bodies, learned societies and professional associations. This practice informs the University's current development of degree and higher apprenticeships. The University's Education and Training Committee regularly reviews publications concerning developments in the national quality framework from a range of organisations including those from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the QAA, the Legal Services Board and Higher Education Policy Institute.

13 Overall the University has reviewed and updated its General Academic Regulations and Manual of Policies and Procedures, 2016-17 to reflect best practice in the sector.

5 Report on a concerns investigation

14 QAA conducted an initial inquiry under the Concerns Scheme between 5 May and 28 July 2016, in response to submission to the scheme from a former student of the University. Dating back to December 2015, the student was enrolled on a part-time Graduate Diploma in Law by distance learning. The student submitted a complaint and subsequent appeal to the University concerning the quality of teaching and learning for distance learning students. While the University accepted responsibility for failing to provide timely access to online assessment, it did not uphold the rest of student's complaint and subsequent appeal.

15 Following its initial inquiry, in July 2016, the QAA resolved that concerns remained which should be investigated as part of the monitoring review. The investigation focused on gathering further evidence about the University's monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning of distance learning students and the University's implementation of its complaints procedure. During the monitoring review, the University cooperated fully with the investigation, both in providing relevant documentation and in facilitating discussion with staff.

16 The review team found that the University has effective systems in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning of distance learning students. The University has equivalent arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning of distance learning and on campus teaching and learning. The content of classes delivered by distance learning matches those for equivalent programmes delivered on campus. The University delivers lectures through the virtual learning environment using pre-recorded audio sessions and enables interactive tutorials using an online classroom facility. It records teaching sessions delivered by distance learning for students' later use and for monitoring purposes. The University uses online classrooms, has done so for many years and has developed protocols to ensure that sessions are audible. It invites all students to provide feedback through student representatives, the Staff Student Liaison Committees, module evaluation and to report problems with recorded sessions immediately. The University is currently considering how to implement a proposal from students that it provides audio quality rating tool after each online session. The performance of all tutors is managed through peer observation, performance review and relevant staff development. The University's Staff Development team provides targeted support for, and staff development in, technology enhanced learning. Student complaints about recorded sessions are rapidly reviewed by a senior manager who can arrange immediate intervention through peer observation of a tutor's performance.

17 In this case, the University's operation of its student complaints procedure was not aligned fully with Expectation B9 of the Quality Code. The student had submitted informal and formal complaints and an appeal, which were considered in a timely manner by the University. The University had notified the student clearly about the outcome of each stage and about further opportunities to seek redress. While the University operated its complaints procedure in a timely manner it did not do so in a completely fair way. The University expects that students will submit salient evidence in advance of each stage of its student complaints procedure. In this instance, the University identified four such occasions when the student might have submitted evidence. Once the formal complaint had been submitted, the Office for Regulation and Compliance did not actively seek any additional evidence from the student, which could have served to clarify its lines of inquiry. This approach was not consistent with the practice that the University had adopted in other cases. At the appeal stage, the Vice Chancellor's representative obtained further evidence on the appellant's behalf. This action was intended to ensure parity of treatment in comparison with other cases and to clarify the lines of enquiry. He determined that there was no additional material or systemic evidence to support the appeal. The review team concludes that in future the

University should ensure that its student complaints procedure is implemented consistently and in a fair as well as a timely manner.

6 Background to the monitoring visit

18 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.

19 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Helen Corkill, Reviewer, and Dr Anne M Miller, Coordinator, on 24 February 2017.

QAA1840 - R8331 - Apr 17

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk