



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of SAE Education Ltd, June 2015

Section 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 SAE Education Ltd (the Institute) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in June 2013.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The Institute has 858 students, which is 24 per cent more than at the time of the monitoring visit in June 2013. This reflects the continued expansion of the Institute's campuses outside London. A new BA/BSc Music Business programme commenced in September 2014.

3 The academic leadership of SAE Europe has recently been restructured under the direction of the Academic Leadership Committee. The newly appointed dean heads up the EU Directorate of Academic and Student Services, with headquarters in Oxford, providing leadership and functional oversight for academic affairs, student services, compliance and regulation, and library services. A new managing director has also been appointed for SAE UK and started in April 2015. The Institute has reported low student retention and, as a result, has identified a range of actions to be taken to improve the student experience and enhance retention through the implementation of a comprehensive Student Retention Project.

4 At the 2013 monitoring visit it was reported that the Institute had made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the June 2012 REO visit; as a result an annual monitoring visit did not happen in 2014. However, as a result of the above staffing changes and the low retention rates, an extended monitoring visit was undertaken in June 2015.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The Institute continues to demonstrate its commitment to improvement and enhancement of features of good practice. Oversight of the provision is managed effectively through the Regional Change Board, the Academic Leadership Committee and the Academic Advisory Committee. Enhancement strategies are guided by the current Strategic Plan; the Teaching and Learning Plan; and the Library and Learning Centre Plan, which include specific campus-based action plans involving academic coordinators meetings. The strength of the collegial relationship with Middlesex University (the University) has been further consolidated through a new partnership agreement and memorandum of cooperation. The University has revalidated programmes and approved new provision during the recent programmes review and revalidation process.

6 Procedures for programme monitoring, validation and review have been updated with comprehensive documentation, including the Institute's Quality Manual and the University's Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. Formal arrangements are in

place for obtaining advice to enhance the vocational and professional aspects of programmes through the Academic Advisory Committee. Industry expert panels and alumni also offer advice for Audio Production, Film and Animation, and Interactive Media programmes.

7 Assessment guidelines are detailed and clear, with considerable use of student feedback and evaluation. While the majority of students believe that assignment guidelines are easy to understand, the Institute is aware of the need for tutors to continue to monitor the concerns of the minority where students perceive a lack of clarity in assignment requirements. Academic coordinators work effectively with programme coordinators to ensure that assessment issues raised by students are reviewed and addressed.

8 The Institute operates a schedule of peer observations to ensure that the quality of learning and teaching is consistent across the four campuses, and good practice shared. Staff confirmed that peer observation is well embedded and contributes to a systematic process to enhance teaching and learning. Extension of mentorship activities of teaching and other staff is identified as a helpful additional element to develop potential enhancement opportunities.

9 The Institute has developed an Industry Engagement module, approved by the University through programme reviews, to develop and improve professional skills and to support students' work-related opportunities. Students appreciate the existing strong links with audio and film industries, including guest lectures. The UK Alumni Action Plan provides additional opportunities for past and present students to share current sector information and career opportunities to support progression into the creative media professions. In 2014, the Institute supported 46 students to attend the SAE Alumni Convention in Berlin.

10 The Institute has implemented comprehensive enhancements to the use of electronic and social media in response to staff and student feedback. The new student management information system, already trialled with supporting staff, is scheduled for launch in July 2015. The implementation and impact of this new system to monitor student performance will need to be evaluated. Recent other developments include: the improved virtual learning environment; and the implementation of an institutional multifunctional virtual platform with staff and student portals. The use of social media platforms, including a private group, and an events management system are features that demonstrate commitment to improving communications to enhance the student experience. The admissions process has also benefited from electronic access to comprehensive applicant information.

11 The Institute has made considerable progress in addressing the two advisable and one desirable recommendation from the 2012 review. The Institute's Quality Manual is updated as new policies and procedures are approved, and the April 2015 version is now available online to staff and students. The Regional Change Board has oversight of the implementation of the new student management information system. Recruitment of staff continues to be a priority across all campuses, with commitment to recruiting and supporting well-qualified teaching staff. A performance management review framework, including a manager toolkit, are used to ensure that recruitment policies, and induction of staff, are followed with active support from the human resources team. The Quality Manual provides detailed information on the Staff Development Policy, with further guidance for new staff available through the staff comprehensive 'on-boarding' induction programme.

12 The Institute has taken a proactive approach to the recent concerns of student retention, which were identified through the 2013-14 Annual Monitoring Review process. The establishment of the Retention Project Group has already implemented actions that have made reference to good practice available within the sector. The impact of this new group will need to be fully evaluated; however, current data and reports provided by the

Institute indicate that the work being undertaken is having a positive impact on retaining students. The current 2014-15 non-continuation data of six per cent is showing a significant improvement on 2012-13 and 2013-14 rates, which were 17 and 19 per cent respectively for year one cohorts.

13 Following a recent review of marketing, recruitment and admission of students, the Institute has implemented a revised plan for admission of students, and has appointed a new Head of Student Recruitment. Policies and procedures, including the Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy, are documented in the Quality Manual and the Admissions Manual. The application process is clear, fair and consistent, with tracking of all application requirements and individual progress. Implementation of admissions policies across campuses is reviewed and monitored by the Recruitment, Planning and Monitoring Group. A recent away-day was used to focus on alignment of all aspects of admissions protocols with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education* and Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision, with improvements identified for inclusion in the latest prospectus. Applicants are encouraged to attend Open Days or receive personal tours, with access to the applications portal. Students confirmed that there is comprehensive support and helpful information, including an applicant offer pack, accommodation guide and Studying at SAE Institute publication. There is a rigorous checking procedure for qualifications and references, with final decisions made by the campus academic coordinators. International students are interviewed twice to ensure that applicants are suitably qualified and have appropriate motivation. English language competence requirements are clearly stated on the website and in the prospectus. Confirmation to applicants is followed up with access to the joining instructions portal. Oversight of the admission of students is robust, supported by comprehensive documentation and an effective system of communications with applicants.

14 The Institute continues to review and monitor assessment strategies in line with the expectations of the University and areas for improvement clearly identified in programme reviews. The Quality Manual contains current policies for assessment, including: the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy; the Academic Honesty Policy; the Academic Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy; and the Academic Grievance Policy. The Teaching and Learning Plan demonstrates progress to ensure alignment of assessment practice with the Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Students receive assessment information during induction, supplemented by access to the Quality Manual, the campus guide and programme handbooks. Module assessments are available on the virtual learning environment. Students are informed about the referencing and formatting of assessments, which must be submitted using plagiarism-detection software. Procedures for marking, double-marking, internal verification and moderation follow the requirements agreed with the University. Students receive constructive formative and summative feedback on assessment practice, which is captured and monitored through representatives meetings, surveys and boards of study. Feedback is used to enhance assignment guidelines and improve assessment procedures. External examiners comment on the validity of assessments at assessment boards and in reports to the University. Students confirmed that they receive valued support from staff to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The Institute continues to work closely with University link tutors to ensure that assessment practice is robust, fair and consistent.

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

15 The Institute works effectively with its awarding body to secure the academic standards of its programmes, with a cycle of programme validation and review that serves as

a check on relevant parts of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and alignment with the Quality Code. Programme specifications are in place, which make reference to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Relationships with the creative media industries ensure that programmes are designed to develop relevant sector skills and competencies.

16 There is clear commitment to meeting the expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education with Others*, delivered successfully through the established collegial relationship with the University. The Teaching and Learning Plan also provides evidence of engagement with the Quality Code by mapping enhancements to, for example: *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education* and *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*, as noted in paragraphs 13 and 14 above. The Institute is aware of the importance of pastoral support for students and the need to enhance its already well developed student engagement policy.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Bob Saynor, Coordinator, and Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Reviewer, on 23 to 24 June 2015.

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