



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of ABI College Ltd March 2019

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 Ltd (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [April 2017 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There are two material changes to the College and its curriculum since the most recent monitoring visit in 2017. In the current academic year, the College has recruited no new HND students, due to the Department for Education de-designating its 'other undergraduate courses'. All existing students have been supported to transition to other providers. In addition, and due to a strategic review of collaborative provision at its University partner (University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth), the memorandum of understanding between the University and the College has presently been suspended. There are, therefore, no current top-up students with the University partner at the College, and no current HND students. The College employs seven permanent academic, teaching and administrative staff, and occupies the same premises in Acton as at the previous visit.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The monitoring visit confirms that the College has made acceptable progress in both continuing to develop and embed the good practice and to address the four recommendations from the February 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). Most actions identified have led to improvements, and actions that are not yet fully addressed do not put the academic standards or quality at risk (paragraphs 10 and 14).

4 The College has fully embedded the good practice represented by its version control procedures for managing policy documents (paragraph 6); and the virtual learning environment (VLE) has been continually developed and further enhanced (paragraph 7). In respect of the recommendations, the oversight of work placements has been improved through the implementation of signed service level agreements with employers (paragraph 8), and the work of the Academic Board strengthened by use of standardised agendas and formal meeting calendars (paragraph 9). Admissions policy and procedures are improved and beginning to have a positive impact on student retention, although student achievement remains a challenge for the College (paragraphs 10 and 14). The approach to enhancement is formally documented and managed through the deliberative structure (paragraph 11).

5 Student admission arrangements are thorough and supportive (paragraph 12), and assessment practice is robust and assured through internal and external moderation (paragraph 13). The use of relevant external reference points has been maintained through the regular updating of policies and procedures (paragraphs 15 and 16).

6 The version control procedures for managing policies are comprehensively applied and evidenced on the standardised control pages of each such document. The College Public Information Control Policy clearly identifies the target audience and where information is to be published.

7 The VLE is a comprehensive repository of information for both students and staff and has been further developed to include the integration of plagiarism-detection software. It was cited in a recent Edexcel Academic Management Review as exemplary, and students attest to its positive contribution both as a tool for learning and as an access point for College policies, programme and module information, and surveys.

8 The recommendation to strengthen the management of work placements has been addressed by the introduction of signed service level agreements with employers, used for example in the HND in Health and Social Care programme. The arrangements were scheduled to be reviewed as part of the 2017-18 annual monitoring cycle, but this has yet to be completed owing to the de-designation process.

9 Procedures for scheduling and recording the business of Academic Board have also been developed and applied. The dates of committee meetings are formally published as part of the College academic calendar and communicated to staff and student representatives through the VLE. Provision of reports to the Academic Board is closely controlled and monitored through the publication of a schedule of key dates for report submission. The Board now has a standardised agenda that includes consideration of the College's extended action plan, and the minutes of meetings are formally recorded in line with published terms of reference.

10 The revised admissions policy has contributed to an increase in student retention and, to a lesser extent, in student achievement. However, the de-designation process, and the consequent concentration on facilitating the transfer of students to other providers has made it difficult to measure the full impacts of this development. Nonetheless, the College can point to over 60 per cent of applicants being rejected in each of the past two academic years as a demonstration of the robustness of its application system. At the programme level, student data is systematically analysed and evaluated through the annual monitoring process. Emerging themes impacting on retention and achievement include poor attendance, non-submission of assignments and non-payment of fees. While action has been taken to address these issues, the College acknowledges further work is still required to critically analyse and evaluate student data to address and target the specific features of their student cohorts.

11 Enhancement is a standard agenda item of College committee business and is included in the annual monitoring of programmes. Recent provider level enhancements include the integration of plagiarism-detection software within the VLE, the use of standardised templates for assignment briefs, the implementation of in-class study skills tutorials and the re-appraisal of modifications to the admissions process.

12 The procedure for managing admission to the HN programmes is detailed in the Admissions Policy. Recent enhancements include a more detailed admissions procedure, including decision processes and revisions to the grading of the English test and interview. Prospective students complete a written application form together with supporting documentation and these are assessed by the Admissions Team against the entry requirements for the programme. Formal qualifications are checked for authenticity and suitability with overseas qualifications being evaluated using UK NARIC. The most recent Edexcel Academic Management Review Report confirms that the HN admissions process is robust, and students commented positively on the process and the associated information

provided by the College. Plymouth Marjon University sets entry requirements for the top-up degree programme and formally approves all admissions.

13 The College has a comprehensive Assessment Policy and a range of supporting documents to inform its assessment practices. The structure of assessments and the relevant learning outcomes are defined in the programme handbooks. The assessment structure for all modules is clearly articulated within the individual module descriptors. All assignments are internally verified and the College also uses the Edexcel assignment checking service, alongside standardisation meetings to ensure consistency of practice and to assure academic standards. External examiners review students' work and provide detailed comments on the overall achievement at module and programme level. Students found the assessment process and requirements to be clear, and commented positively on the usefulness of the feedback they receive.

14 Student performance data underscores the points made above regarding improvements in retention. While for the 2015-16 cohorts an overall retention rate of 37 per cent (21 of 57) was recorded, this rose in 2016-17 to 55 per cent (35 of 64), and in 2017-18 rose again to 87 per cent (62 of 71). Of those students retained who were expected to complete by March 2018, 76 per cent (16 of 21) gained their target qualification, while for those expected to qualify by December 2018, the equivalent figure for achievement was 13 of 35 (37 per cent). This latter figure has been impacted by the de-designation process, and students were still submitting final assignments at the time of the visit, so achievement levels are projected by the College to rise to 50 per cent.

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

15 The College has continued to engage regularly and appropriately with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) through the regular checking and updating of its policies and procedures. and additional operating procedures have been introduced where required. There is good evidence of the use of the Quality Code in the admissions process; assessment; annual monitoring and associated action planning, student engagement and student support and guidance.

16 The College uses another external reference points to help assure academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, including the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The College adheres to Edexcel's quality management processes and the awarding organisation's programme specifications, module specifications and assessment policies and procedures. Compliance with Edexcel expectations is monitored through the external examiner system and the annual monitoring review conducted by the awarding organisation. The College has incorporated Prevent into relevant policies and procedures and holds regular meetings with a Prevent Adviser.

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 Dr Colin Fryer, Reviewer, and Ms Roshani Swift, QAA Officer, on 16 March 2019.

QAA2364 - R10413 - Apr 19

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