



Bangor International College

Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements

May 2018

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements (EOEA) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bangor International College. The review took place on 25 May 2018 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Mrs Catherine Fairhurst
- Professor Graham Romp.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner
- make judgements on the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- make judgements about the reliability of the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.¹ More information about this review method can be found in the Handbook for providers.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Bangor International College (the College), both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the review visit. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgements about Bangor International College.

- **Confidence** can be placed in Bangor International College's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.
- **Confidence** can be placed in Bangor International College's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.
- **Reliance can** be placed on the information that Bangor International College produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The QAA panel did not identify any features of good practice.

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to Bangor International College.

It is **advisable** for the provider to:

- discuss with the University the explicit inclusion of the level of the programme on the transcript issued to students
- clarify with the University and make explicit to students, the regulations that apply to the incorporated degrees.

About Bangor International College

Bangor International College (the College) was established in 2016 as a partnership between Oxford International Education Group (OIEG) and Bangor University (the University). The partnership was established to increase the number and range of international students studying at the University.

OIEG is a private education company registered with the British Council that runs schools, colleges and centres for international students in the UK and North America.

A Collaboration Agreement outlines the responsibilities of each party. The University is ultimately responsible for the academic standards of the awards and the quality of the provision leading to them. The University provides teaching and administrative space. It provides access for the College students to learning resources, welfare, IT support and facilities, the same as for all other enrolled University students. There is a University Coordinator and link tutors.

The College is responsible for managing and delivering the University validated programmes. The College adheres to the University quality assurance processes detailed in the Operational and Quality Assurance Manual. OIEG is responsible for marketing and student recruitment to its programmes. The final decision on the admission of students and the issuance of confirmation of acceptance for studies (CAS) rests with the University.

The 3.5 full-time and 17 part-time/sessional teaching staff within the College are employed by OIEG, approved by the University and have access to its resources.

The College delivers:

- International Foundation Year Zero of a range of four-year bachelor's programmes (IYZ CQFW Level 3)
- International Year One of bachelor's programmes (IY1 CQFW Level 4)
- preparatory phase of an International Incorporated Masters (IIM CQFW Level 6)
- 6 or 12-week pre-sessional English course for students whose English language level is below IELTS 5.5.

At the time of the visit, the total number of students at the College was 42.

Standards and the quality of the learning experience are monitored through the governance structures of the University. External Examiners provide an external reference point for monitoring quality and standards.

As part of the validation process by the University, the relevant sections of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW) were used as external reference points for the IYZ, IY1 and IIM.

There have been no previous EOEAs although there was a University Internal Quality Audit in December 2017 which resulted in several recommendations.

Detailed findings about Bangor International College

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The College has effective processes for maintaining academic standards which are overseen by both OIEG and the University. The University has ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality and academic standards of its awards. The Joint Management Board (JMB) has oversight of academic standards. The JMB reports to the OIEG/University Steering Board which is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the collaboration. The College is overseen by the University's Collaborative Provision Sub-Group on behalf of the Quality Assurance and Validation Task Group. OIEG has a Quality Committee for the Embedded Colleges of which all College Directors are members, and Bangor International College's Director reports regularly to OIEG's Academic Development Director.

1.2 The College's Director and the University's Coordinator meet regularly to discuss the routine operations of the College and any issues or concerns that may arise.

1.3 The University Link Tutors provide support for programme and module modifications and annual monitoring and review. The JMB has recently reviewed the Link Tutor's role and the University has appointed an Academic Lead to be responsible for enhancing the partnership.

1.4 The College produces a reflective Annual Review of Teaching report and a quality enhancement and development plan which includes student, staff and external examiner feedback. After consideration by the JMB the plan becomes part of the University's annual monitoring process. The College Director is responsible for ensuring that any actions contained in the quality enhancement and development plans are carried out within the review cycle. Programmes delivered at the College are also subject to periodic review within the University's standard five-year cycle.

1.5 The University, therefore, provides the quality assurance framework within which the College operates and delivers University-approved programmes and guarantees that threshold academic standards are set initially and maintained over time.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.6 The College makes effective use of external reference points in the management of academic standards through its implementation of the University's procedures. The University tests these processes internally through approval and review processes, and externally, by external assessors and examiners.

1.7 The College maps the International Year One (IY1) programme to the common first-year of the University undergraduate programmes. The College generally adheres to the University's academic regulations for taught programmes. However, Bangor University Regulations for Taught Programmes do not specify the International Incorporated bachelor's and master's degrees or provide regulations for the assessment of Level 3 modules. In order to secure fully academic standards, it is advisable for the College to clarify with the University and make explicit to students, the regulations that apply to the incorporated degrees.

1.8 The formal University approval procedures ensure recognition is made of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)*, *Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)*, AQA subject descriptors for outcomes at Advanced Level (Level 3), QAA's Subject Benchmark Statements, the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* at B2 for language modules, and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) descriptors for Bands 5 and 6. These are further reflected in handbooks and module guides, which contain links to key reference points. Programme specifications are clear and detailed. The University validation and approval panels include an external member and external examiners provide an effective reference point for assessment and comment on conformity to external reference points. OIEG has been accredited by The British Council which provides a further external reference point.

How effectively does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?

1.9 The College uses external examiners, verification and assessment effectively to assure academic standards. Programme specifications map learning outcomes to assessment methods, teaching strategies and the curriculum. The College's teaching staff are responsible for setting assessments, internal moderation and marking. The University appoints, trains and takes responsibility for the external examiners. JMB gives full and careful consideration to these reports which are part of the annual review and monitoring process.

1.10 The students have access to the external examiner reports through the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.11 External examiners' reports confirm that academic standards are equivalent to other higher education (HE) institutions and are consistent with levels set out in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.

1.12 The Board of Examiners chaired by the College Director and attended by the external examiner, determines students' eligibility to progress to the University.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in **Bangor International College's** management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 OIEG takes a strategic approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The main aim of the College is to prepare international students for successful transition into higher education at the University. The JMB is responsible for monitoring the quality of learning opportunities at the College and receives regular reports from the Teaching and Learning Committee. The JMB reports to the Steering Board.

2.2 The College shares responsibility for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities with the University. The College is responsible for delivering the curriculum, student support, setting assessments, the marking and moderation of student work, and giving feedback to students. At the time of the review, the College employed two

full-time academic management staff, the College Director and the Head of English. This management team oversees the day-to-day management of learning opportunities at the College. A key element in the strategy for enhancement is to enlarge the senior management team as student numbers grow, with members being assigned specific responsibility related to learning opportunities and enhancement.

2.3 College programmes are designed and approved in collaboration with the University to support international students in both language and academic skills development. The College has produced a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy that informs the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. The College recognises the opportunities and challenges in supporting international students from diverse backgrounds and there is an emphasis on cultural acclimatisation, small-class tuition, and formative assessment to encourage the active engagement of all students.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

2.4 The College uses a number of external reference points for the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. These include the University processes for programme design, approval and review. Approval of programmes involves input from external subject specialists and University staff.

2.5 The English Language units that form part of the IYZ and IIM are mapped to the CEFR to ensure that the assessment of learning outcomes of these units enables students to demonstrate their level of language ability.

2.6 There is robust scrutiny of programmes by external examiners appointed and trained by the University to ensure that standards are comparable with UK expectations. External examiner reports are considered by the JMB and inform annual reports and internal quality audits. Link tutors, appointed by the University, liaise with College staff to provide information and advice, and are involved in student induction activities. The College receives reports from link tutors and external examiners that are used in the annual review of its provision.

2.7 The OIEG Admissions Policy is mapped to Chapter 2 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and commits OIEG to providing a fair, effective and responsible admissions service. Responsibility for admissions is set out in the manual. OIEG is primarily responsible for the recruitment of students in accord with pre-agreed academic entry criteria, and handles the admissions process from the point of application up to the issuing of an initial decision on the suitability of the candidate. The final decision over the admission of students to programmes at the College lies with the University which issues the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies letters. The right to appeal an admissions decision is explained in the OIEG Admissions Policy. Students who met the review team confirmed that they had been effectively supported through the admissions process.

2.8 The College follows the University's Academic Appeals and Students Complaints procedures which are made available to students through the VLE.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.9 The JMB considers the outcomes of monitoring reports, assessment boards, link coordinator reports, and feedback from external examiners. Teaching quality is a standard item on the agenda.

2.10 The College operates the University's annual monitoring and review processes for all courses and units. The outcome of the monitoring process is the production of course and unit enhancement plans. This is informed by statistical information, and feedback from students and staff. In addition to following the University's processes, the College Director produces a reflective annual report to the JMB and Steering Board. Student feedback is obtained through a range of mechanisms, including representation on the Student-Staff Liaison Committee, module and programme-level feedback forms, and feedback on pre-arrival and induction procedures.

2.11 In accordance with the Operational and Quality Assurance Manual, the College underwent an Internal Quality Audit in December 2017. This Audit had a developmental focus and made recommendations related to partnership working between the College and University and enhancing the student experience. The College is required to provide a response within a year of the Audit, outlining the steps that have been taken to implement these recommendations.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.12 The College seeks to recruit teaching staff who can demonstrate an understanding of, and empathy with, international students. Teaching experience abroad and/or previous experience of teaching international students in the UK is specified as highly desirable in the person specification for tutors. Teaching staff are approved by the Link Coordinator on behalf of the University and have access to University services and facilities.

2.13 Staff receive induction sessions on appointment and have regular meetings with the College Director and Head of English to ensure they are supported effectively to maintain and enhance learning opportunities. There is an annual appraisal of full-time staff and teaching observations of all tutors is undertaken by peers, the Head of English and the College Director.

2.14 Training for staff is provided regularly at the start of each term, with follow-up sessions later in the term. The College operates a programme of continuing professional development for its staff, which is designed to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. OIEG also provides support for staff to acquire additional qualifications, and staff are encouraged to attend relevant conferences and workshops. College staff are able to attend University staff development activities.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that students are appropriately and effectively supported?

2.15 Students are sent pre-arrival information once they have secured a place. This material is reviewed annually by the Administration Manager, following student feedback. On arrival, students attend the College's orientation and induction which includes University input. Students met by the review team commented positively on the preparatory material and the induction period.

2.16 The key information that students require is found in the student handbook. The handbook includes individual module overviews that detail the learning outcomes, content and assessment methods. Module guides are prepared and distributed separately.

2.17 Students are required to attend all classes and records of attendance are kept by tutors and transferred onto a weekly spreadsheet by the Administration Manager. The College follows a clear and robust attendance policy, with a series of interventions in cases of protracted absence from classes.

2.18 At the start of 2017-18, the College introduced a personal tutor system to provide general academic and personal advice and support within individual and group settings. Student performance is monitored and the College has adopted mechanisms to identify and support students perceived to be at risk. Subject tutors can highlight problems by using the Cause for Concern process and there is prompt identification of problem areas and early intervention.

2.19 The Administration Manager has overall responsibility for student support and welfare and is the first point of contact for any student who has a problem. Students have access to support services provided by the University. In future, the College is committed to tracking the outcomes of students as they progress through their University studies, and this is a further key indicator to ensure students are effectively supported to benefit from University-level study.

2.20 Student feedback is obtained through feedback questionnaires at the conclusion of each module. Feedback is also obtained through student representatives who are elected from tutorial groups to be members of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee. It is an intention of the College that one student representative will also attend future meetings of the JMB.

How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible and sufficient to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?

2.21 The University provides the College with teaching and administrative space, and College students have access to all University services, including learning resources, welfare, IT support and facilities, the same as for all other enrolled University students.

2.22 Students that the review team met confirmed that they had full access to required learning resources to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in **Bangor International College's** management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

3 Information

How effective are the provider's arrangements for ensuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.1 OIEG and the University are committed to providing reliable, clear and accessible information about the College through a variety of media, including the OIEG corporate website, the College pages hosted on the University website, the College annual brochure, information flyers, and through social media channels. The College pages on the University website explain the embedded nature of the College and the partnership between OIEG and the University. The College webpages and the brochure contain full details of the admissions process.

3.2 All material produced by either OIEG or the College that supports students in their decision making is managed through the content management system, which requires a consultation and sign-off process prior to information going live or being published. Within the College, the Director is responsible for signing off all relevant materials. The University has final sign off of all marketing material.

3.3 The College provides prospective students with pre-arrival information to assist them in planning for their arrival in the UK and the College itself. Applicants to the College are made aware what they need to achieve to continue their study at the University through the printed brochure and website, and this information is repeated at induction and during the programme. Enrolled students are issued with a student handbook, which contains general as well as programme-specific information. The handbook makes clear that College students are fully enrolled members of the University. Module guides follow the standard University template and provide detailed information about delivery patterns and timing and modes of assessments. Student handbooks and module guides are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that their content remains accurate and current. Students who the review team met confirmed that the information they received, both before arrival and during their time on the course, was accurate and useful.

3.4 OIEG make use of overseas agents to market its programmes and has extensive mechanisms in place to ensure agents are provided with up-to-date information about its programmes and partners.

3.5 Students receive a transcript of the academic credit achieved on the completion of their College programme. The current transcript does not specify the level of the programme. Therefore, it is advisable that the provider discusses with the University, the explicit inclusion of the level of the programme on the transcript issued to students.

The review team concludes that **reliance can** be placed on the information that Bangor International College produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms that may be used in this report.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary

Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

e-learning

See **technology enhanced or enabled learning**

Embedded college

Colleges, often operating as part of a network, that are embedded on or near the campuses of UK higher education institutions (HEI) and that primarily provide preparatory programmes for higher education.

Enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Operational definition

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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