Bangor University International College

Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements

October 2022

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bangor University International College. The review took place on 27 October 2022 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Dr Terence Clifford-Amos
- Dr Barbara Howell.

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
- 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 1. 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 5.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission. More information about this review method can be found in the Handbook for Providers.

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Bangor University 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 judgement about Bangor University International College.

- **Confidence** can be placed in Bangor University 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 University International College's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at Bangor University International College.

- The systematic use of formal and informal teaching observation which supports thematic learning and teaching developments.

- The development of an effective learning culture which supports students' academic integrity.
- The highly-effective interactive working partnership between the College, Bangor University and Oxford International Education Group, and the opportunities for staff development and external peer engagement.
- The effective adoption and refinement of learning technology platforms which improve and enhance pedagogic practice.

Recommendations

The QAA panel made no recommendations.

About Bangor University International College

Bangor University International College is an embedded college offering integrated programmes delivered on the campus of Bangor University and is listed on the University's Tier 4 sponsor's licence. The College was established in 2016 by Collaboration Agreement and is operated in partnership between Oxford International Education Group (OIEG) and Bangor University (BU).

The principal aim of the partnership is to widen access to, and participation in, higher education in the UK for international (non-EU) students. The programmes available at the College constitute the first stage of a degree and are aimed at international students who do not have the qualifications for immediate university entry. Programmes are designed to develop students' English language proficiency, academic and study skills, and to enable them to progress onto an undergraduate or postgraduate degree programme. The College provides small class sizes together with personalised and individual support. The College offers a supportive environment for international students entering into an unfamiliar environment and encourages the development of independent learning.

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 also provides teaching and administrative space. It enables access for the College's students to learning resources, welfare services, IT support and facilities - the same as for all other enrolled university students. A University Coordinator and a range of link tutors provide the conduit between the College and the University.

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

The College currently employs eight full-time and one part-time and sessional teaching staff who are employed by OIEG, approved by the University and have access to its resources.

The following programmes are currently delivered:

- International Year Zero (IYZ) - the first year of a four-year International Integrated Bachelor's degree (IIB) (CQFW Level 3)
- Bangor Business School Foundation Year (BFY) (CQFW Level 3)
- International Year One of bachelor's programmes (IY1) (CQFW Level 4)
- The preparatory phase of an International Incorporated Masters (IIM) (CQFW Level 6)

At the time of the visit, the total number of students at the College was 155.

Academic 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) are used as external reference points for the IYZ, IY1 and IIM courses.

The College was subject to a successful Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements review in 2018. Further annual monitoring visits have taken place, most recently in May 2021 when the review team concluded that the College was making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision.

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review of Bangor University International College was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

Detailed findings about Bangor University 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 the University and OIEG. The University provides academic governance in assuring the standard of its awards in line with the collaborative partnership agreement. Oversight of academic standards has been subject to external review over a number of years and demonstrates the College's responsibilities are effectively fulfilled. Validation events and evaluations by external examiners also provide commentaries which confirm that academic standards appropriate to the award are at the levels set out in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ).

1.2 Academic standards are reviewed and verified annually by a range of authorities, including external assessors and examiners, and through QAA reviews. The overarching quality-assurance framework provided by the University, with which the College complies, guides its work in achieving and maintaining academic standards. Threshold standards and student achievement beyond these levels are seen as key priorities among the teaching staff.

1.3 The achievement of threshold standards, and the range of standards and quality requirements detailed in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* is supported by a newly-established governance structure. This comprises the Joint Academic and Operations Boards, which report to the BUIC Management Board which, in turn, is responsible to the Executive Steering Committee. Management is led by the College Director, Academic Director and College Manager. The College adheres to the academic standards as detailed in the University Regulations for Taught Programmes. Since 2019, responsibility for academic aspects of the College's operation has resided with the Joint Academic Board. An evaluation of these senior-management changes will feature in future monitoring and review processes.

1.4 As a collaborative partner, academic oversight of the College comes under the University's Collaborative Provision Sub-Group, acting on behalf of the University, and specifically, the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group. Partnership development between the University, OIEG and the College, is a live, ongoing process conducted through formal meetings and regular exchanges. The working relationship between the parties is highly-effective and provides an interactive partnership which promotes opportunities for staff development and external peer engagement. This matter is addressed as an area of good practice under paragraph 2.14.

1.5 Rigorous staff recruitment ensures the College's effective maintenance of academic standards. Teaching staff are recruited and selected by the College Director following consultation with other senior staff and are formally employed by OIEG. The Collaboration Agreement requires that all members of the College's teaching staff are subject to approval by a senior member of university staff. Currently, this responsibility lies with the Academic Lead, who liaises on all collaborative academic matters. OIEG, in meetings with the review team staff and students, commented on high-quality teaching and support staff.

1.6 The College additionally adheres to the OIEG quality assurance framework. Prior to 2022, OIEG had a well-established Quality Committee for Embedded Colleges which

included all college directors. Senior staff of the six colleges operated by OIEG in the UK and Europe, regularly attended these sessions. In 2022, OIEG created a central board structure to provide regular meetings between the College Director and College Managers to further embed the work of the former Quality Committee. The new structure includes an Academic Board, convened to consider a range of quality-assurance issues and to support the identification and dissemination of good practice.

1.7 Internal quality assurance processes involve students, tutors, link tutors and external examiners. Feedback from these processes ensures that matters raised at internal college meetings, and those held jointly with the University, together with the outcomes from QAA reviews, are consolidated into an ongoing College action plan. The action plan is effective in recording developmental matters, compiling actions towards resolution and the setting of deadlines for responsible persons and task groups. The action plan is comprehensive and effective in making improvements. Recent discussions include approaches to additional unfair-practice training for staff, and the development of a new mini-module on building academic integrity. There is an effective BUIC Operational and Quality Assurance Manual and the University operates a Quality Enhancement Unit to provide further support.

1.8 Monitoring and review processes are linked to enhancement and include periodic internal quality audits and revalidation of programmes. The College Director is responsible for these formal review processes and ensures that all data and feedback are collated, and that the student experience is given a prominent voice. The annual process includes student feedback, tutor evaluation of taught modules, and comments from external examiners. Commentaries on other developments - for example, equality and diversity - are also considered. Monitoring and review activity demonstrates reflective practice and provides a good platform for the enhancement of teaching and learning. Staff cited recent examples of enhancement including a focus on technology-enhanced delivery and the development of the virtual learning platforms. This matter is addressed as an area of good practice under paragraph 2.22.

1.9 Recent changes in staffing have been designed to improve the infrastructure, and to bring a more effective and even distribution of duties among senior staff in oversight and management of academic standards across the College. The recent appointment of additional programme leaders is intended to assist in devolving some of the extensive responsibilities of senior colleagues. There is a focus on ensuring a greater number of full-time staff employed at the College to reduce reliance on sessional tutors. More than half of the academic staff members are on full-time contracts, each with a specifically allocated responsibility. Programme leaders' responsibilities include students with disabilities and Welsh language coordination. Personal tutors are now drawn solely from full-time members of staff. The effectiveness of these staffing changes will be evaluated in future monitoring and review cycles.

1.10 The combination of a thorough quality-assurance governance structure and processes at the University, with appropriate management oversight within the College, ensures that academic standards are effectively maintained and monitored in line with the collaborative arrangements.

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

1.11 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.

1.12 External reference points include 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. Through the University processes there is engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

1.13 The College uses all of these reference points effectively in its academic frameworks and in its learning and teaching approaches. There is a strong commitment to the continuous development of the students' English language and academic levels, which are defined at the start of the course as being at CEFR B2 or at least IELTS 5.5. Student results show that there is effective teaching, and demonstrate successful performance and competence in English Language.

1.14 Full account is taken of external reference points including the CQFW frameworks and QAA Subject Benchmark Statements which underpin the approval and review processes at the College. The systematic use of external examiners enables checking whether the appropriate academic levels are being reached for each of the higher programmes of study. The foundation-level provision is now fully integrated into a range of four-year undergraduate programmes. The University has issued a detailed Code of Practice for Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review which ensures that external reference points are appropriately considered.

1.15 External reference points underpin definitive programme and module specifications which are authorised by the Head of School and Dean of College. All credit-bearing units conform to the expectations stated in the CQFW levels, and learning outcomes are appropriately aligned. Academic credit is in accordance with the appropriate levels of CQFW. Programme and module specifications are records of academic activities leading to academic credit. The University holds definitive copies of these in a management database.

1.16 Many staff are active externally in attending conferences, the pursuit of further qualifications, and many other engagements which bring them into contact with other higher education institutions and academic colleagues. This academic engagement supports the sharing of sectoral good practice and engagement with external reference points.

1.17 Key external reference points are fully established within the University's policies and procedures which have been adopted by the College and embedded in practice. This process ensures that external reference points are used effectively to support the management of academic standards at the College.

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

1.18 The validation of programmes and modules are key events for the verification of academic standards. The procedure includes external panel membership from UK universities, senior university representation and professional support staff. The College's validation events address programme and module content, aims and learning outcomes, and subject and level benchmarking. Student-centred practices and support - including assessment, teaching and learning, placements and student research - are also considered. Qualification frameworks, adherence to the requirements of professional bodies, the University's regulations, and accommodation and resources are fully considered. Validation reports are thorough, meticulous in their approvals and recommendations, and consequently communicate effectiveness in assuring academic standards.

1.19 Moderation and examining are subject to internal and external procedures. The process of sampling and double-marking is undertaken by teaching staff following the

guidance in BU Taught Regulations and the College's marks verification process (which draws from the BU Taught regulations). Results of first and second-marking and moderation are made available to external examiners through a designated online facility. External examiner scrutiny and commentaries are returned to the Academic Director to be made available to the Progression and Assessment Board.

1.20 External examiners may be nominated by OIEG through the College Director. The University's External Examiner Committee receives nominations to go forward for further consideration and possible approval. External examiners have access to module guides, schemes of work, learning outcomes and planned assessments. They have authority to comment on any of these prior to the receipt of students' written work.

1.21 External examiner responsibilities include reviewing assessments and examinations set by college staff, and on the grading of student work. External examiners confirm that academic standards are in line with national expectations and equivalent to standards on other programmes with which they are familiar. Examiners confirm that programmes accord with Subject Benchmark Statements. External examiners indicate the rigour and fairness of the examination procedures and conformity to the relevant external reference. External examiners comment on good practice and any areas which would benefit from improvements.

1.22 Examiner reports are submitted on the university pro-forma and are made available through the virtual learning environment (VLE). Responses are thorough and are reviewed at the University's Quality Enhancement Unit. Careful consideration of external examiner reports is given at the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Joint Academic Board. The reports feature in the annual report by the College Director to the Management Board. External examiner reports also inform internal quality audits, and institutional and programme reviews.

1.23 The review team found external moderation, verification and external examining to be disciplined, reliable and highly-effective, and the use of the University's monitoring and review processes assures the maintenance and management of academic standards at the College.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in Bangor University 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 The Joint Operational Board and Joint Academic Board (JAB), report to the College's Management Board with the JAB responsible for the management of the academic quality of the programme and overseeing programme development and improvement. Oversight of the quality of the learning opportunities takes place through the Teaching and Learning Committee which reports to the JAB, programme meetings, and student forums which are held each term. The Teaching and Learning Committee and the JAB are informed by reports from external examiners and link tutors appointed by the University. These reports summarise their views on teaching, learning and assessment. All meetings are further informed by feedback from students through termly module evaluation, student programme evaluation, tutor feedback, and external examiner and link tutor reports. There is clear

evidence of attendance and contribution by students and link tutors at both the JAB and Teaching and Learning Committee.

2.2 The JAB also receives a comprehensive reflective annual report produced by the College Director with key statistical information about the past year and qualitative elements that identify what has gone well, or requires improvement. The annual report is informed by discussion at programme meetings, students forums, the Teaching and Learning Committee, and comments in reports provided by external examiners and link tutors. Feedback from students on their programmes of study and individual modules is also fully considered. The process provides a robust framework which ensures that areas for improvement and enhancement are actioned.

2.3 The systematic and reflective use of meetings, committees, and feedback from students, external examiners and link tutors ensure that effective processes are in place for managing and enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

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

2.4 Effective use is made of external reference points in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities throughout the student journey. The College and OIEG take full account of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in relation to ensuring there is a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system and that appropriate advice and guidance on admissions, recruitment and widening access is given. This is in line with the guidelines provided by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to ensure compliance with UK consumer protection laws on the publication of information.

2.5 Full details of the admissions process are found in the college brochure. Student applications are processed through the OIEG Pathways Admissions Team which receives the student application forms and then makes conditional offers. The paperwork is subsequently sent to the University to confirm compliance with visa requirements and for the final academic decisions on making unconditional offers. The final decision on the admission of students and the issuing of CAS rests with the University. Students confirmed that many of them were recruited through agents and confirmed that the guidance they receive is appropriate and accurate. Recruitment agents are carefully selected and provided with training by OIEG which ensures that they provide accurate and comprehensive information. Students understand how they may appeal an admissions' decision, and the process is clearly explained in the OIEG policy.

2.6 The development, formulation and monitoring of the College's programmes are informed by a range of external reference points including the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW), *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ), the Quality Code, *Regulated Qualifications Framework* (RQF), AQA subject descriptors for outcomes at Advanced Level (Level 3) and QAA's Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.7 In addition, the College utilises the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) descriptors for Bands 5 and 6, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) at B2 for language modules.

2.8 Adherence to the guiding principles of the CQFW and the Subject Benchmark Statements is embedded within the initial approval and annual or periodic review processes of the University. Approval is formalised and captured in the definitive programme and module templates. The IY0 and IIM in Business (in 2015-16), IY1 in Business (in 2016-17), IIM in Psychology (December 2018), and IY1 in Psychology (July 2019) were designed collaboratively by the University and OIEG staff. Proposals were considered through the

University's Programme Validation Process which ensured engagement with external reference points and included external panel representation for the validation events. External examiners also report on adherence to external reference points appropriate to the various levels of programmes through their annual reports.

2.9 The College follows the University's Academic Appeals and Student Complaints procedures, with shared responsibility for dealing with appeals or complaints as they arise under fair, robust and timely procedures. Students confirmed that they are fully aware of how to make a complaint or appeal should the need arise.

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

2.10 The College has effective processes and procedures in place to ensure that the quality of teaching is being maintained and enhanced. Teaching staff are recruited following a clear OIEG recruitment policy, based on a set of fair, consistent and effective processes. The process is managed through a centralised OIEG human resources team, with the College interviewing shortlisted candidates, and the University's designated Academic Lead providing final approval of appointments.

2.11 On appointment, tutors are subject to a lesson observation, undertaken by the College Director or Academic Director, normally within their first month of employment. This is followed by line manager observations on an annual basis, with lesson plans and observation records kept under review to show good practice and monitor improvement. Peer observations also take place during the academic year on a more informal basis, through the pairing of a subject tutor with a language and skills tutor through a buddying system. These peer observations follow a particular theme identified through feedback from students or external examiners and, ultimately, committee action plans. A recent theme focused on developing more interactivity in the classroom. Good practice identified during those observations is then shared through continuing professional development sessions led by programme leads and across the wider OIEG network during peer networking meetings. The team considers the systematic use of formal and informal teaching observation methods which support thematic teaching and learning developments to be **good practice**.

2.12 Programmes and modules are monitored annually through the completion of the standardised reporting templates. These reports provide an opportunity to review the assessment strategy, and the student workload and make reasonable adjustments as appropriate to the setting and submission of assessments. Feedback from staff and students on any changes that are being proposed as a result of these are discussed at the Learning and Teaching Committee which includes student representation. Agreed changes and minor modifications to College's programmes are ratified by the Joint Academic Board (JAB).

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

2.13 The College has an established programme of continuing professional development for staff. Recent sessions have addressed topics such as teaching techniques and the effective use of technology in the classroom, and including the use of the VLE. Staff development needs are identified through the process of management and peer teaching observations, and related ongoing dialogue between tutors and senior members of college staff. This feeds into the professional development plan. In addition, an annual role review of all staff helps identify any training needs, allows discussion of what is going well, identifies challenges and support needs, and sets goals for the year ahead.

2.14 College tutors take part in regular staff development training sessions hosted by the University. OIEG offers part-funded places on the University PG Cert HE and the Trinity Diploma in TESOL. Staff confirmed that three members of the teaching team have completed a PG Cert HE, and one member of staff - the Trinity Diploma in TESOL for EAP tutors. Staff also have the opportunity to attend conferences with examples given of programme leads attending the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) conference, and teaching staff attending the University human science conference. Staff at the College confirmed that a wide range of staff development opportunities are available to both academic, and administrative and support staff who consider themselves fully supported by their managers in taking up these opportunities. The highly-effective interactive working partnership between the College, Bangor University and OIEG, and the opportunities for staff development and external peer engagement is **good practice**. This matter is also addressed in paragraph 1.4.

2.15 The systemic identification of staff development opportunities, availability of CPD and support provided to engage with those opportunities, demonstrate that effective arrangements are in place to maintain and enhance the quality of the learning opportunity.

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

2.16 Student induction presentations include information on term dates, registration, attendance, access to the VLE, assessment, plagiarism and an introduction to Personal Tutors. Students are also provided with a comprehensive Student Handbook containing general as well as programme-specific information. Students who met with the review team spoke positively of the support they receive including that provided by their Personal Tutor and the College's support staff team.

2.17 The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy describes an incremental student journey set in an environment that is both intellectually stimulating and sensitive to individual student needs. Student needs are met through small class sizes and classes that focus on study skills, with early identification of any problem areas. All programmes , IYO, IYI and IIM contain both English language and academic study skills development alongside the subject-based modules. Within the language and study skills modules, the College continues to build student understanding of what constitutes good and unacceptable academic practice, and guidance on how to avoid plagiarism in written assignments. Students commented very positively on the high-level support provided which enables them to understand fully the nature of plagiarism and sound academic conduct. The review team considers the development of an effective learning culture which supports students' academic integrity to be **good practice**.

2.18 The College has a well-embedded personal tutor system which provides pastoral support for individuals and groups of students. Personal tutors are members of academic staff who are given pastoral responsibility for a named student and who provide appropriate and timely help with issues that affect academic performance. An open-door policy is also in place and the students confirmed that they had several accessible contact points ranging from their Personal Tutor and college office staff, to the College Director. Specific policies are in place to safeguard the interests of younger students and all students have access to Student Support Services and the International Student Support Office.

2.19 The College holds regular staff and student Concern Meetings and monthly staff meetings which allow for careful and detailed consideration of student matters. All staff meetings include agenda opportunities for staff members to raise concerns about individual students. The Cause for Concern process allows subject tutors to highlight problems encountered by individual students, relating to either behaviour, motivation, or lack of

progress. Concerns about individual students are brought to the attention of the Academic Director for appropriate intervention.

2.20 The student induction programme, study skills support and personal tutor system, along with the regular staff and student meetings to address student concerns and progression collectively, provide assurance that students are appropriately and effectively supported throughout their study.

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

2.21 There is an emphasis on small class sizes, with a maximum of 20 students per class. All classrooms are equipped with electronic smart boards allowing for internet-sourced content and interactive learning. Students also have access to specialist computing, laboratory and workshop facilities, and the University's VLE. Students also have the same rights of access to the University library and IT services, and the same borrowing rights as other students of the University.

2.22 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to influence the way college programmes are delivered with teaching staff delivering technology-enhanced teaching and learning materials. College staff commented positively on the lessons they had learned during the pandemic about the use of technology which continue to be adopted. For example, all lessons continue to be recorded and both staff and students are benefiting from significant improvements that have been made to the VLE during the periods of remote learning. Staff also stated that materials created during the pandemic are now being used as an extra teaching resource, with examples of research method materials and computerised cognitive tests, and functions that can be run at home. Students are highly complementary about the information they receive, with comprehensive learning material available on the VLE and find virtual access to the recorded classes very helpful. External examiner reports commend the effectiveness of content and materials delivered online and face-to-face. The review team considers the effective adoption and refinement of learning technology platforms which improve and enhance pedagogic practice to be **good practice**. This matter is also addressed under paragraph 1.8.

2.23 The College provides an extensive range of resources which are accessible and sufficient, and the continued development and exploitation of technology-enhanced teaching and learning practice effectively enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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

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