



# Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements: report of the desk-based analysis of Bangor University International College, May 2020

## Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that Bangor University International College is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the May 2019 [monitoring visit](#).

## Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 Bangor University International College (the College) is a partnership between Oxford International Education Group (OIEG) and Bangor University (BU). The College has steadily increased its total student enrolments from 2017-18 to 2019-20, with a 33% increase in student numbers over the last year. Further intakes were anticipated in April 2020. The College is staffed by a mix of full-time staff and 17 sessional tutors. Staff numbers have increased in line with the expanding student numbers and reflect the broadening of the programmes offered.

3 New programmes have been introduced for International Year 1 for Psychology, and the International Incorporated Masters two-term Psychology programme recruited its first cohort in January 2020. A Level 3 Foundation year was intending to recruit UK/EU intakes from September 2020. No other change has taken place since the last QAA monitoring visit in May 2019.

## Findings from the desk-based analysis

4 The review was desk-based and the outcome of the review was reached by reading the Annual Monitoring Return form and the documentary evidence provided. The College's actions from the QAA review in 2018 were confirmed complete in the Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements review of 2019. Student transcripts had been arranged to reflect the level of study 2019-20 and student handbooks amended in September 2019 to clarify the regulations which are applied to the programmes. The College continues to engage in further scrutiny with its university-awarding body to enhance the student experience. The College has shown that with the actions and activities underway, and its work with its partner, it meets the revised Quality Code for Higher Education and its mandatory Core and Common practices.

5 The data return confirms that student numbers have grown and retention, progression and completion continue to be high. The College continues to develop its engagement with external reference points, working closely with their university partner.

6 Monitoring was achieved through Student Forums, Teaching and Learning Committees, and programme meetings which take place every term, including an evaluation of the measures where student representatives present the results of students' evaluations.

7 The College continues to address improvements and enhancement activities, developing these in coordination with Bangor University and the OIEG Quality Committee acting for the Group. The OIEG Quality Committee shares good practice across the partner colleges and recently has provided a central dynamic college record of activity gathered in a College Action Plan. The college plan draws together actions to respond to outcomes from regulatory body reviews, audit or monitoring processes from Bangor University and the College's own proposed developments. The actions are determined and progress monitored using the Calendar of Business with standard items highlighted in college meetings.

8 The OIEG Bangor University Steering Board has oversight of strategic and operational matters, overseeing academic standards through the Joint Academic Board acting with the College and Bangor University. Operational matters are overseen through a Joint Operations Board, meeting the requirements of the Bangor University International College (BUIC) Operational and Quality Assurance Manual and Bangor University, for monitoring and review. Liaison with Bangor University remains frequent with active processes and consideration of partnership matters, such as the revision of Joint Academic Board Terms of Reference to include key performance indicators and service level agreements as standard agenda items.

9 Feedback from students is provided formally at Student Forum meetings held each term. Students feed back on each module using a Module Questionnaire and on their programmes using a Programme Questionnaire. These questionnaires are summarised for modules and programmes and considered at Teaching and Learning Committees, with outcomes reported through the annual report and governance meetings which agree actions.

10 The College monitors programmes using the questionnaires completed by students, together with self-evaluation reports from tutors providing their reviews of the module taught. External reports on programme activity are provided by link tutors and external examiners. These approaches meet activities outlined in BUIC and BU operational manuals for monitoring and review. These reports are considered with staff in formal Teaching and Learning Committee meetings and a Tutor's Forum is planned to increase tutors' opportunity to engage in discussion and provide their feedback.

11 The College schedules termly meetings for staff to consider operational programme matters. The College has focused recently on developing a number of staff practices. One such development aims to manage post-marking meetings after assessment activity for tutors to undertake second-marking discussion of scripts and ensure scripts were available promptly for external examiner review. Other staff developments include holding programme subject-based meetings with academic staff. The meetings are intended to provide time for the programme team to plan, develop responses to feedback from students and external examiners, and share consistent practices. This arrangement is at an early stage and the impact of these meetings has not yet been evaluated.

12 Tutors are hired with a range of appropriate subject and delivery skills and many have close current contact with Bangor University through their higher-level studies. The College has introduced annual tutor appraisals covering a range of duties and responsibilities and providing opportunity for reflection and identification of staff development needs. The College has introduced peer and tutor's own reflections of delivery. Formal management observations of subject tutors' delivery activity take place and good practices are developed and shared at the College's Teaching and Learning Committee.

13 Training opportunities for tutors cover a variety of teaching and learning topics such as managing classroom incidents; expectations and support of student language development; marking development days; and developing peer-learning approaches. These are part of a strategy to expand formal staff development opportunities available to tutors

and the College was planning their first tutors' conference at the time of the review. This is intended to develop access and discussion of learning and teaching strategies. Bangor University offers College staff formal external staff development opportunities, such as the PG Cert Higher Education programmes, which are part funded by OIEG. OIEG offers the Diploma TESOL to College staff.

14 Student representation is being extended, enabling a student nominee to attend college and university boards, chair the Student Forum, act as Lead Student Representative and represent students on the Teaching and Learning Committee and Joint Academic Board. The College has appointed college alumni as ambassadors. Expansion of links supporting students and their transition, such as Bangor University providing talks at college induction, have been planned with the college student body. A Student Engagement Officer has been identified.

15 Assessment strategies are being developed further, aiming to reduce poor academic practice. These focus on increasing the number of controlled assessments used. These practices are supported through the academic handbook available to students, the support materials such as the examination guide provided on Blackboard, and the provision of examination etiquette sessions. The College action plan also includes items to support accessible pre-arrival information provided to students.

16 The College continues to increase student recruitment with 33% more students on programmes in the last year, and with a further intake intended April 2020. The majority of student enrolments are for Business programmes, but two new programme routes were introduced for Psychology this year. The latter recruited its first cohort in January 2020 on the International Incorporated Masters two-term Psychology programme. Further recruitment to the International Incorporated Masters one-term Psychology programme had been anticipated in April 2020.

17 High levels of student retention, pass rates and progression continue to be maintained across all programmes with close to 94% passing and progressing studies. Three cohorts have now progressed studies to Bangor University. The latest cohort graduating from Bangor University included achievement of 18 passes, three merits and a distinction.

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

18 The College works effectively with its university partner for programme development and revalidation. The development of new programmes is undertaken through Bangor University's development and approval processes. These awards are informed by external reference points including the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and Subject Benchmark Statements. The Common European Framework of Reference is the reference point reflected by the language modules.

19 The College engages with relevant benchmark statements in definitive programme and module specification documents using Bangor University processes. The Joint Academic Board ensures effective oversight of the quality assurance processes which are enshrined in the BUIC Operational and Quality Assurance Manual. The College's approaches are confirmed in the Joint Academic Board which is responsible for monitoring quality assurance and standards overall.

20 The OIEG recently undertook mapping of college activity against the mandatory Core and Common practices for standards and quality of the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). This work was intended to enable the individual

colleges to contextualise the mapping to meet their practices with partners. The College considered examples to confirm them meeting the Quality Code Core practices for standards. The examples provided demonstrate broad understanding of the Expectations and practices, such as the development of new Bangor Business School Foundation programmes which were approved and show the College's consistent application of threshold standards of the qualifications it provides. External examiner reports confirm that threshold standards are met by the College and that student performance is comparable with similar programmes in the sector. Further examination of the College's strategies, policies and procedures used to guide and advise staff to meet the Core practices would underpin and embed the understandings further.

21 The College works effectively with the appointed external examiners who approve draft assessments, moderate samples of work provided and contribute to the Board of Examiners meetings. External examiner reports are shared with staff and students and considered formally, so that actions to points raised are determined and recorded in the college-wide action plan. Steps continue to be taken to develop a more proactive and early engagement of external examiners with scrutiny processes at the College.

22 The College has gathered actions with a focus on enhancement into a college-wide action plan. Actions are tracked and reviewed by the College Management Team each term and good practice shared with partner colleges in the OIEG. Detailed evaluation and review of practices for standards is undertaken particularly in cases when prompted by student performance.

23 Core practices for quality have been reviewed to ensure they meet the revised Quality Code. Admissions practices which are managed under joint approaches enshrined in the Collaborative Agreement with the partner and operated through a Pathways Admissions Policy provide a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions policy.

24 College staff engage collaboratively with Bangor University staff working peer-to-peer in developing and managing programmes and the partnership overall. Arrangements for recruitment of tutors accord with OIEG human resources practices and all staff are approved by BU before appointment. Staffing practices recently developed, include formal tutor observation, opportunities for formal staff development and Annual Personal Development Reviews which identify staff training opportunities. A staff workshop was planned with a learning and teaching focus using an external speaker.

25 The College reviews its physical teaching and administrative resources and arrangements for student support to ensure these are in place, communicated to students and are considered formally at Bangor University Boards. Opportunities are growing to include the student voice in formal representation.

27 The College has delivered a CPD session to staff introducing the Quality Code and its mandatory Core and Common practices. The OIEG meeting in July 2019 considered the impact of the session and determined that the materials should be included in staff induction and the revised Quality Code made available to staff on the College's virtual learning environment.

28 These activities and approaches have been reviewed by the College and the mapping confirms that the College has successfully considered examples against the Quality Code's mandatory Core and Common practices. Detailed consideration of the College's own academic infrastructure against the Quality Code has not yet been undertaken and formal reporting of this evaluation has not yet been made in College governance meetings.

## Background to the desk-based analysis

29 The desk-based analysis 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

30 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Deborah Trayhurn, Reviewer, and Tony Platt, QAA Officer in May 2020. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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