



## **Bath Spa Global LLP**

### **Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements**

**March 2017**

## 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 Bath Spa Global LLP. The review took place on 2 March 2017 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Mrs Catherine Fairhurst.

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. [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.<sup>1</sup> More information about this the review method can be found in the Handbook for providers.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us)

## Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Bath Spa Global LLP, 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 Bath Spa Global LLP.

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

## Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following feature of **good practice** at Bath Spa Global LLP.

- The highly effective formal and informal support mechanisms available to students that have a positive impact on their personal development and academic progression.

## Recommendations

The QAA panel makes no recommendations.

## About Bath Spa Global LLP

Bath Spa Global LLP (the provider) is a limited liability partnership established in 2014 between Bath Spa University (the University) and Shorelight Education to create an international pathway school. The aim of the provider is to facilitate progression of international students to Bath Spa University degrees through preparatory programmes designed to include specialised support, mentoring and tailored tutoring. The provider is situated on the main University campus at Newton Park, using premises owned and controlled by the University.

Membership of the Board of Directors is equally divided between Shorelight and the University. The Managing Director is responsible for the academic leadership and management of the operation and reports directly to the Board. In addition to the Managing Director, the provider employs two full-time permanent academic staff, a full-time administrator and six part-time teachers, most of whom also teach at the University. For quality assurance purposes, the provider operates in the same way as a department of the University, reporting through the College of Liberal Arts and represented on the College Board at the University by the Managing Director. The provider therefore adheres to the standard quality assurance policies, procedures and regulations defined by the University for all of its provision.

All academic and operational responsibilities are managed by either the provider or the University, with the Shorelight relationship being a financial arrangement. The respective responsibilities of the provider and University are outlined in two separate legal agreements: a Services Agreement and Accreditation Agreement. The University retains responsibility for the academic standards of the awards and has designed and approved the programmes with reference to both national and internal academic frameworks. The provider has responsibility for maintaining academic standards and for managing aspects of the quality of student learning opportunities, including the appointment of staff, teaching and learning activities, assessment and ensuring compliance with University quality assurance processes. As students have access to the same baseline learning resources and support arrangements as other University students, student support activities and resources are a shared responsibility.

The provider currently provides a Level 4 international year that facilitates progression directly into Level 5 of a specified range of social science, business and management programmes at the University. The provider also provides the teaching for the initial stage of an extended master's programme in Business and Management. Both programmes are validated by the University through its standard programme approval procedures. Sixty one students have successfully progressed to the University and 16 students are currently enrolled on the preparatory programmes.

## Detailed findings about Bath Spa Global LLP

### 1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The provider carries out its duties effectively through clear management and committee structures and through policies provided by the University. It understands its roles and responsibilities for the management of academic standards as stipulated in its Accreditation Agreement, and effectively applies the University's academic regulations, policies, procedures and guidelines.

1.2 The Managing Director of the provider is responsible for academic leadership and management of the provision, and regularly reports to the College of Liberal Arts Board at the University. The provision complies with the same quality arrangements as all other University provision, such as course approval, committee reporting, annual and periodic review. In addition, unlike the University provision, the level 4 programmes benefit from external examiner scrutiny. Student handbooks contain links to the University academic regulations and are aligned with the University's Assessment Policy. Similarly the annual reporting of student performance, teaching, learning, assessment and feedback from students and examiners is monitored by the Academic Development Reporting (ADR) procedure, and is considered by a University panel.

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

1.3 The provider makes effective use of external reference points in the management of academic standards. It achieves alignment with Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) through its rigorous implementation of the University's regulations and procedures. Through the application of the University approval procedures, due recognition is made of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) to ensure appropriate level outcomes, and appropriate use of Subject Benchmark Statements for its undergraduate provision. These are further reflected in handbooks and module descriptors, which contain links to key reference points. Programme Specifications are clear and detailed.

1.4 The external examiner report template requires examiners to comment on the match of the curriculum to benchmark statements and the appropriateness of the level in relation to the FHEQ. Examiners have reported favourably in this respect, confirming that the performance of students is at a level to be expected on equivalent courses at other institutions nationally. External examiner reports note that standards are consistently maintained and programmes align well to relevant subject benchmarks.

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

1.5 The provider uses external examining effectively to assure academic standards. Under its partnership requirements with the University, the provider has two external examiners covering the Level 4 provision. The University appoints, trains and takes responsibility for the external examiners. Module tutors mark student work and it is internally moderated. The provider follows a coherent action planning process for responding to external examiners' comments within the University ADR procedure. External examiner reports indicate a high level of satisfaction with the provision. Transcripts of marks are

managed by University processes. Subject and Award Boards approve module and programme results respectively, and are chaired by a senior member of the University. Structures to assure academic standards, which include processes to make use of external examining, enable the provider to discharge its responsibilities successfully.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in the provider'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 Appropriate management structures, with clear reporting lines to the University, are in place which enables the provider to effectively fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities. The Managing Director is a member of the College of Liberal Arts Board and attends its senior management team meetings and therefore engages regularly in deliberative and executive discussions at the University. The provider monitors its programmes appropriately through the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements that apply to all departments of the University. Annual reports are considered by University committees and a schedule for periodic review is in place.

2.2 Formal agreements detail the responsibilities of the University and of the provider. The University is responsible for library, computing, admissions, academic and student services, finance systems and data processing, marketing, Students' Union, and estates service. First-line responsibility for the student learning experience rests with the provider in the day-to-day operation of programmes. The provider is responsible for all teaching and, with the University's agreement, the appointment of teaching staff. The student handbooks provide comprehensive information on what students may expect, listing programme aims and learning outcomes, the contents of modules, and information on the learning environment, including a description of learning and teaching modes.

2.3 The provider effectively fulfils its responsibilities for enhancing student learning opportunities by systematically reviewing the quality of provision and enacting improvements at Board level. Evidence from ADR reports, student surveys and meetings held by the review team confirm that the enhancement of learning opportunities is duly considered. Recent examples of enhancement initiatives include the successful use of student peer mentors for new entrants, provision of tablet computers to enhance engagement in team work activities and a formal study abroad partnership with an American university. Weekly visits are also provided to local businesses and regional projects to enrich the students' learning experience.

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

2.4 The provider makes full use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities through its partnership with the University. The programmes are designed, validated and monitored according to the University quality procedures as confirmed by the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee approval process. The awards reflect the FHEQ and are informed by the Subject Benchmark Statements for Business and Management, Geography, Psychology, and Sociology.

2.5 The University has responsibility for the admission of students. The Admissions Policy clearly outlines the admission requirements, the application process and English language policy and takes account of the UK Quality Code and Competition and Marketing Authority guidance. There is a formal admissions complaints and appeals procedure. The University website contains information about programme structures, support available, visas, exchange opportunities, country advice, accommodation, and application procedures. There are links to minimum entry requirements for each programme, including English language requirements, selection criteria, fees and finance.

2.6 The University policies apply for academic appeals and student complaints, both of which include an initial informal stage. The student handbooks include a clear complaints flowchart illustrating the procedure, with hyperlinks to all relevant University student policies. Students confirm that this information is clearly signposted and indicate satisfaction with the support received from staff when informal issues are raised. An annual report on complaints is required in the ADR to enable strategic oversight, although to date there have been no formal complaints.

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

2.7 The provider manages the maintenance and enhancement of teaching and learning through various methods including ADR reports, managerial and peer observation, external examiners' reports and student feedback. The approach to teaching and learning is shared with that of the University and is described in the student handbook. The Board of Directors maintains continuing oversight of the quality of teaching and learning through regular reporting by the Managing Director, who directly observes teaching. Developmental peer-observation processes are in place to contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice. University oversight of teaching and learning is maintained through an end of cycle ADR, a thorough subject ADR annual report and an action plan which is considered by the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee panel.

2.8 Effective formal and informal methods for student feedback are in place including the Academic Student Forum, module and programme student surveys, personal tutorials and regular access to staff. Students met by the team report satisfaction with the quality and variety of teaching and cite positive aspects of the programmes such as application skills, small class sizes and study skills for referencing. The provider has integrated student suggestions into the curriculum and as a result the current provision includes more business skills and self-directed tasks. Current students are positive about the level of preparation for transition to university study and those that have progressed affirm the seamless progression experience. External examiners comment that teaching methods are appropriate and stretch the students, with evidence of consistency and good practice being cited. In addition to meeting students, one external examiner also observed a class which gave more insight into the teaching methods used.

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

2.9 An established staff development process is used to identify and deliver training opportunities. Individual staff needs are identified through induction, teaching observations, events and/or changes in operating practices. New teaching staff undertake a thorough induction, carried out centrally by the University with input from the provider. Teaching staff are experienced and well qualified and are able to access a range of opportunities for staff development. This includes access to the University staff development programme to which the provider also contributes. For example, a tutor recently led a University staff development session regarding working with international students. A continuing professional development fund is allocated to develop specific teaching skills for international student cohorts and for professional development such as part funding for a PhD in Education and Business and fully funded attendance at an entrepreneurial education workshop. Tutors participate in the peer review process and have regular minuted lunchtime meetings to share good practice.



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

2.10 The provider applies a number of mechanisms to ensure that students are appropriately and effectively supported. This includes senior managers considering individual student reports that are informed by a standard tutor guide, reports from the Student Services Team Leader to the Managing Director, and a traffic light system for monitoring students who may need additional support. A wide range of formal and informal support mechanisms are available such as study skill support, personal tutorials, peer mentoring, pastoral support and the full range of student support services available to all international students from the University International Relations Office. A clear and detailed Guide to Student Care for Personal Tutors informs tutorial support. Staff met by the team confirm that this document gives comprehensive guidance and enables a consistent and proactive approach to individualised student support. This guide also details the arrangements for student with additional learning needs. Personal Tutors meet students individually twice a term to develop learning and development plans and discuss academic and career goals. Outcomes of the meetings are recorded on a standardised template and are shared with senior management to assure the provider that students are being appropriately supported.

2.11 The Student Services Team Leader is responsible for monitoring attendance, following up absences and overseeing the student peer mentor scheme. Data from student support mechanisms inform a traffic light system for the holistic monitoring of students which provides a useful tool for staff and students. This approach enables the provider to identify students who might benefit from additional support and students met by the team confirm that this approach is valuable and effective. Detailed progression reports and learning plans are given to the students on a termly basis. Students met by the review team confirm that the combination of support arrangements is effective and assists both their learning and the transition to higher education. Those students that had progressed to the University considered that they were better prepared for Level 5 study than their University counterparts and that they provided informal peer support to others. The highly effective formal and informal support mechanisms available to students have a positive impact on their personal development and academic progression and the review team considers that this is **good practice**.

2.12 The University International Relations Office offers support to students at all stages of their relationship with the University. There is a dedicated social space for international students, language support study skills and the Careers Service provides guidance specifically designed for international students.

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

2.13 Students at the provider have access to the learning resources of the University under the same conditions as other University students. Through the programme approval procedure, the provider ensures that learning resources are accessible and sufficient to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. This process also enables the University to be assured that appropriate provision is in place. The approval documentation required by the University includes written confirmation that resource provision is sufficient. The University has responsibility for library, technology support, information services (including the University's virtual learning environment), and the range of administrative services such as student services and finance. The provider has a range of facilities exclusively for its students, including a library and information technology suites with a dedicated budget for the acquisition of new learning and teaching resources. Students met

by the review team noted satisfaction with the access and quality of learning resources available for their studies.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in the provider'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 The provider has limited responsibilities in respect of providing information on learning opportunities due to the extent of integration into the systems of the University. Marketing information relating to the programmes is incorporated within the University's own website. The Student Services Team Leader works effectively with the University Marketing and Recruitment Team, and any information proposed is subject to the same checks as for University programmes. Student handbooks are checked to ensure consistency with the University standard.

3.2 The written Student Submission, and students who met the review team, report satisfaction with the accuracy and completeness of the information received prior to making an application and throughout their studies. Early in the application process some students lacked awareness of the rationale for attending the provider programme as opposed to attending the equivalent University programme directly, but were subsequently made aware of the reasons for this and were satisfied. Clearly published admission criteria are available and the provider is involved in every admission application. The systems for checking the currency, accuracy and fitness for purpose of the information published by the provider are appropriate and effective.

The review team concludes that **reliance can** be placed on the information that the provider 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.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please

refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality)

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx)

### 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* (FHEQIS).

**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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