Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas UK Holdings Ltd, April 2018

Birmingham City University International College

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1   From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that Birmingham City University International College (BCUIC) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan following the April 2016 Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2   BCUIC underwent a Higher Education Review (HER (EC) in April 2016. Since then there have been no changes in premises, ownership, programmes or Principal. There has been a reduction in enrolments of 18 per cent, of which those for pre-master's saw the largest decline and at the time of the visit there were 214 students. BCUIC introduced a new student portal in July 2017, which provides an enhanced user experience for students and staff. In September 2017 BCUIC took over the direct management of the art and design workshops and technicians and this has enhanced workshop provision.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3   The review team considered a range of evidence, including strategic, policy and programme documentation, information on BCUIC's website and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Meetings were held with senior, teaching and support staff, and staff from the University, to discuss progress made during the past two years against the action plan from the 2016 review. The review team also met undergraduate students and alumni who are currently students at the University. The 2016 review identified four instances of good practice. Actions related to these demonstrate the commitment of BCUIC to build strongly on the good practice identified. Actions are listed on the College action plan, which is monitored by the College Learning and Teaching Board that includes University staff and College students, and at College senior management team meetings.

4   The comprehensive and extensive provision of teaching and learning material on the VLE that provides an equal and effective opportunity for students to achieve intended learning outcomes has continued to be developed and is monitored through annual monitoring reviews. Students spoke positively about the role the VLE plays in promoting independent learning. The site contains a comprehensive repository of materials. Staff identified the full roll-out of online marking, the use of online quizzes and the facility for students to actively monitor their own attendance as significant innovations in the use of VLE. Staff and students spoke positively about increased digital literacy and its role in enhancing independent learning.

5   The range of opportunities for student engagement in developing learning facilities and resources continues to improve with the introduction of an 'Ask Desk' and discussion at the Student Council has continued to be developed. Additionally, BCUIC has recently introduced student representation on the College Learning and Teaching Board and there are plans for student representation on the Academic Advisory Committee. The College Learning and Teaching Board enables students to have a direct involvement with the University community. A Learning and Teaching Forum has been established to provide members with a platform to discuss and share student enhancement practices across the UK Navitas network. This reports to the Navitas Learning and Teaching Committee. Students spoke positively about the opportunities they have to improve their experience; an example was to respond to a student suggestion to only speak English while on campus.

6   The flexible and effective assessment feedback mechanisms, which enable and promote student learning continue to be valued by students. Students have a good understanding of how to avoid plagiarism and this is reinforced in a number of ways, including during orientation and in a plagiarism handbook. As of this academic year, students submit all their work online. Students report that detailed feedback is provided within the week and feedback includes advice on how to improve their work. Students receive one-to-one feedback on examinations. Positive feedback from link tutors and external examiners is noted.

7   The use of tracer data from the University in reviewing curricula and student performance and achievement continues to be embedded in BCUIC processes. BCUIC now has full data for its first cohort and agreement has been reached in the Navitas Group for a common reporting template that will enable comparative statistics to be generated. Tracer data informed curriculum revisions in business and law to provide enhanced study skills and progression data informed the development of a broader range of media programmes in art and design, both of which demonstrate data-led improvements in programmes.

8   There is demonstrable improvement in all the areas of good practice. Many actions, such as student involvement in the Academic Advisory Committee and the use of standardised tracer data to inform curriculum development and student support, are emergent. The impact of these can be determined at the next monitoring visit.

9   BCUIC operates a robust admission process that is overseen by the Director of Admissions and Recruitment Centre, Navitas UK and managed locally by the Director of Admissions and Marketing. BCUIC follows the Navitas UK policy, procedures and regulations for the admission of students, which align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), *Chapter B2.* Local arrangements for admission are agreed between BCUIC, Navitas UK and the University. These processes are clearly detailed in the College Operations Manual and BCUIC and University staff reported on the effectiveness of their close working relationships. All Navitas UK staff, BCUIC staff and recruitment agents are required to abide by a Code of Ethics, which aligns with UK Council for International Student Affairs guidelines. Academic and English language admission requirements are published on the BCUIC website. There is a contact email address if an applicant wishes to make an appeal available on the admissions section of the website and the students know how to raise a concern should they have one. Formal offers of admission are generated within agreed and prescribed criteria, with all three parties, and issued centrally by Navitas UK. English entry requirements are set and approved by the University and comply with UKVI's Tier 4 Guidelines. These are set out in the Operations Manual. BCUIC and the University work closely together to common processes to ensure robust admissions decisions are made. International students must meet English

language entry requirements assessed through the use of the Home Office approved Secure English Language Tests (SELTs).

10   Around 90 per cent of students are recruited through agents in their home countries, while others are recruited directly through BCUIC. Working in partnership with the University and using a risk-based approach, all applicants are assessed to determine their commitment to study. The Navitas UK Director of Admissions and Recruitment and the Navitas Head of Compliance Services work together on reporting data for review of visa refusal or any irregular activity by agents and this is also monitored locally by BCUIC and the University.

11   All students met by the review team had made good use of the detailed information provided on the website and in hard copy. BCUIC works with the University and Navitas UK central team to ensure detailed and relevant local information for students at the points of enquiry, application and pre-entry, and this is signed off by the University. Students and alumni confirmed that the information on the BCUIC website was detailed and helpful. Students felt well prepared for their programmes of study and really valued the opportunity to study with students from many cultures.

12   Navitas UK sets out the policy for the annual monitoring of BCUIC's provision. This is aligned to the University's procedures as set out in the BCUIC CPR QS2: Annual Monitoring document. BCUIC's action plan, in which the QAA action plan is embedded, includes both quantitative and qualitative data, drawn from reports, feedback from students and staff, and progress and achievement data. BCUIC has identified an issue with retention for the 2016-17 foundation year cohort and is taking many actions to address this. These include early intervention and active encouragement of attendance and engagement, the use of the student in jeopardy programme and the development of individual learning plans. Staff also provide emotional and personal support. Students spoke positively about the role of the Ask Desk in being able to provide advice and support for a wide range of queries and issues. In addition to monitoring the provision delivered at BCUIC, the annual monitoring report also monitors student performance of those who have progressed to the University using tracer data. BCUIC has several examples of enhancements resulting from annual monitoring including enhancements in independent learning, improvements in the use of the VLE to support digital learning and the embedding of Graduate+ in programmes. BCUIC's use of external reference points meets UK expectations for higher education.

4   The embedded colleges' use of external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

13   BCUIC makes wide use of the Quality Code in that all policies are underpinned by it. Chapter B3 had been used to develop the VLE, online assessment and to enhance IT and library facilities. The Graduate+ scheme provides students with a social learning environment that has been incorporated into modules. Staff are encouraged to engage with external staff development, such as through the Staff and Educational Development Organisation (SEDA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Two tutors have recently completed their PGCE and are now Fellows of the HEA and two are currently studying for part-time doctorates. A staff development session focusing on critical thinking was held with the Navitas Director of Teaching and Learning. In admissions, the College refers to the requirements and guidelines of UKVI.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

14   The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's and its embedded colleges' continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider and its embedded colleges of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

15   The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Phil Markey, QAA Officer and Ms Penny Renwick, QAA Reviewer, on 24 April 2018.