



Educational Oversight for Embedded Colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas UK Holdings Ltd, May 2019

Birmingham City University International College

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Birmingham City University International College (the College) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the April 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The College underwent a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)) in April 2016. It received a monitoring visit in 2018 to discuss progress, which concluded that the College was making commendable progress implementing the action plan drawn up following the April 2016 review. Since the 2018 monitoring visit, the College has moved to modern, purpose-built premises located within Birmingham City University's City Centre Campus. Phase 1 of the move, the relocation of teaching and support staff, was completed at the start of the academic year 2018-19. A second phase, involving senior managers, and marketing and recruitment staff, is due to be completed before the start of the next academic year. Staff and students comment favourably on the new location and the closer relationship with the University that it facilitates. The move was well-managed. Student numbers remain broadly stable, both in total and in terms of subject distribution and levels.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has built further on the strengths identified by QAA in previous reports. It has also identified and addressed effectively, issues, weaknesses and opportunities for enhancement through its own monitoring and review processes. The College has an overarching action plan overseen by the College Learning and Teaching Board (CLTB), which brings together actions that address the QAA report with actions addressing matters raised through feedback surveys, committees, Navitas UK and the University.

4 The last full review in 2016 made no recommendations for action by Navitas UK or the College. The report on the College identified four features of good practice. Since the last monitoring visit, the College has undertaken further enhancement in these areas and they continue to be strengths of its provision. The College is taking advantage of the opportunities offered by relocation and increased proximity to the University to further enhance its teaching and learning.

5 The first feature of good practice related to the comprehensive and extensive provision of teaching and learning material on the virtual learning environment (VLE) that provides an equal and effective opportunity for students to achieve intended learning outcomes. Following relocation, students now use the University's IT facilities and services, including borrowing laptops. Greater use is being made of technology in teaching, learning and assessment. Where appropriate, students submit work online using anti-plagiarism

software, and marking is also done on-line. A flipped learning pilot has been undertaken using the VLE to support greater independent learning. Staff training has supported staff in using different classroom equipment following relocation. The VLE has been upgraded and storage moved online to provide better support and access for staff and students. Further enhancements are under discussion by the College Enhancement Team (CET). Students confirm the positive role that technology, in particular the VLE, plays in their learning.

6 The second area of good practice was the range of opportunities for student engagement in developing learning facilities and resources. In 2018, the College introduced a new Learning and Teaching Strategy which aims to foster student engagement in different ways, including a new focus on independent learning and entrepreneurship. The College has appointed 11 programme leads, including one with responsibility for employability, as part of its project to foster 'the connected and capable student'. College students now participate in the University's Graduate+ programme which formally recognises acquisition of personal skills. Participation in this programme, and other joint events, reflects the growth of closer relationships between the College and University. The formal student representation system continues to provide an effective channel for student feedback and participation in decision-making. Student representatives sit on key committees of the College. Students act as ambassadors, for example, during orientation week they welcome and brief new students.

7 The third area of good practice identified in the 2016 review, was the flexible and effective assessment feedback mechanisms which enable and promote student learning. In building on this strength, the College also seeks to encourage two-way feedback. In terms of provision to students of feedback on their performance and progression, increased use is being made of the VLE to provide prompt and helpful feedback and to respond to student queries. Students state that the feedback they receive is helpful, and that tutors are available and willing to provide additional help and advice. The ability to hand in draft work for comment is appreciated.

8 The fourth area of good practice that was identified was the effective use of tracer data in reviewing existing curricula, which enhances student learning opportunities. This data provides the College with information on the performance of students who progress to the University. The University provides the College with detailed comparative data on the performance and final outcomes of students who have followed a Navitas pathway. In future, data will be received more frequently as a standard report following the integration of the College's and University's record systems. Tracer data feeds into annual monitoring. Data is used to confirm whether performance by college students is broadly comparable to that of their peers. Detailed analysis permits the identification of specific areas where college provision can be strengthened, and action taken. Examples of such action include revised assessment strategies and provision of skills-based tutorial support which enhances students' learning.

9 Admissions is a centrally-managed process with local input into defining admissions criteria and decisions on non-standard candidates. The College admissions policy reflects the policies and requirements of Navitas UK and the University which, in turn, reflect the requirements of the Quality Code for Higher Education, UK Visa and Immigration, and relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The policy includes a Code of Ethics, reflecting UK Council for International Student Affairs guidelines, which must be followed by the College, Navitas UK and recruitment agents. Admission requirements are agreed with the University and published prominently on the College's website and in brochures. Navitas UK's Admissions and Recruitment Centre (ARC) works closely with the College to ensure that admissions requirements are met, and that ARC staff are familiar with the College's programmes. International students must meet English language entry requirements, assessed through the use of Home Office approved Secure English Language Tests. The College, and in some cases also the University, advises on the suitability of non-standard

candidates such as those whose qualifications are borderline, minors, and those with additional needs. Interviews are used to check on an applicant's genuine intention to study. A tripartite committee, involving the College, Navitas UK and the University, oversees recruitment and admissions activity. Students state that the admissions process operates smoothly and effectively. They comment positively on the helpfulness of staff, and the quality of information about the College and study programmes available to them throughout the recruitment and admissions process.

10 The College assessment framework reflects the policies and regulations of Navitas UK and the University, which in turn reflect external reference points including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). Assessment strategies and progression requirements are set out in programme specifications and module documents. Students are well-informed about what they must do to pass their studies and how their work will be graded. The importance of good academic practice is emphasised in teaching, a handbook and workshops provided to deter plagiarism. Anti-plagiarism software is used in submission of assessed work. All assessment tasks are moderated internally prior to being sat. Marks are internally verified using a system of sample second marking. Wherever possible, marking is undertaken anonymously. Moderation of the ILSC module delivered across all colleges in the network is undertaken centrally by Navitas UK. Externality is provided by university link tutors who see all Level 3 and pre-master's scripts; and university external examiners who moderate assessments and marking for Level 4 students. Formal module and progression boards are held and involve both college and university staff. CLTB maintains oversight of assessment which is also considered in annual monitoring. Assessment is a core theme of the *Navitas UPE Learning and Teaching Strategy 2018-2023*. The College's assessment strategy and processes are reviewed regularly in order to maintain alignment with University policies and practices, and to reflect the pattern of University assessment for which students are being prepared.

11 The College monitors pass and retention rates. Pass rates for all programmes are very high. Retention is also good and increasing. Tracer data is provided by the University which confirms that completion rates are good, and student outcomes are comparable to those for directly recruited overseas students.

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

12 Local policy documents are developed within the frameworks provided by Navitas UK and the University, both of whom align their policies to the Quality Code and relevant external reference points. References to FHEQ levels and Subject Benchmark Statements are to be found in programme specifications. A recent revision of ILSC modules made use of *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) to benchmark content and standards. Staff are encouraged to engage with the wider sector in order to deepen their understanding of UK expectations for higher education. The great majority of teaching staff have HEA fellowship status. Staff development sessions provided locally, and by Navitas UK and the University, reinforce staff awareness of external reference points and expectations.

Background to the monitoring visit

13 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.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey, QAA Officer, and Dr Carol Vielba, QAA Reviewer, on 2 May 2019.

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