Partial Quality Enhancement Review of the Birmingham Learning Centre of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Technical Report

June 2019

Contents

This report is published in both English and Welsh.

About the Quality Enhancement Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Quality Enhancement Review (QER)](url) and has links to the QER handbook and other informative documents.[1] You can also find more information about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)](url).[2]

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the Partial QER conducted by QAA at the Birmingham Learning Centre of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). The review took place on 11 and 12 June 2019. The review was conducted by a team of three reviewers:

- Professor John Baldock
- Sarah Riches
- Sala Khulumula (Student Reviewer).

In advance of the review visit, the University submitted a change report and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the provider's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

About this report

In this report, the QER team makes judgements on:

- the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Part 1 for internal quality assurance
- the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales.

The judgements can be found on page 2, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the QER team's view under each of the report headings. A shorter Outcome Report sets out the main findings of the QER for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](url) for this review is on the QAA website.[3]

QER Technical Reports are intended primarily for the provider reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several providers.

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[1] About QER:[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review](url)
[2] About QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](url)
[3] Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-Wales-Trinity-Saint-David](url)

Overarching judgement about the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in respect of its Birmingham Learning Centre

Based on the information presented, the review team judges that:

- In respect of its Birmingham Learning Centre, the University of Wales Trinity Saint David **meets** the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance.
- In respect of its Birmingham Learning Centre, the University of Wales Trinity Saint David **meets** the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

This is a positive judgement, which means the provider has robust arrangements for securing academic standards, managing academic quality and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

1 Strategic context and rationale for higher education provision at the Birmingham Learning Centre

1.1 Provision at the Birmingham Learning Centre and other centres of the University

1   At the time of the QAA review (June 2019), the Birmingham Learning Centre (BLC) had an enrolment of 797 full-time students studying on programmes leading to awards at Levels 4-6 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (FHEQ). The Centre has expanded rapidly since the admission of its first cohort of students in March 2018.

2   The programmes currently provided (June 2019) were:

- Certificate of Higher Education, Skills for the Workplace (CertHE SfW): 620 students
- BA Leadership and Management Skills for the Workplace (BA LMfW): 64 students
- BA International Hotel Management (BA IHM): 29 students
- Certificate of Higher Education International Hotel Management (CertHE IHM): 84 students.

3   The student numbers at BLC form a small but significant and growing proportion of all UWTSD student numbers. In March 2019, the University had a total of 10,315 enrolled students, of which 6.7% were currently being taught at the BLC. Students are admitted to, and may graduate from, all BLC programmes at the beginning and end of each of the three 17-week terms which begin in January, May and September. Thus, the total number of students taught over a twelve-month academic year will be larger than the number enrolled at a particular point in time. This difference amounted to about 300 during the year of the review.

4   All recruitment to both the London campus and the BLC programmes is by direct application to the University. The process is supported by local agents with specialised knowledge of the inner-city communities from which the students are drawn. No recruitment is through UCAS. The certificate programmes do not require any existing qualifications or UCAS points but applicants need to pass a timed written assessment and an interview to be accepted on the programme. Students recruited to the BA programmes have either graduated from the certificate-level awards or hold A-Level, Baccalaureate or equivalent

qualifications. The BLC recruits only home/EU students and the University's Tier 4 Sponsor Licence does not include the BLC. In 2017, the University applied to, and received permission from, HEFCW for a variation to its Fee and Access Plan 2017-18, to allow recruitment to the BLC.

5   Further expansion is planned with recruitment to two additional full-time higher education programmes in the 2019-20 academic year: the Certificate of Higher Education Health and Social Care Skills (CertHE HSC) and the BSc programme in Health and Social Care (BSc HSC). Expansion plans are contingent on current negotiations to obtain suitable space in an additional building in Birmingham.

6   Teaching is provided by two full-time and 14 hourly-paid lecturers, supported by 11 professional services staff based in Birmingham, and by the Academic and Centre Manager who is responsible for day-to-day operations. The BLC is managed through the UWTSD London campus, which was established in 2012 and which delivers all the programmes available or planned at BLC. The London campus has the status of a faculty for planning and other purposes. Both the BLC and the London campus are the responsibility of the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (International Initiatives) who reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International and Enhancement) and to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

7   Although provision at the BLC is relatively new, all the programmes delivered there are well-established, having been developed and taught at UWTSD campuses in Cardiff, Swansea and London, as well as at outreach locations in Wales. The BLC operates within the policies, procedures and academic regulations that apply to all the campuses and learning centres of the University and has access to all its administrative and learning resources. Staff work within university-wide contracts and job descriptions and are subject to the same expectations and support in relation to induction, appraisal and participation in staff development.

1.2   Strategic context and rationale

8   A particular focus of this partial review was on understanding how the growing provision in Birmingham was consistent with the University's profile and strategic intentions, and on how the financial and academic risks of running programmes at some distance from the main campuses were being managed.

9   The Change Report submitted for the review, placed the decision to develop the BLC in the context of UWTSD's Mission and Strategic Plan 2017-2022, specifically the priority given to removing barriers that limit participation in higher education by particular people or communities within the UK population. The evidence base provided to the review team documented how and why key decisions to develop the centre in the Sparkhill neighbourhood of Birmingham had been taken and how progress and outcomes had been monitored and reported. The review team was able to explore these matters further in meetings with senior management, academic and professional services staff and with a cross-section of current students from the BLC.

10   UWTSD describes itself as a 'widening participation university' and a key value in its current strategic plan is 'inclusivity, by removing barriers to participation and supporting people from all backgrounds and circumstances to fulfil their potential'. This strategic intention has been implemented through the University's Widening Access and Community Engagement (WACE) Strategy which is used to plan and monitor performance in achieving the objectives of 'promoting equality of access and opportunity for learners, encouraging participation at all levels and from all backgrounds, through activities, planning and knowledge, underpinned by performance data to inform progress and planning'.

11   The BLC was planned and developed in the light of the mission and core objectives of the University, which include: the consolidation of a diverse academic portfolio; the strengthening of widening access opportunities; the identification of opportunities to attract students from England to Wales; the enablement of closer links with schools, colleges and potential learner groups in cities within 100 miles of a UWTSD campus; the development of new models of educational delivery that promote practical skills and employability.

12   Initially this strategy focused on developing outreach provision in areas of economic disadvantage and low participation close to its main campuses in Wales and in the context of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 and the Communities First Programme. The Certificate in Skills for the Workplace was first developed in 2012 and delivered in Tidworth, Swansea, Carmarthen, Pontypridd, Llanelli, Bridgend and Cardiff. The programme's flexible delivery pattern was designed to be particularly attractive to students already in work and those who have family responsibilities.

13   The review team saw documentary records and heard evidence from university staff that show how each stage of the development of provision at the London campus, and subsequently at the BLC, has been planned and monitored in the light of a growing understanding of the educational needs of ethnically diverse and inner city communities whose higher education needs were not being met by existing providers. The decision to set up the centre in Birmingham grew directly from the experience of provision in London and incrementally from the course content and the pedagogic methods originally developed when designing programmes relevant to the needs of mature students from low participation communities in Wales. UWTSD discovered in the inner cities of London, and more recently in Birmingham, significant unmet need and demand for the academic programmes and the particular forms of flexible delivery that were originally developed in the Welsh context.

14   It was on the basis of the London experience that the decision was taken to provide for a similar population in Birmingham. The University's London campus was set up in 2012 initially to cater for overseas students who prefer to take business studies programmes in the capital. However, it was found that the Certificate in Skills for the Workplace attracted home/EU students from inner city communities in London. These were mainly people from black, Asian or ethnic minority (BAME) backgrounds. Very few had previously engaged, directly or indirectly, in higher education but were keen to develop skills and qualifications that would allow them to advance in their employment or to develop their own businesses. The full-time, flexible delivery with multiple entry points allows students to integrate the programme more successfully into their personal and professional lives. The availability of fee and maintenance loans from Student Finance England makes the course more accessible to learners of limited means.

15   The University and BLC management teams met by the review team, as well as the documentation submitted, were explicit about the risks of the expansion of provision in Birmingham and how they were monitored and addressed. Each stage of the development of the BLC has been carefully planned and outcomes and risks systematically monitored. Regular reports are made to Council as well as to the University Senate on a quarterly basis which provide updates on the key aims and objectives set as part of the original strategic planning exercise. Reports on the management of the student experience and on academic performance are made to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee on a six-monthly basis.

1.3   The University's approach to the risks highlighted in the provision

16   The evidence seen and heard by the review team highlighted three related areas of risk to the standards and quality of provision that have required particular attention at the BLC: non-continuation rates significantly above sector benchmarks; higher than expected

levels of 'unfair practice' (generally, the submission of work that is not the student's own); less than satisfactory levels of engagement in lectures and classes by a minority of students. In all these areas, it was clear that University staff were aware of the problems and that remedies had been put in place and were taking effect. These problems and the responses are briefly summarised below.

17   At the time of the review, five successive cohorts of students had been admitted to the one-year CertHE Skills for the Workplace. Only in the case of the first cohort had the one-year programme reached completion. Of the 249 students enrolled in March 2018, 85 had successfully achieved the award and 42 were preparing to resit part of the programme, but 114 or 46% of the original admissions had withdrawn from the programme before completion. This pattern of high early and ongoing withdrawal was also apparent in the data for subsequent cohorts but the rate was decreasing.

18   The University has analysed the reasons for low progression and attributed them to both the initial admission of unsuitable and uncommitted students, but also to difficulties some students had in understanding and adjusting to the study and performance requirements of a higher education programme. It was pointed out that Sparkhill neighbourhood had a 'long experience of some other providers who do not require attendance or educational achievement' and that meant that some students with inappropriate expectations of commitment had initially been enrolled. Additionally, other students, while committed to study, needed more guidance and particularly personalised support to achieve the standards of work required.

19   The response of the University has been to put in place a more rigorous, test-based, admissions process, and to significantly increase the availability of one-to-one study guidance available to students at the centre. Provision of study skills support sessions is available in the study suite at a set time each day. Lecturers have provision of study skill sessions included in their hourly-paid contracts. Students and staff met by the review team confirmed the effectiveness of readily-accessible guidance and support. One advantage of these interventions was that more of the students without a genuine interest in study were required to withdraw early 'ensuring that they are not able to claim Student Finance England support'. The data for subsequent cohorts showed both improved attendance and progression together with earlier withdrawal of non-engaged students. In its submission, the University pointed out that as 'the CertHE was specifically designed for those who may not have accessed higher education recently or previously, and attracts students with a range of family and other commitments, it is expected that non-continuation will be higher than that for more traditional programmes'. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to address retention issues in a systematic way.

20   Between March 2018 and April 2019, there were 114 allegations of unfair practice against 88 students, of which 105 were first offences. In accordance with the University's procedures for considering allegations of unfair practice, 96 allegations were accepted, and 18 allegations were considered by a panel of inquiry, the vast majority of which were substantiated, resulting in formal warnings and/or the award of mark of zero for the affected item of assessment.

21   The meetings with teaching staff indicated the allegations mainly concerned plagiarism, collusion between students and submitting work that was not the student's own. The Centre's response has been to increase information to students about appropriate academic behaviour at induction and to adjust assessments so that these mainly take place within the classroom and allow discrepancies between work done at home and in the Centre to be more readily visible.

22   Both staff and students met by the review team commented on distracting behaviour in some classes, such as talking over the lecturer and arriving late, on the part of poorly committed and engaged students. To some extent, these problems are alleviated when poorly engaged students withdraw from the programmes. Teaching staff indicated that these behaviour problems had been helpfully discussed at staff symposia and that some had attended staff development sessions on classroom management which had been useful.

1.4   The review team's conclusion

23   This section of the report has focused on the rationale for UWTSD's development of a substantial presence in Birmingham and on the University's responses to challenges in the management of standards and quality that emerged during the first year of operation of the BLC. While the UWTSD Strategic Plan 2017-22 makes clear that 'at the heart of our Strategic Plan is a commitment to all our learners and specifically to Wales - to its culture, its heritage and its language, and to the prosperity and long-term health of its citizens', the University also recognises an 'international and civic role as a provider of higher education' more widely. In particular, the University's Widening Access and Community Engagement (WACE) Strategy articulates a commitment to providing education to those who seek a second chance to access higher education, particularly help in fulfilling employment or self-employment goals. The volume of applications and enrolments achieved by the BLC in its first year demonstrate there is an important and distinctive pool of unmet need and demand amongst the first and second-generation migrant communities of Sparkhill and neighbouring parts of Birmingham which was not being met by more local higher education providers. The University has openly presented evidence of the difficulties that can arise when developing a new centre some distance from the main campuses, but it has also shown how it is addressing these problems, and particularly how its exceptional experience in providing flexible higher education opportunities to communities in Wales and London is relevant and applicable in Birmingham.

2   Meeting the baseline regulatory requirements

24   The review team examined the policies and procedures used by the University to ensure that its provision complies with the requirements of the various regulatory bodies and codes of practice and guidance that apply to higher education institutions in Wales and the UK. These include: HEFCW's Quality Assessment Framework for Wales; the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area; the Higher Education Code of Governance published by the Committee of University Chairs; HEFCW's financial and planning requirements set out in an agreed Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability; the submission of an annual assurance statement to HEFCW by the University Council; adherence to UK consumer protection law and guidance provided by the Competition and Markets Authority; the good practice guidance for handling complaints and appeals provided by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator; the legally binding Welsh Language Standards issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner and which apply to provision within Wales.

25   The University's approach to compliance with baseline requirements is to apply the same academic regulations and quality management procedures to all its provision wherever it is delivered, including in London and Birmingham. There had therefore been no need to construct alternative policies and procedures for the BLC to those considered and judged satisfactory in previous reviews, including the QAA Higher Education Review Wales of UWTSD in 2015 and the QAA Thematic Review of provision at London campuses in 2014. The evidence presented to the review team showed that the University regularly updated and checked its policies and procedures against the applicable baseline requirements, usually on at least an annual basis and also when new guidance is issued.

26   Until August 2019, the quality and standards of the University's awards are mapped against the Expectations of the current UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and work has already begun to assure compliance with the revised Quality Code that will apply from September 2019. All the programmes delivered at the BLC have previously been delivered at other sites of the University and have been approved in line with the procedures set out in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH). In particular, the CertHE in Skills for the Workplace was originally validated in 2012 and had been subject to a Major Review and Revalidation in March 2017.

27   The AQH sets out comprehensive regulations and procedures for the annual monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes, and the outcomes are reported to Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). However, for undergraduate programmes that were delivered in the academic year 2017-18, the University had decided to suspend the usual arrangements for an Annual Programme Review (APR) and replace them with the processes applied to all the programmes as part of the 2018-19 Subject TEF Pilots (Teaching Evaluation Framework). UWTSD is one of 50 institutions selected by the Office for Students to participate in the Subject TEF Pilots and the University decided that this process, requiring detailed analysis of data for each subject area, including student evaluations and assessment outcomes, would cover more than the same ground as the APR process. However, as the TEF pilots address relatively large subject areas, the provision at BLC since its inception in March 2018 has not yet been subject to the equivalent of an APR.

28   The procedures for producing and checking information for the BLC are identical to those for other campuses. Prospectuses, publicity and other information in print and online are mainly generated by the University's Marketing and Communications staff, based on information provided by academic teams. Heads of schools and unit managers (including the BLC) are required to approve location-specific publicity and other information relating to programmes and services before publication and carry responsibility for their accuracy. BLC has its own webpages on the University's website which provides details, using the standard university format, of the key features of current programmes, including information about costs of study and a link to information about scholarships and bursaries. However, the review team noted that currently no information about the Certificate of Higher Education International Hotel Management (CertHE IHM), which is being taught to the first cohort of 84 students, appears on the BLC website. The team were told that this is because a decision to advertise for subsequent recruitment could not be made until negotiations to obtain additional accommodation for the BLC have been settled (see paragraph 54). The information about this certificate previously did not accurately reflect the programme, particularly the use and nature of the placements. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensures greater clarity of the information provided in future to students about the availability and nature of the Certificate of Higher Education in International Hotel Management programme.

29   The review team concluded that the evidence it heard and the documentary and web-based material it examined, allow it to reach a positive judgement that the University has in place appropriate procedures to manage compliance with the baseline requirements that apply to higher education in the UK, subject to the conditions contained in the team's judgement.

3 Enhancing the student learning experience

3.1 Strategic approach to enhancing the student experience

30   The Centre's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is driven by UWTSD's overall strategic plan 2017-22. As BLC has only been in operation since March 2018, it does not have any formal mention within the overall strategic plan nor the 2019 prospectus; however, the team heard from senior staff that the Centre strategically fits within the Widening Access and Community Engagement Strategy (WACE) with a particular focus on ethnic communities and EU citizens living in the UK.

31   Practically, the Centre has introduced a symposium which allows for student outcomes and experience at BLC to be discussed at a strategic level. The staff the team met described the symposium as having both a bottom-up and top-down element that allows for action to be implemented with regard to enhancing the student experience with examples given of how module delivery patterns have changed to ensure a favourable student experience.

3.2 Approach to working in partnership with students

32   BLC engages students as partners mostly through student representatives who engage with their peers and represent the student voice at staff and student committees. The staff at the Centre noted that students do not normally engage with module evaluations - rather they engage effectively with student representatives who meet and frequently engage with academic staff and support staff. There was some discrepancy with the students the review team met, on the role of the student representatives, however, they did concur that the representative system in place has been effective in raising and addressing concerns as well as bringing about change using the traffic light system as the key mode of communicating progress of issues raised. The student representative system is informed by UWTSD's Students' Union with the aim of working closely through conferences which are held in Wales.

3.3 Recognising and responding to diversity of the student population, including approaches to widening access, the needs of specific groups of students and by mode, level and location of study

33   At a strategic level, BLC is committed to UWTSD's WACE strategy that aims to transform the lives of individuals from underrepresented groups in society. The students that the team met consisted of: those who had left education and wanted to return; students with SMEs; students looking to move to another level of work; while others had not had the opportunity for higher education due to family commitments. As the Centre became more aware of range and background of experience in the student body, they noted that their education systems had to change to ensure an effective provision is in place for second-chance learners.

34   The CertHE in Skills for the Workplace was initially formulated for underrepresented groups in Wales and has been adapted to the community in Birmingham to a maximum positive outcome in areas of module delivery, assessment and study times. The programme is full-time over a 12-month period with three intakes -currently November, March and July - with changes taking place from May 2019 with intakes in September, January and May, to align with school holidays due to the nature and needs of their mature students; this has also been identified as a strategy that will increase attendance levels and positively impact retention. The team was concerned that there would be an overlap in student numbers with the new intake dates impacting the capacity and resources of the Centre; senior staff and support staff assured the team and provided evidence that expansion plans are in place to

cover the overlap with plans to recruit more academic and pastoral staff to support the students and expand physical and digital resources.

35   In November 2018, and in recognition of the need to ensure coordination and comparability of student experience across the locations, the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (International Initiatives) and the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Management organised a symposium to look at differentiation in the delivery of the programme to address local needs. The symposium had a range of outcomes. With the aim of improving student retention rates at the BLC, the decision was taken to change delivery of the programme from four modules per term to two (while maintaining an overall credit load of 40 credits per term). Benefits of this transition for students include the ability to concentrate learning within a subject area and allow for greater focus; the introduction of more in-class assessment opportunities throughout the term, rather than a single final submission; and the opportunity for students to retrieve up to 20 failed credits within a subsequent term rather than having to wait until the end of their programme. This new delivery pattern has not impacted upon the overall style of teaching delivery within the BLC, which has always included a mixture of theory and practice with the aim of improving student engagement.

36   BLC acknowledges a problem with non-continuation rates as being above benchmark. The team were shown evidence and given examples of how the Centre is actively addressing the matter with focused interventions such as: strengthening the admissions process; improving teaching structures; improving the student support framework and financial support mechanisms; enhancing academic support measures that include offering additional classes (for instance, bespoke IT support sessions); 30-minute support workshops following all lessons; draft deadlines for formative feedback; the creation of free programme-specific textbooks; and provision to ensure that students are able to access pastoral support. The Centre provided evidence that showed some improvement in retention of the CertHE cohorts, but it is still too early for useful trend data. The review team therefore **commends** BLC for the steps being taken to adapt programme delivery to ensure students engage effectively with their learning.

37   The Centre supports students in their development as learners both centrally and at the University level. Students can access Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to enhance their learning; the Centre is aware that it needs to proactively and continually develop this provision and students that the team met who are accessing DSA commented on the proactive approach the Centre has taken in identifying their needs and assisting them in their learning.

3.4   Supporting students in their development as learners

38   The Level 4 Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) in Skills for the Workplace on offer at BLC is central to the WACE strategy which focuses on underrepresented groups in higher education and supports learners progressing into areas such as the BA Leadership and Management Skills for the Workplace, while increasing social mobility and tackling poverty.

39   BLC aims to support its students from initial recruitment with the admissions team assisting students in their application processes to the University and in applying for Student Finance England support. Students commented on how the Centre assisted, directed, prompted and signposted how to access support and complete their applications during the admissions and recruitment process. Once they have enrolled onto the course, students are provided with a comprehensive and compulsory induction that is contextualised to location of delivery that covers academic and practical issues which include IT, unfair practice regulations, programme handbook plus module handbooks and guides with web-based summaries of relevant sections of the AQH, for example, complaints and appeals. Students

are introduced to the University's Student Services department which operates across all campuses/centres including BLC. The Centre has two professionally qualified fractional staff, one of which is a British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) accredited counsellor and it has plans to appoint a careers adviser. It also has three full-time Student Services staff dedicated to pastoral support and student engagement. The BLC's Student Services provision is directly linked to the University's central Student Services teams, with regular meetings and cross-campus visits held. The first module students undertake is academic skills to ensure they assimilate and are comfortable with learning at Level 4 while allowing staff to quickly identify any learning needs that can be supported including DSA.

40   Study Skills sessions are the key component the Centre utilises in supporting its diverse students to develop as learners. Both staff and students have commented on how helpful the sessions are, as they have access to a member of staff daily for two hours, who will assist them in essential skills that vary from academic writing to IT skills. The review team, therefore, **commends** the personalised student support throughout the student journey - including mechanisms for preparing, socialising, inducting and enrolling students.

3.5   Learning environment provided, including the use of technology

41   BLC has an IT suite with 15 PCs, available open access Monday-Friday 8.30-17.30; three PCs are available during the same hours in the common room and free WiFi is available for students who have their own devices. BLC also holds four 'lap safes' each equipped with 20 laptops for in-class use; while students with specific learning disabilities are provided with a laptop for on-campus use when awaiting provision of DSA. There is a technician based at BLC who provides four hours a day drop-in support and is available at lunchtimes in the IT suite. Written guidance and support material is available in hard copy throughout the building and online. Students note that the PCs and laptops available are adequate as most students have their own laptops and log on to the Centre's WiFi.

42   There is currently no lending library but plans are in place for a fractional librarian post for 2019-20 as the academic portfolio and book stock expands; library support is currently provided through the Academic Liaison Librarian based at the London campus, who delivers taught sessions in the first term on how to access library facilities. Bespoke textbooks for CertHE have been developed by the Faculty of Business and Management and published by Sage to support the programme. The team were informed of the plans for a physical informal repository in the new building where the librarian will act as an Academic Liaison Librarian to signpost students, with senior staff confident they can deliver Level 5/6 programmes without a physical library. Focus is on digital learning resources as per the overall approach of the Library and Learning Resources (LLR) department with students positively commenting on the vast number of materials they are able to access online. The University policy is to develop a digital library service rather than print-based resources. The Faculty has developed textbooks for the CertHE/BA Skills for the Workplace which are provided free of charge for students. Students have access to Moodle and the University's online library which they feel is adequate and they also have access to the materials online at home.

43   Other plans to enhance the learning environment include building relationships within the community with developments in unsuccessful applicants accessing skills-building training and enhancing cycle accessibility via the community bicycle initiative.

3.6 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

44   BLC's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is effective and student focused. Since its inception, the Centre has taken steps to ensure provision is adapted to the needs of its student population with diverse examples given on how this translates practically. With the examples given and the conversations the review team had with staff and students, the review team concludes that BLC has an effective, flexible and systematic approach in enhancing the student learning experience.

4   Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching

4.1 Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy

45   The University's approach to forward planning, including the use of information to identify priorities designed to enhance learning and teaching, are clearly set out in its Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy (LTES). The Strategy is designed to enhance the University's performance in relation to TEF, National Student Survey, Destination of Leavers from Higher Education/Graduate Outcomes survey and retention, through the adoption of four key principles: that learning is collaborative, personalised, inclusive and professionally focused. Success measures, aligned to the Strategic Plan and Fee and Access Plan, have been set for each of the key principles to enable the monitoring and evaluation of the associated action plans. Institutional level targets are echoed at faculty level, providing an overarching framework for the development and implementation of focused local plans. The University's approach to establishing and developing the BLC is clearly informed by the principles and objectives set out in the LTES, although they have yet to be detailed in the form of a bespoke action plan with specific targets for the BLC.

46   The LTES forms the basis for a programme of staff development for academic and professional support staff which is set out in an annual staff development plan. In terms of learning and teaching, the plan has focused on academic leadership, teaching qualifications, retention, collaborative learning and mental health. Training and development opportunities, including online training packages, are collated on a central staff development hub. Faculties draw on their analysis of staff appraisals, peer observation of teaching and student feedback to identify their own staff development themes.

4.2 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

47   Staff at BLC are employed on the same basis as staff elsewhere in the University, including with regard to recruitment, induction, probation, appraisals, peer observation and access to staff development. Careful attention has been paid to the development needs of staff new to the University and/or BLC with specific development weeks taking place when the Centre was established in February 2018 and, subsequently, in September 2018 and February 2019. Sessions have included applying for HEA fellowship, behaviour and conflict management, and training in Insights, a classroom communication tool. There are plans for further HEA application workshops and ongoing discussions about Higher Apprenticeships for staff, particularly in relation to academic leadership and management. Academic staff have participated in two rounds of teaching observation in the spring and autumn 2018: a report on the outcomes of the initial set of observations was considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) in June 2018. Academic and professional support staff who met the review team confirmed that they had good access to internal and external development opportunities, including upgrading qualifications, HEA fellowships, attendance at conferences and training events.

48   New teaching staff join a network of tutors delivering the same module in different locations, sharing learning resources available via the virtual learning environment (VLE). The establishment of a symposium to review the delivery of the CertHE in Skills for the Workplace provides an opportunity for staff to support innovation and the sharing of good practice.

49   The review team confirms that the University has a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching which is in evidence at the BLC. Staff new to the University and/or BLC are inducted effectively into their roles and their ongoing needs are met through a full programme of training and development activities. Staff are supported to engage in scholarly activity and professional development and the sharing of good practice is facilitated through the introduction of symposia and their associated working groups.

5   The assurance of quality and standards

50   The University's approach to managing quality and standards is set out in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) which applies to all courses irrespective of level, mode or delivery location. The AQH, which is updated annually, is made available in hard copy to all staff and is easily accessible via the University's website. It provides a comprehensive and robust quality assurance framework, including details of the deliberative committee structure, programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements, academic regulations for taught and research awards, assessment, external examining, and quality enhancement processes.

51   The University makes effective use of external reference points to set and maintain the academic standards of its awards. The University's award regulations are designed to meet *The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW): in so doing they articulate with the frameworks for qualifications in the European Higher Education Area and the FHEQ. The alignment of the University's regulations, policies, procedures and practices to the Quality Code is kept under regular review to ensure currency; work is underway to ensure that the Expectations of the revised Code are addressed.

52   The academic provision delivered at the BLC operates within the frameworks for academic management and deliberative committee oversight contained in the AQH. The BLC is managed through the London campus which has the status of a faculty for planning and other purposes. Responsibility for programmes delivered at BLC and at other locations rests primarily with the host academic faculty, operating through faculty boards; all of the BLC programmes are currently located in the Faculty of Business and Management. Overall responsibility for quality and standards rests with Senate, with more detailed work being undertaken by the AQSC at university level and faculty boards at local level. AQSC has received regular updates on quality matters and key developments at the BLC since June 2018.

53   The programmes currently delivered at the BLC have been validated/revalidated and reviewed in accordance with the University's quality processes. Annual monitoring of programmes takes the form of an Annual Programme Review (APR) which requires programme teams to engage with and reflect on a range of information including: student recruitment, retention and achievement data; and feedback from students and external examiners. APRs were completed up to 2016-17, when AQSC decided that submissions to the subject level TEF pilot would replace the usual APR process for 2017-18. The University plans to introduce a revised two-stage APR process for the 2018-19 academic year, which will be the first opportunity for a review of programme delivery at the BLC.

54   Opportunities for students to contribute to the management of the quality of learning include: completion of external and internal surveys and questionnaires and representation at staff-student, programme, faculty or institutional committees. At BLC, student feedback is gathered informally and through student representatives' attendance at Staff-Student Committees (SSCs). Each learner group elects two students to represent them at SSCs; representatives are inducted into and trained for their role. The frequency of meetings has increased to three per term to facilitate a more dynamic dialogue suited to the needs of a one-year programme and the expectations of non-traditional learners. Actions arising from SSCs are tracked using a traffic light system. Staff responses to student requests are considered carefully and implemented where possible; explanations are provided if changes cannot be made. There is a strong connection between the Students' Union and BLC students: the Students' Union have made three visits to Birmingham and supported student representative training and there are plans for BLC students to attend the next Students' Union conference in Wales. The systematic administration of student surveys will enable BLC to identify areas of concern to the wider student body and to track the effectiveness of any actions taken in response. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that the University introduces a comprehensive system to collect and analyse student satisfaction data at module and programme level at the Birmingham Learning Centre (see also paragraph 27).

55   The University is conscious of the potential for inconsistencies to develop with a programme, such as the CertHE Skills for the Workplace, that is delivered at multiple centres, with different delivery patterns and to student groups with distinctive characteristics. The Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (International Initiatives) and the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Management have established symposia to address these concerns and to identify where local differentiation may be acceptable to address local circumstances. A review of delivery of the CertHE Skills for the Workplace programme identified a need for definitive programme documentation to be revised to reflect the different assessment and delivery patterns of the on-campus and outreach versions of the programme. A revised programme more suited to the needs of the BLC students is being delivered with effect from May 2019. Meanwhile, working groups on assessment, examination boards, student support, attendance and marketing are meeting to address actions identified at the symposia. The review team **affirms** the introduction of programme-based symposia and working groups to ensure consistency of delivery of programmes at different sites.

56   Assessment strategies for each programme are approved at validation and detailed in the definitive programme documents. The assessment strategy for the CertHE Skills for the Workplace is specifically designed to support students, the majority of whom do not have the traditional entry qualifications for HE or recent experience of education. All assessment is in the form of coursework; formal examinations are not used. The BLC makes effort to support students to adopt good academic practice, and to avoid the consequences of using unfair means, such as plagiarism or collusion. This has been a particular concern given the focus on practical learning and the University's encouragement of collaborative learning. Nevertheless, the BLC has experienced a high number of unfair practice allegations in its first year of operation. Action to address these concerns include: the delivery of a comprehensive programme induction, the ongoing availability of study skills support, the use of formative assessments and tutor feedback, supported by plagiarism detection software, warnings about inappropriate collaboration, and the completion of some assessment tasks in supervised class time.

57   Assessment procedures are carried out in accordance with the general principles set out in the AQH. For the CertHE Skills for the Workplace, assessment tasks for BLC students are drawn from a bank of assessments maintained centrally by programme teams. Students' work is marked by BLC staff and moderated both at the Centre and by colleagues at the London campus. External examiners are appointed in accordance with the

requirements of Chapter 7 of the AQH. A 'Module' external examiner verifies that 'standards are appropriate for all modules for which the module external examiner is responsible' and 'assists the University 'in the comparison of academic standards across Higher Education awards'. The module external examiner for the CertHE Skills for the Workplace covers delivery at BLC and London, and by the time of the review, had submitted two reports. Concerns about the consistency of marking and moderation and electronic access to comments and annotations have been addressed promptly by the BLC. A 'Procedural' external examiner is appointed to attend examination boards at the BLC reporting on the board's adherence to University academic regulations for progression and awards. At the time of the review, the procedural external examiner had attended and reported on one board. He confirms that the board was conducted appropriately with consistent decision-making but notes that, as he only attends the London and Birmingham boards, he cannot confirm that decisions made are consistent with other boards considering the same award elsewhere.

58   The University employs a number of mechanisms to secure the consistency of academic standards of awards delivered at multiple sites, including: standard module descriptors, a bank of approved assessment tasks, academic staff delivering across different sites, and moderation and external examining at module level covering more than one site. However, the review team noted the absence of mechanisms such as moderation and external examining to ensure the standard of awards delivered across locations are comparable. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that the University puts in place mechanisms to strengthen the assurance that the academic standards of awards at different sites are comparable.

59   BLC is making appropriate use of quantitative and qualitative data to identify opportunities to enhance delivery. Data relating to student enrolment, attendance, progression, achievement and withdrawal is monitored carefully to ensure that: admission processes are robust; study skills support is available; and University systems and policies - for example, relating to extenuating circumstances and suspension of studies - are understood and used to support students coping with the challenges typically faced by mature learners. The attrition rate for the first cohort on the CertHE Skills for the Workplace programme has been high, with almost half of the students enrolled leaving before the end of the course. The BLC attributes these high levels of withdrawals to several factors including: the enrolment of students who did not have genuine interest in studying; family and personal issues; lack of support from employers; and frustration with assignment submission and marking. A retention action plan has been developed. Action to improve retention include: strengthening the admissions process; changing delivery patterns to help parents with school age children; improving the student support framework; and financial support mechanisms.

60   The review team confirms that the University has in place an appropriate framework to secure the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its provision. The challenges of delivering a programme at different sites to students with distinctive characteristics are recognised and being addressed through symposia and working groups. Further work is required to strengthen the arrangements for ensuring comparability of academic standards for multi-site delivery of the same award. Staff at the BLC have worked closely with students to develop the BLC site and curriculum delivery; students are appreciative of the opportunities provided by the BLC and the responsiveness of the University to their requests. However, a comprehensive approach to gathering feedback from the student body will allow the University to identify issues and monitor the effectiveness of actions taken.