



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of BPP University Ltd, December 2018

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that BPP University Ltd is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the December 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The University has 15,011 students and 631 staff and offered 68 programmes and five modules with 34 programmes in teach-out in eight locations. This compares with circa 16,000 students and 687 staff at the time of the December 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) and 95 programmes in nine locations. All current programmes are awarded by BPP University.

3 In 2017, the University closed its School of English and Foundation Studies. The English language provision has transferred into Education Services and the Pathway programmes are in teach out, with the exception of the Pathway to Higher Education Certificate in Health and the Graduate Certificate in Animal Therapy. In 2018, the University established BPP University School of Nursing and the Business School was renamed the School of Business and Technology. In addition, the University closed its Liverpool study centre, which was used by a small number of Law School students. Further in 2018, the University closed its Endorsed Provider provision for distance-learning students and reached an agreement to provide support to these students until the completion of their studies. It has also suspended recruitment for its LLB (Hons) programme (save for LLB (Hons) Legal Practice, which is designed for Solicitor apprentices) in the Law School in anticipation of changes to legal education. In addition, the School of Business and Technology has redesigned its undergraduate portfolio to focus on degree apprenticeships and employer-focused programmes.

4 In the summer of 2017, the Bachelor of Dental and Oral Science (BDOS) programme, which was in its first year of delivery, was subject to an annual monitoring visit from the General Dental Council (GDC). The GDC expressed concerns and required that the programme be suspended, pending further scrutiny. Subsequently the University decided to close the programme and made arrangements for existing students and those holding offers. Further, the review team were informed that on 23 November 2018 the University's MClInDent programmes were sold to the College of Dentistry and students will be awarded the BPP University awards for which they originally registered.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The University continues to strengthen and embed the good practice identified in the December 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) with regards to the engagement of employers in the design and delivery of programmes (paragraph 7) and the expansion and development of tailored resources to support teaching and learning (paragraph 8). The Career Ready Strategy continues to evolve and now includes a new pilot

which seeks to further engage part-time and distance learners (paragraph 9). The Students' Association has now completed their seventh annual written submission, which is authored exclusively by their President and twenty-four Student Voice Representatives at an away-day. This provides feedback from the student body and uses a range of data provided by the University, which also supports the development of the resulting document (paragraph 10).

6 In addition, the University has provided clarity on its response to the recommendations regarding the status of McTimoney College of Chiropractic (paragraph 11), pass feedback (paragraph 12) and student transcripts (paragraph 13). Students confirmed that further training has enabled them to engage fully and positively as members of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee and effective advocates for their peers (paragraph 14).

7 The University continue to develop programmes designed with business. They engage and consult with employers and employer representatives to deploy expertise in employability, career skills and practice to inform programme development. Employer representatives are also formally members of programme approval panels and are appropriately trained. The University is implementing a set of further enhancements to the programme approval processes, which include protocols for the approval of apprenticeship programmes, enhanced agendas for approval panels and the strengthening of business cases for approval events.

8 Likewise, they continue to extend the provision of tailored resources to support new and experienced staff in their professional development. The learning and teaching team are responsible for this initiative, working directly with academic colleagues on the development of University-wide resources. The resources developed are informed by current sector thinking and issues and aligned with sector best practice. A notable example of this is evidenced in the revalidation of the PGCert Professional Higher Education programme reported in the Learning and Teaching Annual Report. Content and materials for this programme are available to staff throughout the University and significantly they are accessible without direct enrolment or engagement on the programme.

9 The University's Career Ready Strategy has been designed to enable students to develop skills relevant for their future success and supports the University's ambition to provide career relevant education that enables students to be work ready and able to achieve their goals through employment-focused programmes. The Strategy was devised with students and identifies 10 key skills and behaviours which are embedded into the learning outcomes of programmes. Examples include the University's Law School Pro Bono team, which is part of its Education Services and has now expanded to other Schools. This provides students with the opportunity to be involved in volunteering and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Similarly, a new employability award, aimed at increasing student engagement access for distance and part-time learners is being piloted. Staff and students commented positively on how the Strategy and its expansion supports both the development of curriculum and the achievement of student career goals.

10 Each year the Students' Association prepares a submission for the University regarding their experiences, which informs the University's strategic planning processes. The submission is prepared by the Association's President and the Student Voice Representatives. It makes observations, notes good practice and submits affirmations and recommendations to the University. The University values and supports this process and provides resources to enable students to meet across locations to aid production of the submission. It also provides internal and externally sourced data and metrics on the Institution's performance to inform the student's discussions. The University considers this open partnership approach with their students as fundamental to the improvement and

enhancement of their provision and the student experience. The student's submission is received by the formal committees of the University including the Academic Council who respond to its content and recommendations.

11 The University now provides clarity regarding the status of their School of Health and their association to the McTimoney College of Chiropractic. The website for McTimoney College of Chiropractic now correctly references the College as a department within the University's School of Health. It details how it is operated by BPP University on behalf of the McTimoney Trust and that programmes are awarded by the University. The University General Academic Regulations appropriately reflect the University's policies and procedures and the Academic Quality Office continues to monitor all published information.

12 Subsequent to further discussion led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Services) and Deputy Dean of Education Services with programme teams, the University determined that pass feedback should continue to be provided to undergraduate students on request. It concluded that there is a clear distinction between undergraduate students who are progressing through a multi-year degree programme and those taking a one-year professional course that prepares them for practice. A new Assessment Feedback policy was implemented in January 2018, which reinforces the University's General Academic Regulations, in which it is clear that pass feedback requests need to be made to the appropriate authority within 10 working days of students receiving their results. Students and staff confirmed the process is working effectively and students find the new policy effective in preparing their next piece of work.

13 In meetings with the Vice Chancellor and University staff the review team sought and secured an understanding of the actions taken by the University with regard to the recommendation concerning information on transcripts. It was evident to the team that the University had engaged fully with the recommendation and had taken the matter seriously. Among other things, the review team heard of the desire to act in the interest of students, the full discussions that took place in Academic Council and elsewhere, and taking note of practice within the sector. The Council concluded that the importance was the outcome of the award, not the process. Their rationale was that a degree is not less of a degree due to the mode in which it had been studied, and to include distance learning on the transcript would suggest that it did not have equal standing. In addition, it was felt that to categorise an award as distance learning was potentially misleading. During the annual monitoring review visit senior staff further contextualised the debate for the review team stating that students are often taught synchronously with full and part-time students using live electronic visual media all with a tutor present and therefore it would be inappropriate to codify these students differently. With reference to wording on transcripts for School of Health, students in McTimoney College the University decided it will mirror the wording used on the website and in marketing materials to make explicit that McTimoney College falls within the University's School of Health.

14 All student members of the Staff-Student Liaison Committees are now trained in their roles using a range of interactive scenarios and supporting videos. Accompanying recorded webinars are made available to those who were unable to attend. The University, with the Students' Association, continues to improve and develop training and resource materials and they plan to award representatives with a Certificate of Recognition for contributing to quality and standards at the University.

15 The University has a clear strategy and governance model for the oversight of effective recruitment, selection and admission of students. The University's strategic priorities are developed and agreed on a School-by-School basis between the Vice-Chancellor and each Dean of School. An implementation plan is agreed with the Director of Marketing and Recruitment, into whom the Marketing, Admissions and Insight

teams report. The associated Manual of Policies and Procedures 2018-19 (MoPPs) details the rules, policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission, including programme specific and English language requirements for international students. Similarly, processes for the recognition of prior learning are clearly presented for each School, as is, the support offered to applicants and students with physical disabilities or learning support needs. This includes prior to application, during application and in induction, and while on programme.

16 Associated admissions complaints and appeals processes set out the various stages of each procedure, and how the policies and processes are subject to formal review. The relevant manual is available electronically to staff on the University website, from the University Students' Association, staff intranet and the virtual learning environment (VLE). Staff are appropriately trained in admissions processes and have access to admissions support materials and induction guides to discharge their duties effectively. The formal review of the effectiveness of recruitment, selection and admissions processes is comprehensive and includes thematic reviews including domestic admissions, international student experience and induction. Students confirmed that the admissions process is effective with full support made available to them throughout the process.

17 Assessment practice is guided by the University's single set of rules and principles included in their General Academic Regulations and Manual of Policies and Procedures. These outline and detail the assessment strategy framework, which covers all aspects of University provision and is available electronically from the University website, from the University Students' Association, staff intranet and the VLE. Assessment mechanisms are approved by the relevant external examiner assigned to the module. Schools generate assessments based on learning outcomes and use an audit form to ensure compliance. Generic marking criteria are published in programme handbooks and on the VLE that provides a link to a social media site with playable visual media. A marking calibration and standardisation exercise takes place between examiners for each assessment and there is a moderation process which seeks to address any matters arising in the content or conduct of the examination or assessment.

18 From September 2018 a new University marking policy has been implemented. This sets out minimum standards for marking and ensures that a sample of all markers are moderated. There is also increased clarity regarding the role and responsibility of moderators. Student progression and achievement is reviewed independently by the Student Assessment Retention and Achievement Committee to ensure institution-wide oversight and that any matters of concern are reported to the Education and Training Committee.

19 The University distinguishes between poor academic practice and academic malpractice and many, not all, assessments are submitted through plagiarism-detection software to ensure authenticity. Poor academic practice is defined as first offences and/or to those students which it could be expected to have understanding and adapting to the conventions of good academic practice. Academic malpractice is applied when there is evidence of an intention to gain an advantage and where it is reasonable to assume an understanding of the conventions. Assessment practice is systematically reviewed by the University through annual and periodic programme review taking into account feedback from external examiners and students, and through the internal consistency of student achievement by Boards of Examiners.

20 As at October 2018, the University had 15,011 registered degree-level students (headcount equating 11,453.5 full-time equivalent), comprising 9,026 full-time and 5,985 part-time students. Of these 56 per cent were postgraduates. Students are enrolled on 104 degree programmes, across 524 modules and 14 centres. Provision at the University includes face to face and distance learning with multiple enrolments per annum. There are

some 400 individual cohorts per year (380 in 2015-16; 405 in 2016-17 and 414 in 2017-18). For the academic year, 2018-19 to date, there are 4,171 new enrolments. Distance learning students account for 3 per cent (134) of total new enrolments. Over the past three-years, distance-learning students have accounted for between 8 per cent and 17 per cent of the total student population. Nearly 70 per cent of the University's students are home/EU students.

21 The University's overall retention rate for the period 2015-18 is 90.5 per cent. The retention rate on individual programmes ranges between 44 and 100 per cent, with 631 cohorts out of 1,201 showing retention of 100 per cent. Data provided by the University indicates achievement rates vary markedly between Schools, from 76.29 per cent for the Law School in the academic year 2015-16 for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to 28.40 per cent for the School of Health. The associated overall achievement trend to 2017-18 is negative in all schools, except the School of Nursing where the achievement rate increased by 4.26 to 83.3 per cent. The pass rates for 2016-17 to 2017-18 may not be reflective of completion, as the majority of the respective cohorts have not completed their programmes at the time of data analysis.

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

22 The University engages with a range of external reference points in the management and development of their programmes. This is demonstrated through engagement with funding bodies, sector regulators and a range of government departments and bodies. They are also subject to external scrutiny and accreditation from five PSRBs.

23 During the period of this review the team were informed of issues related to programmes for professional apprenticeships (levels 2-5) subject to an Ofsted monitoring visit in September 2017. Ofsted's judgments focused on the University's progression reporting and found there to be insufficient progress in two of the three judgment areas. The review team noted that action plans have been put in to place since the monitoring visit.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

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

25 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Mark Cooper, Reviewer, and Mr Derek Hamilton, QAA Officer, on 5 December 2018.

QAA2319 - R10326 - Jan 19

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 20199
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk