



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Buckinghamshire New University, February 2016

Section 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 Buckinghamshire New University has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the March 2010 [Institutional Audit](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 In the five years since Institutional Audit, the University has seen a cumulative percentage change of 33 per cent in permanent teaching staff, with an annual turnover for all staff of between seven and eight per cent. During the same period, student headcount numbers rose from 9,361 to 9,774 in 2011-12, falling to 9,033 in 2014-15. Following the retirement of the previous incumbent, the University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor in February 2015. In November 2015, the institution opened the University Campus Aylesbury Vale in collaboration with the local council and Buckinghamshire Education, Skills and Training. This monitoring visit is being carried out for Tier 4 sponsor compliance purposes.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The University continues to enhance the features of good practice identified in the Institutional Audit report from 2010. The ongoing action plan is reviewed and monitored for impact by the Senate and the Quality and Enhancement Committee.

4 Involvement of students and external stakeholders in curriculum development and the traffic-light system to monitor external examiners' reports is well embedded and evident in the University's review processes. The University engages extensively with the Students' Union. An example of this is in the new Learning Partnership Agreement. Students are represented on all University committees and on the Senate.

5 The University has developed a guide to enhance student employability, which is used by course teams and validation panels to improve curriculum content. The Higher Education Academy has also used the guide to inform its employability agenda. The University has also established an in-house employment agency. Students confirm that these developments enhance their learning experience.

6 Admissions procedures and support for research students continue to be effectively managed by the Research Unit. A recent audit by Brunel University testifies to the robust arrangements for research supervision.

7 The University has made significant progress in addressing the recommendations in its action plan. There is a clear and consistent approach to assessment practice, including use of an upgraded virtual learning environment, the development of electronic submission of assessments and the use of plagiarism-detection software. Students confirmed that assessments are varied and well publicised in their programme handbooks, and that marked work is normally returned within the deadline.

8 A revised Work-based and Placement Learning Policy is progressing through the Education Committee for approval by the Senate in March 2016. Work-based learning is developing throughout the University but is particularly evident in Social Care and Nursing. It is effectively managed and supervised according to the established Learning and Teaching Strategy guidelines.

9 The management of academic staff workload is continuing to be reviewed following the audit work of the Balanced Academic Workload Group and discussion with staff. A self-reporting Personal Development Review template is used to track individual workloads, which is also transparent in the timetables published on the virtual learning environment.

10 Since 2012, the University has improved the annual monitoring process through its Programme Review and Enhancement Programme and has separated programme monitoring from the Strategic University Review and Evaluation process. The University effectively monitors partner college provision using the same processes. The focus on programme monitoring reports, which are peer reviewed for Faculty Boards, represents a reflective and deliberative approach to annual review. These reports inform the Faculty Achievement Report and Action Plan which contributes to the Strategic University Review and Evaluation process. The subsequent and overarching Strategic University Review and Evaluation review reports are considered by a joint meeting of the University Quality and Standards and Education Committees and ultimately approved by the Senate. The University is in the process of putting in place a service level agreement for the provision of data in relation to all its requirements.

11 The team scrutinised samples of annual Programme Review and Enhancement reports, together with examples from partner colleges. These reports provide detailed evaluative analysis of retention, progression and achievement data, with comprehensive student feedback through module evaluations, programme committee minutes, end-of-year evaluations and reference to data from the National Student Survey. Commentary on learning, teaching and assessment strategies and innovations focuses on areas for development.

12 The comments of external examiners are documented at module and programme levels, with responses from programme teams. The University uses red ratings to highlight actions considered to be imperative and showed evidence of a subsequent green-rated report to demonstrate effective actions taken in response to the comments. The Quality and Enhancement Committee has oversight of the action plan to address shortcomings and ensures the completion of the response to the external examiner.

13 Consideration is given to programme staffing as part of the annual monitoring process, which also requires consideration of current student employability data and professional programme accreditation where appropriate. Collaborative partner reports contain information on staff development activities, including those conducted with the University. All reports contain identified areas of good practice and plans for further dissemination. Course and programme action plans for the previous year are evaluated for effectiveness, together with proposed detailed action plans for the current year.

14 External examiners' reports are available to students and staff on the virtual learning environment and are discussed at programme committees as necessary. The University has implemented a new and more effective virtual learning environment following consultation with the students, which is being developed as a learning tool as well as a depository for information. Investment in mobile and tablet technology also enhances access to student learning materials and plagiarism-detection software.

15 Strategic planning of resource requirements is embedded in the validation proposal for new programmes or revalidation of existing ones. The proposal documentation requires transparent identification of all resources to support programme delivery, which the Faculty Management Team has to approve before submission to the Academic Planning Committee. Where major resource investment is deemed necessary, programme teams may consult the Project Management Office to assess the business case for resource development. Annual programme reviews also require consideration of the adequacy of learning resources.

16 The University uses a series of workshops to prepare postgraduate students formally for teaching and assessment roles within its programmes. Attendance is a requirement for all postgraduate research students who are undertaking teaching, providing opportunities for them to enhance their understanding of teaching and learning. It also prepares them for progression to the Higher Education Academy Associate Fellowship.

17 The Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment has responsibility for admissions processes, reporting to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and with strategic oversight from the Vice-Chancellor's Recruitment Committee. The newly restructured directorate works effectively as admissions and compliance groups, which act independently but cooperatively. The directorate identified potential risk of fraudulent documentation provided by some overseas applicants. Following review, the University refocused on new areas for overseas recruitment.

18 All UK and European Union students are recruited, selected and admitted according to the University's Admissions Policy and Procedures. Admissions processes are fair, transparent and consistently applied, with detailed mapping to the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*.

19 A recent review of admissions of international students has resulted in the University updating its policies and procedures to ensure that they comply with sector requirements. Central oversight of international student admissions is the responsibility of the newly established Tier 4 compliance group. All previous overseas agents' contracts have been cancelled, with new contracts approved for trained agents to recruit in lower risk countries. The admissions team receives regular training on advising applicants, and attends events by the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) and UK Visas and Immigration.

20 The University has set published threshold levels for English language competence for all applicants, including International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores of 6.0 and 6.5 for undergraduate and postgraduate entry respectively. English language skills are tested throughout the process and with a formal interview. International students who apply but do not meet the minimum language requirements must take an approved external agency assessment test. On admission, the University provides additional academic learner support, for example, with some integrated modules such as Business Communications for the MBA programme.

21 The relevant programme specification, together with evaluation of the applicant's personal statement and interview, are used to assess suitability and genuine intention to study. The Director of Marketing and Recruitment and the Compliance and Administration Manager confirmed that if admissions staff are not convinced that the application is genuine, they will terminate the process at this stage. They verify original supporting certificates and transcripts at enrolment and check international qualifications using NARIC equivalence. Applicants from non-traditional routes may be accepted on the evidence of professional qualifications, work experience and portfolios that are considered by the programme leader.

The team confirmed that the University has implemented a robust set of admissions procedures to meet the requirements of the Quality Code, *Chapter B2*.

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

22 The University has appropriately aligned all of its academic related policies and procedures to the relevant chapters of the Quality Code. The Quality and Enhancement Committee is responsible for ensuring the alignment of policies and procedures with the Quality Code. A formal mapping exercise document, including identified actions, has been audited recently by the Committee. Engagement with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements are embedded in the programme validation processes and programme specifications for awards. The University also engages effectively with many relevant public sector bodies through professional accreditation of its programmes.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

23 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.

24 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Chris Amodio (Coordinator) and Dr Elizabeth Briggs (Reviewer) on 4 February 2016.

QAA1513 - R5098 - Mar 16

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk