



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of East End Computing and Business College, September 2018

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the East End Computing and Business College (the College) is **not making acceptable progress** since the October 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 Since the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) in October 2017, the College has been the subject of a Concerns investigation by QAA in December 2017. The College was subject to an investigation by its awarding organisation, Pearson, in April 2018 which led to a report. The College appealed against this and a revised report was issued in May 2018. This did not allow any further recruitment to Pearson programmes and debarred the Principal from any involvement in delivery or assessment of their awards for two years. It also expressed a lack of confidence in senior management at the College. The College is not allowed to teach out current students who have transferred to other institutions.

3 Currently there are no students on the HNC/HND in Business or in Health and Social Care, which are the only higher education programmes offered at the College. As most academic staff are on hourly-paid contracts, none are currently engaged. There are a small number of administrative and senior staff and two members of academic staff who also teach on other programmes.

4 The External Verifier report for 2017-18 has not yet been received from Pearson who have blocked results from all but four HND students. They are in the process of interviewing all students who would be eligible for progression to and for Level 5 awards in paragraphs 4 and 15. The College has recently received centre approval from EduQual to deliver their Level 5 Diploma in Marketing, Management and Business and Level 7 Diploma in Business Management from January 2019.

5 The visit was extended to consider progress on the action plan from the Concerns report.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

6 It is clear that the College has attempted to address both the recommendations of the HER (AP) report and Concerns investigation. Because it currently has no students, the team was unable to test out either the implementation or effectiveness of the measures planned. More importantly, whilst the College has taken some steps to ensure that students' work is genuine, the exceptionally high number of cases of academic malpractice identified in the July assessment round, suggest these have not been effective. The weakness in application of actions in place, put academic standards at risk. Consequently the findings of the team are that the provider is not making acceptable progress.

7 The College action plan indicates limited progress on recommendations of the plan. The two areas of good practice identified have been to: continue to improve levels of student support and identify areas for further academic support; and to continue with an externally-appointed independent internal verifier and extend this role to the HND Business programme. Students met by the team were content with the level of support offered. No evidence of improved academic support was provided, and the high levels of academic malpractice identified suggest that academic support beyond a brief note in the student handbook, has not been provided. The independent internal verifier for HND Business has not been appointed.

8 Of the recommendations, five out of the six have been addressed but little evidence was provided of effective implementation of the processes due to there having been no recruitment since January 2018 and currently, no teaching. The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy (RPL) has been revised and reference to RPL included in updated programme specifications. There have been no applications for RPL this academic year. The recommendation to extend current processes to implement an explicit and transparent process for making external verifier reports available to all, has been addressed by posting the reports and College response on the virtual learning environment, however, students who met the team, claimed not to have seen any reports or met with the verifier on sampling visits. The formal written agreements with providers of work placements to clarify the roles and responsibilities, has been addressed by the development of a new work placement proforma to be used in the 2018-19 academic year. This has not yet been used as no placements have taken place. The College has updated its publication policy and has introduced a monthly review of all information. The strategic implementation of enhancement has been addressed by the creation of an Enhancement Statement included in the College's Quality Assurance Handbook with oversight by the Quality Assurance and Standards Committee (QASC) and Academic Board. Specific examples of enhancement provided by staff include improvements to the virtual learning environment, improved e-learning materials and the change to delivery of one unit per day on the HND Health and Social Care programme. The periodic review of Pearson programmes has not yet taken place. The affirmation to further improve the IT facilities and virtual learning environment have continued and students commented favourably on IT facilities, learning resources and the improved virtual learning environment.

### **Thematic area 1: Admissions**

9 The College has been unable to recruit new students following Pearson's investigation and its decision to deregister the College as a centre with effect from 3 July 2018. The last time the College considered students for admission was April 2018 but, because of the Pearson decision, it was unable to admit these students.

10 The College approved a new Recruitment and Admissions Policy in June 2018 which has been written to reflect *Chapter B2* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). It has been unable to implement this because of the Pearson ruling. This, together with the fact that the College is not teaching any students currently, meant that the team was unable to assess both the implementation of the new policy and its impact on the calibre of students recruited. The College plans to regularly review the policy and its implementation by the Quality and Academic Standards Committee (QASC) and Academic Board. An outcome of an initial informal review of the policy has been to ensure that more detailed information is provided on its website for prospective students. The admissions process includes the use of an admissions checklist, a two-stage interview process and an English language test for all students. Applications will be first scrutinised by admissions staff who will consider the application against stated entry criteria. Applicants' original certificates will be verified and checked with the awarding body if there is any uncertainty. Non-UK qualifications will be checked against the NARIC database. The second interview is

by a senior academic using a standard record from admissions checklist. Again, because no students have been admitted under this process, the team was unable to make an assessment on the effectiveness of this element of the admissions process but concluded that it has the potential to be a sound process.

11 The College uses the services of a small number of recruitment agents which it describes as 'Education Advisers'. It has recently introduced formal contracts for these advisers and holds meetings to brief them on any changes to the College, its policies or relevant external developments. The last meeting took place in January 2018. The College delivered staff development to keep admissions staff up-to-date with the academic regulations concerning admissions on 18 July 2018, when administrative staff were also updated with matters including the admissions policy and the Quality Code.

## **Thematic area 2: Assessment**

12 The College has developed its Assessment Policy to reflect the principles of validity, reliability, fairness and equity, and was approved in June 2018. Assessments are set by lecturers, internally verified before being distributed to students, and are aimed at enabling students to meet the learning outcomes through assessment tasks which reflect vocational scenarios.

13 The internal verification policy was approved in June 2018. The Principal acts as the Lead Internal Verifier and ensures that internal verifiers are appointed for every unit and that internal verification takes place. The policy is, however, not specific on the size of the sample required for internal verification and the team heard different responses from the staff as to the requirements. The College should ensure that its internal verification policy clearly informs verifiers as to the size and nature of the sample they are required to internally verify. Because the College has not been able to recruit any students, this policy has not yet been implemented and the team was unable to see any evidence of its application. External verification is carried out by Pearson and external reports are discussed at programme committees, QASC and assessments boards. The College informed the team that reports are made available to students on the virtual learning environment although students who met the team were not aware of this, nor were they aware of the opportunity to meet with the external verifier at sampling visits. The team was informed that an annual report is made to QASC on the external verifier reports, although there was no evidence of this process being implemented as yet because the College has not yet held its September meeting of QASC. Because of the requirement for Pearson to interview all students eligible for an award, the College had not received external verifier reports for 2017-18.

14 The College has begun the practice of providing students with written formative feedback on early drafts of their assignments and the team saw evidence of completed formative feedback forms. However, this process was limited in its success due to the high incidence of academic malpractice for the July assessment round. It also plans to introduce the use of a performance log for each student which will enable staff to collate a record of a student's progress throughout the module. The College claims this will enable them to detect any mismatches and anomalous peaks in the performance of submitted work. It also plans to use a greater variety of assessments to include oral and presentation work. The team was unable to assess the effectiveness of the latter two because they have yet to be implemented.

15 The HND Health and Social Care programme recruited 76 students in the 2017-18 academic year of whom seven withdrew; the HND Business recruited 71 of whom three withdrew. No students were recruited to the April entry point. Students' results have been blocked by Pearson who are in the process of interviewing all students who are eligible for progression to and for Level 5 awards in paragraphs 4 and 15, therefore no achievement

data is provided. At the time of the visit, only a small number of interviews had been completed.

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

16 The College has delivered a staff development session to improve their admissions process, which concentrated on *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code and Pearson admissions regulations. The revised programme specification makes no reference to the Quality Code or to Subject Benchmark Statements which are included in the specifications produced by Pearson who are responsible for designing the programmes and aligning them to appropriate guidelines. The programmes align to Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) guidelines and Pearson assessment regulations. There is no reference to other external reference points or professional body guidelines.

## **Report on progress since a Concerns investigation**

17 The Concerns investigation covered: procedures for identifying and responding to academic malpractice to be appropriate and operating effectively in practice; recruitment processes are effective in ensuring that students have the appropriate level of English language for the programme on which they are enrolled. The action plan made four recommendations which have been addressed with measures put in place to address concerns. This would appear to have the potential to address the issues but no evaluation of the effectiveness of these measures could be provided.

18 The College is to impose a limit of two assignment submissions through online detection software within a one-week window for the next academic year and to include a statement on submission limits in the relevant policies, programme handbook, student handbooks and virtual learning environment. It was unclear if these were to be considered as final submissions and if the second submission would lead to marks capped at pass level as required by RQF guidelines. The second recommendation was to ensure that all instances of suspected academic malpractice are formally managed according to the College's academic malpractice policy. The third recommendation was to take steps to ensure college-level oversight of the effectiveness of the application of its academic malpractice policy. There have been an exceptionally high number of suspected cases of academic malpractice which would suggest that the process of identification is robust but guidance to students is lacking. All cases of suspected malpractice are referred to the Academic Malpractice Panel which meets monthly. This panel comprises the Principal and Assessment Coordinator. Given the findings of the Pearson investigation which disbarred the Principal from involvement in assessment of their awards, the team asked if it was appropriate for the Principal to chair these panels and he assured the team that it was. The measures put in place would seem to be essential for compliance with RQF requirements. They would improve the identification and investigation of academic malpractice but do not provide adequate guidance for students to avoid it. Under the current circumstances it is not possible for the team to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures.

19 There was one recommendation around admissions: to consistently apply its requirements in respect of English language competence as stated in the College's admissions policy and selection procedures. The College has revised its Admissions Policy and Procedures to require certificated Level B2 in English and Level 3 qualifications in relevant subjects (see paragraph 10). Recruitment agents are instructed to examine these before recommending students to apply (see paragraph 11). The first stage of the interview process checks all applicants' qualifications and is followed by a written English test. Examples provided of this test showed it to comprise short written answers to a couple of questions. This would not necessarily prove that applicants were capable of Level 5 study.

As there has been no recruitment since these measures were put in place, the team could not comment on their effectiveness.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

20 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.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Amanda Greason, Reviewer, and Mr Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, on 25 and 26 September 2018.

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