



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Edge Hotel School Ltd, March 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 the Edge Hotel School Ltd. (the School) has made commendable progress in continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision from the March 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 Currently there are 90 students enrolled on the FdA/BA Hotel Management degree programme of the University of Essex (the awarding body) and five for the FdA/BA Event Management with Hospitality programme. Of these, 41 enrolled since the last review, reflecting a slight decline in admissions over the last two years. Both bachelor's degrees are of two years' duration. The direct entry routes to Level 6 of both programmes, validated in 2016, were offered in September 2017 but did not run due to lack of applicants. Similarly, the MSc International Hospitality Management programme, validated in conjunction with the awarding body's Essex Business School, continues to be suspended. There has been a small change in teaching personnel since the last review, although the School has maintained its overall number. Of the six teaching staff, five are full-time. Another academic member of staff helps with assessments and marking on a zero hours contract.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The School has made commendable progress in continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision since the March 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER). During the course of monitoring, the team scrutinised documentation provided and met the School's management, academic and support staff. It also met a group of six current students from all levels of provision. The School was able to demonstrate exceptional commitment to enhancing the student experience with continuing substantial, effective, and developmental action on areas of good practice, recommendations and affirmation highlighted in the report. It also successfully acted upon comments made in the annual monitoring report of 2017 concerning Level 4 retention and documentation for internal course proposal.

4 The School has thorough and appropriate mechanisms in place to systematically review and enhance its operations in accordance with the requirements of the published action plan. Although the School has not made any variations to its programmes in the last year, it has, however, strengthened the internal course proposal procedure to ensure that the academic justification for approval is considered alongside the business case. The process flow clearly articulates the stages and associated criteria that must be met before a new course can progress to the next stage in the decision-making process. Staff are routinely reminded of the requirement to adhere to all approved quality assurance processes.

5 The School's staff development policy has been formally approved by the Board of Trustees. Staff are engaged with a wide range of developmental opportunities. The School takes full advantage of opportunities provided by the awarding body, industry events and other external conferences and workshops. The policy has clear aims to increase the number of staff that gain Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowship and to build research capacity within the academic team.

6 The School continues to develop and enhance its relationship with the neighbouring Wivenhoe House Hotel (the Hotel). Both jointly and annually review the Service Level Agreement which identifies the key responsibilities of each party. Joint attendance at regular meetings provides ample opportunity for discussion of operational processes and student concerns. In response to student feedback the Hotel has recently changed its on-shift student meal menu and has implemented actions to enhance the experience of students while on placement during the Christmas festive period. Students confirmed that this period will continue to be a challenge but will prepare them for their future employment.

7 Student involvement in Hotel projects provides sector leading opportunities for professional and personal development in a stimulating learning environment that enhances employability. The School continues to engage effectively and extensively with industry experts and students confirmed that the exceptional opportunities provided are important for their professional development and wider understanding. Due to the vocational nature of the programmes the School incorporates industry engagement through its consultancy project activities, and the School has plans to broaden and embed this formal approach more widely across the curriculum.

8 There is a clear strategy in place for consulting students to ensure their views continue to enhance their learning opportunities. The student feedback policy defines the principles and processes used to collate information and how it is used to improve School services. Engagement opportunities are frequent and include Student-Staff Liaison and Programme Committee meetings. School representatives are also invited to participate in awarding body meetings and they receive formal training from the Students' Union to ensure they understand how to be effective in this role. Student feedback is also systematically collated and reviewed through the annual monitoring processes and more recently the student body has been invited to submit reports to quarterly School Board meetings.

9 The School adopts a strategic approach to the development and implementation of initiatives that enhance the student learning experience beyond the requirements of the QAA action plan. Through its robust internal quality monitoring processes the School classifies ongoing actions under key headings of strategy, process, procedure, and learning, teaching and assessment. Actions for improvement are monitored through the School committee structure and inform the development its Learning and Teaching Strategy.

10 Additionally, the School is required to follow the annual quality monitoring process as defined by the awarding body. This results in the production of a detailed Annual Review of Course (ARC) report that requires the academic team to undertake an in-depth review of the programme and this adds significant strength to the systematic review of provision. The report covers the key aspects of programme delivery that impact on the student learning experience. The process is evidence based and informed by internal surveys, the National Student Survey, Hotel placement feedback, performance indicators provided by the awarding body, external examiner and other reports.

11 Students are invited to Faculty Board meetings and together with the academic staff they discuss, develop and approve the ARC reports that are then submitted to the awarding body for further oversight and approval. The report culminates in the publication of a School-wide action plan which is discussed at weekly team meetings with academic and

professional service staff to ensure progress is monitored in accordance with the agreed timescales. The entire ARC process is a cyclical and robust programme level monitoring tool which, together with student feedback and the School governance and committee structure, provides an extremely effective framework for annual quality monitoring. This in turn supports the continuous review and enhancement-led development of the School's Learning and Teaching Strategy and operational environment.

12 The School has detailed and effective mechanisms in place to manage and monitor recruitment and admissions processes. Relevant policy, procedure and criteria are outlined clearly in its admissions process document. The awarding body approves programme specific entrance criteria at validation and this includes the requirements for language skills for non-native speakers. There is some scope for the School's Academic Vice Principal to admit applicants that fall below the published criteria or to accept credits from prior learning using protocols and limits defined and agreed with the awarding body. Candidates can apply directly to the School or through UCAS. Applicants are kept informed about the status of their application using a series of template communications. The students confirmed that the process was supportive and provided the appropriate information to prepare them for their studies.

13 The marketing, recruitment and admission processes are robust and are supported with appropriate levels of oversight and review. The School reviews the admissions processes and the marketing materials used to attract candidates to ensure they comply with Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) guidelines. Marketing material, such as the prospectus and School website, are approved formally by senior leaders at the School, awarding body and the parent Edge Foundation.

14 Over the last four academic years (including 2017-18), 62 students enrolled on the FdA and 130 on the BA programmes. Of these, six (10 per cent) and fifteen (11 per cent) have left the programme. It should be noted that the majority of FdA students progress to the BA programme mid-level 5, from whence they are regarded as BA students. The retention of students entering in 2014-15 was 75 per cent, with a subsequent pass rate of 77 per cent. The 2015-16 cohort had a retention of 87 per cent, and a subsequent pass rate of 99 per cent, while the mostly incomplete 2016-17 cohort have a retention of 95 per cent. Achievement has also improved with 76 per cent of those who graduated in 2017 gaining a first or upper second-class degree, and an overall pass rate of 96 per cent for the 2016 entry cohort.

15 At the time of the last annual monitoring visit, the School noted through their own procedures that there was a problem with Level 4 retention. Much centred around the challenges faced by students who were on placement shift within the hotel over the Christmas and New Year period, many away from home for the first time. The School reviewed its retention plan in early 2017, and subsequent actions have included a detailed and systematic whole-school approach towards design of the academic curriculum and work experience. Enhancement of the provision included more targeted support and explanation for students, particularly those preparing for Christmas and New Year placements. More detailed training is routinely provided prior to major placements. Academic support has been improved, for example including more detailed assignment briefs, facilitated staff availability, and three hours per week set aside for specifically for academic support. Where students are identified as potentially at risk of failure or withdrawal, staff proactively identify an immediate rescue plan. Consequently, retention has risen steeply as indicated in paragraph 14.

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

16 The School works closely with its awarding body to ensure the curriculum is aligned with the FHEQ and that full and appropriate use is made of the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education and Subject Benchmark Statements in programme design and approval. It also interacts with the hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism network of the HEA. Staff engage widely with the requirements of the CMA and ensure that all recruitment and marketing material comply with their guidelines.

17 The vocational nature of the course portfolio requires the School to proactively maintain contact with the industry. It is accredited by The Institute of Hospitality which publishes criteria and reviews provision of its member organisations to ensure the delivery appropriately prepares students who on successful completion of the programme can apply for membership to the Institute. The School is also a member of the Council for Hospitality Management Education and the European Hotel Schools Federation. Staff regularly attend relevant conferences and events such as the Master Innholders General Managers Conference, the Hospitality Professionals Association, and the Independent Hotels Conference. Industry experts are appointed as Trustees to the Board and provide strategic input to the development of the School programmes. The School has also been nominated for several national awards for leadership and management.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

18 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.

19 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Neil Lucas, Reviewer, and Dr Chris Amodio, Coordinator, on 13 March 2018.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk