



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Pearson College Limited May 2019

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Pearson College is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [May 2018 monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 At the time of the monitoring visit the College had 1,082 students and 26 permanent teaching staff and offered 12 programmes through two awarding bodies. This compares with 800 students and 22 permanent teaching staff at the time of the May 2018 monitoring visit. Provision for programmes of study are made within Escape Studios and the Business School. All but one of the programmes are awarded through the University of Kent with the other programme being awarded through the Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust.

3 Degree programmes have been designed with a common first year of study. This enables students following Escape Studios programmes to transfer at the end of that year to another pathway. This option is also open to students in the Business School following Business Management and Law programmes. The College no longer offers HND programmes and has taught out all remaining students and offered a progression pathway to their top-up degree.

4 The increase in student numbers has meant that the College has consolidated its provision at High Holborn and closed the Shepherd's Bush campus. This consolidation necessitated development of the third floor the Holborn campus, which was completed for the start of the academic year 2018-19.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The College has well developed processes for reviewing its provision and generating enhancement priorities (paragraph 6). An external review of the governance arrangements was undertaken in the current year and appropriate changes made (paragraph 7). Some actions undertaken have yet to be evaluated including the premises refurbishment (paragraph 10) and the pedagogic review in the Business School (paragraph 10). In addition, actions to further develop feedback to students have yet to fully impact on the student experience (paragraph 11).

6 The College develops action plans in response to its internal monitoring processes which are informed by external reviews. Contributions to the plans include student feedback, the deliberations of College committees and the annual monitoring process. A number of overarching strategic actions have arisen out of the monitoring and enhancement processes which are included in the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which is overseen by the Academic Board.

7 Completed actions include the review of the College governance structure, improvements to physical resources and the development of a Research Ethics Policy. An external review of the new governance arrangements was undertaken in spring 2018 and the findings were considered by a working party, which recommended proposals to the Governing Body in July 2018. These were approved and have been implemented. In accordance with its terms of reference the Governing Body will continue to review and evaluate its effectiveness on an ongoing basis. Following the QAA Higher Education Review (Plus) in 2014, a method for systematically identifying and providing learning resources was developed.

8 As a result of a review of estates in 2016 the College undertook a major refit of two floors at its premises in High Holborn. This was informed by a planned increase in student numbers and the decision to consolidate provision at this site and it was successfully completed by September 2018. Students confirmed that the converted premises are high quality and the IT equipment for those on Escape Studio programmes are industry standard. However, some students were unsure whether resources would continue to be adequate should student numbers increase.

9 In response to external examiner's comments the College developed a Research Ethics Policy. This was approved by the Academic Board in June 2018 together with associated procedures, which provides a rigorous framework for research undertaken by students. Students are aware of the Policy and how it is used to guide their research.

10 Further actions are at various stages of completion, including some which have been completed but are yet to be evaluated. These include a pedagogic review within the Pearson Business School, which followed analysis of student feedback, to ensure that the provision is relevant, interesting, challenging and intellectually demanding. As part of this process the School has undertaken a major review of the learning materials for all modules to ensure these are current and seminars link to previous lectures and there is appropriate preparation for seminars. Each module reviewer completes a review checklist to ensure consistency. The College intends to evaluate the success of this review at the end of the current academic year.

11 A revised policy was introduced for the academic year 2018-19 to respond to student concerns, which indicated that feedback on summative assessments in particular, could be more helpful and timelier. In addition, development sessions were provided for staff on feedback by the Head of Assessment during each semester. However, students the review team met reported inconsistency in the provision of feedback and that the quantity varied between tutors. They also stated that there had been some recent improvement and that feedback on assessments were received after about six weeks which, including holiday periods, is within the 20 working days required by the Policy. Also included in the Quality Enhancement Plan are the development of Fellowships of Advance HE, Talent Development Opportunities, improved communication to students of the timetable, and industry engagement. Each of these has appropriate actions and timescales within the Quality Enhancement Plan.

12 The College Admissions Policy is designed to be fair and to allow all potential students an opportunity to apply, including those with non-traditional entry qualifications. It aims to recruit students from a variety of backgrounds with the potential to succeed. Students confirmed that the admissions process met the purposes for which it is designed. In the Business School, candidates can gain admission either through their UCAS tariff points or via an assessment-based entry route which takes the form of a Professional Workshop comprising both group and written exercises, interview and online tests. All candidates for the School are interviewed using a standard set of questions to test their aptitude and motivation for the programme. In addition to enabling the College to assess the

applicant's potential and motivation this provides an opportunity for the applicant to find out more about the College. For the Escape Studio programmes, application is by means of an 'applicant day' which takes the form of a creative workshop. Candidates bring a portfolio to a workshop and this is discussed in groups with tutors and other applicants. Prior to attendance candidates are given advice on the College website on what is expected from a creative portfolio.

13 The English Language requirements for applicants whose first language is not English, is published on the College website as well as within programme specifications. These students should obtain an IELTS score of 6.5 (with a minimum of 6.0 in Reading and Writing and 5.5 in Speaking and Listening) or equivalent. The College's Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) process enables students to receive exemption from parts of a degree programme if they have achieved the necessary pre-requisites to demonstrate potential for success on the remainder of the programme and meet its learning outcomes upon completion. The appeals and complaints procedures regarding the admissions process can be accessed via the College website. It includes the form for submission of an appeal or complaint against an admissions decision.

14 To ensure all assessments are fit for purpose they are scrutinised internally by the College. Once this internal approval has been given, assessments are sent to the external examiner whose comments are recorded. Amendments are made, and the final version is agreed before being given to students. External examiners, who are appointed by the College's validating partners, consistently report that the College's standards are set at the appropriate level and ensure students are enabled to achieve the stated learning outcomes. All student written work is submitted through plagiarism-detection software and the College has procedures in place for dealing with any suspected assessment malpractice.

15 Criteria ensure that assessments are marked to the appropriate level and that it is consistent. A selection of scripts for each module is second marked. If there is a discrepancy of more than five per cent in the marks for any scripts a review of the marking for that module is undertaken. A sample of work for each module is then sent to the external examiners. Students confirmed that they are informed about plagiarism and academic misconduct by the College and that written work is submitted through plagiarism-detection software. However, while Escape Studio students stated that they could access their originality reports, students in the Business School stated they could not.

16 As a relatively large number of students transfer between programmes, the standard calculation of retention and achievement do not reflect the actual position. The College provided the team with figures adjusted for transfers as well as the conventional calculation. Overall student retention and achievement are generally high subject to the above adjustment.

17 For the 2015-16 cohort 155 students enrolled of whom 118 (76 per cent) were retained. Of the 81 students that completed the course 73 (90 per cent) have achieved the qualification. However, eight (10 per cent) students completed the programme but failed the qualification. Nine students are continuing on their programme. With regard to the 2016-17 cohort 265 students enrolled of whom 236 (89 per cent) have been retained. Of the 23 students who have completed their course all 23 (100 per cent) achieved the qualification.

18 In the 2017-18 cohort 537 students enrolled of whom 65 (12 per cent) have discontinued their studies. Thirty students from this cohort have completed their course and all 30 (100 per cent) achieved the qualification. Of the initial recruitment of 512 students on the 2018-19 cohort, 472 (92 per cent) have been retained. Of the 11 students from this cohort who completed a one-year BA top-up all 11 (100 per cent) achieved the qualification. The current cohort has retained 92 per cent so far. Use of data continues to be a central

theme in quality and enhancement processes within the College and is used to inform planning and enhancement activity.

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

19 The College maps programme outcomes against the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements as part of their development and new programmes are also mapped to *The Framework of Higher Educations Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). In addition, the committee structure and its deliberations are informed by the Quality Code. The College received accreditation from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales for a number of their ACA examinations in October 2018. It also participates in sector developments through membership of Independent HE, GuildHE and attendance at QAA and OfS events and engagement with both TEF subject pilots.

## **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 Mr Peter Hymans, Reviewer, and Mr Derek Hamilton, QAA Officer, on 23 May 2019.

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