



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Empire College London Ltd, June 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 Empire College London Ltd (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision following the [June 2017 Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 The College continues to offer two higher education programmes: a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business (Business Management) from Pearson and the Level 5 Diploma in Education and Teaching (DET) awarded by City & Guilds. The College had 139 students enrolled at the time of the June 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) visit (the Review) which compares to 145 at the time of the monitoring visit, representing a four per cent increase.

3 There have been no significant changes to the academic structure or premises used by the College since the 2017 Review visit. The Senior Management Team (SMT) comprises the Managing Director, Head of Centre, Head of Marketing and Administration, Head of Academics and Senior Administrator; and the tutor team currently comprises six lecturers.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The College has made acceptable progress with its action plan from the 2017 Review and is at the early stages of starting to monitor and evaluate the actions in order to identify their effectiveness. The good practice relating to the holistic approach to student support, which enables student development and achievement, has been maintained (paragraphs 5 and 6). The College has made available external examiner reports, which excludes sections with individual student data, to the whole student body via the virtual learning environment (VLE) (paragraph 7). The College has also reviewed the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy; and semester reviews evaluate the implementation of the new policy and record enhancement activities to improve the quality of student learning opportunities (paragraph 8).

5 The College remains committed to providing a holistic approach to student support that enables student development and achievement. Recent positive reports received from the two awarding organisations support the claims made. In respect of continued ongoing support, the College provides academic staff with detailed group profiles which include information about each student's learning style, testing and interview results. Academic staff are responsible for providing feedback to students on activity sheets that must be completed after each teaching session. The Head of Academics audits the progress of each tutor to ensure that delivery is appropriate and students are receiving sufficient support through tutorials and tracking of progress. Each student is assigned a personal tutor, who must meet with each tutee at least twice in every semester. All students are required to maintain Individual Learning Plan portfolios that include records of tutorial sessions and activities.

6 The College has also developed new initiatives to improve student prospects for success and progression that have been well received by students and staff. For example, the SMT approved the introduction of a two-week academic support process to ensure that students have adequate feedback on their assignments prior to final submission. A designated Employer Engagement week has also been embedded into the timetable to provide students with more insight into practical features associated with their studies. In addition, the SMT has also increased resources for information technology support provided to students, accommodating students with special learning needs, and piloted a viva activity to ensure that students understand what they have written and to identify any points that should be addressed prior to final submission.

7 Further progress has been made with addressing the two recommendations identified at the Review. In relation to making external examiner reports available to the whole student body, excluding sections with individual student data, the College has addressed this. External examiner reports are now uploaded onto the VLE and are available for staff and students to read on the home page under College News. Reports are also discussed with student representatives in course meetings.

8 The College has made good progress to articulate and disseminate the provider-level approach to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. SMT and staff members recently reviewed the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy, with the aim of clarifying roles and responsibilities. Although the College remains committed to the principle that all staff members and students must share responsibility for enhancement, the SMT now has specific responsibilities for planning and implementing quality assurance, improvement processes and activities throughout the academic year. The two-week academic support and Employer Engagement weeks reported above, are a result of these improved processes. The Head of Academics, in consultation with academic and support staff, has delegated responsibility for implementing specific teaching and learning activities.

9 The College has a well-developed Admissions Policy which aims to ensure that prospective students are treated fairly and without bias. All information regarding recruitment, selection and admission is available on the website. Students confirmed in the meeting with the review team that College staff members had been approachable and helpful, and had provided useful information at each stage of the recruitment, selection and admissions process.

10 Robust application and admissions procedures have been developed to ensure that successful applicants are enrolled on programmes that they are able to complete. Applicants are required to take online tests in English in reading, listening, speaking and writing, and to undertake a personal interview prior to enrolment at the College. At the entry point, students are required to take additional tests in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills which also incorporates learning style questionnaires. The information gained about each student in respect of English, numeracy, ICT skills tests and interview results, are used by academic staff to plan learning and teaching activities, as reported in paragraph five.

11 The College has effective processes in place for dealing with successful and unsuccessful candidates. Successful candidates are required to attend detailed induction sessions that provide valuable information about their learning journey. Unsuccessful candidates have the right to complain or appeal judgements made on grounds of insufficient information or unfair processes.

12 The College uses feedback from students about their recruitment and admissions experiences to identify trends and shape future recruitment activities. Data collected in respect of each entry cohort is analysed, compared against information collected about the previous recruitment period, and findings are published in Recruitment Analyses Reports.

Detailed accounts of semester results are recorded in Semester Review Reports and discussed at achievement, recruitment and management update meetings.

13 The College has a system of programme monitoring in place, with quality reviews taking place at the end of each semester. Semester reviews ensure that areas for consideration are reviewed in a timely manner and cover areas of enrolment, progression, achievement, attendance, assessment, teaching and learning, staff development, and external examiner reports. The aim is to ensure that good practices are shared and areas for improvement are identified. The College also undertakes an annual programme monitoring review for Pearson that allows the Senior Management Team to benchmark the academic provision against other providers.

14 The data and commentary submitted by the College indicates that retention rates over the past three academic years are 87 per cent (2014-15), 80 per cent (2015-16) and 84 per cent (2016-17). The College also reports that the pass rates for completing students over the last three academic years are 99 per cent (2014-15), 92 per cent (2015-16) and 92 per cent (2016-17).

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

15 The College's quality assurance arrangements continue to make appropriate use of external reference points. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) serves as the main standard for benchmarking. The College has mapped effectively its policies and procedures to the Expectations set out in Part B of the Quality Code. In respect of training, all staff members are encouraged to use QAA's Quality Code Toolkit, new staff members are introduced to the Quality Code in induction sessions, and plans are in hand for Senior Managers to attend a QAA briefing session on the new revised Quality Code in July 2018.

16 Senior Managers act upon recommendations and suggestions made in reports issued by its two awarding organisations. For example, in response to suggestions made by external examiners associated with City & Guilds and Pearson, SMT introduced positive changes in the internal verification system. In Pearson's Academic Management Report, the reviewer commented favourably upon the College's benchmarking efforts in respect of policies and procedures and identified as good practice, the College's tutorial system and the ongoing commitment to improve continually the quality of its provision. The College has recently undergone an Educational Oversight Inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate which resulted in an 'exceeds expectation' outcome.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, Reviewer, and Mr Robert Saynor, Coordinator, on 13 June 2018.

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