



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of EThames Graduate School Ltd, April 2017

### 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 EThames Graduate School Ltd (the School) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 The School has not recruited any new students since the April 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). This follows the withdrawal of funding for its higher education students by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The number of students on the School's higher education programmes has decreased by 47 per cent, from 566 to 300 at the time of the April 2016 review. The majority of these students - 297 (99 per cent) - are enrolled on Pearson Higher Nationals. This includes 18 students who are yet to complete the online Higher National Certificate programme.

3 Three students are still on the BSc Health, Wellbeing and Social Care (Top-Up) degree offered in partnership with the University of Bradford, and are due to resubmit their final assessments and complete their programme in August 2017. The Quality Manager has replaced the Academic Principal. New members of staff were recruited to replace a number of academic staff who left for personal reasons or due to the reduction in student numbers. Staff numbers decreased to 11 and 17, down from 22 and 12 for academic and administrative staff respectively.

4 The School is actively negotiating with a university for a potential partnership arrangement.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The School has made progress in addressing the one recommendation from the April 2016 review and has maintained its good practice of facilitating high levels of student engagement to support the continuing improvement of the student learning experience.

6 Some actions have been implemented to address the recommendation to measure the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives using institutional benchmarks. This includes the provision of additional student support available through the implementation of a Digital Literacy Strategy. The School's planned evaluation of this Strategy has been moved to July 2017 from January 2017. Action to further develop pedagogical approaches in teaching has been implemented; however, this has not yet been evaluated.

7 Actions related to the affirmations regarding the development of a new process for programme approval, and improving the admissions process are yet to be implemented because of a lack of new programmes and student recruitment. The School has continued to extend the range of support available to full-time students to online students, and has appointed an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support

students in securing work placements and the required hours to complete their studies. There are effective annual monitoring processes in place, complemented by the Academic Management Review from Pearson and the University of Bradford's monitoring processes.

8 The School continues to formally involve students through participation at Course Boards, the Student Council, Academic Board meetings and the Student Engagement Forum. However, although minutes show that students attend these meetings, particularly the Student Engagement Forum, which is generally well attended, most students met by the review team were not aware of these committees nor of the selection process to get onto the committees. Students confirmed that minutes of meetings continue to be published on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students also confirmed that they are peer-elected and given a course representative handbook, as well as guidelines contained in the Student Handbook. Students continue to feedback formally and informally through their student representatives, end-of-unit questionnaires, end-of-course surveys, online survey desk and post-induction surveys, as well as tutorials. Students have access to standards verifier and external examiner reports, course annual monitoring reports, and the institutional monitoring and evaluation reports, which are posted on the VLE.

9 Minutes from meetings of the Academic Board, Student Engagement Forum and Student Council do not highlight actions to be taken or keep an audit trail of the implementation of such actions. Staff stated that actions from these meetings are discussed at the Curriculum Management Group for review and sign-off off when completed; students confirmed that some actions discussed at the meetings they attend had been implemented. Although minutes of the Curriculum Management Group meetings carry detailed action plans, which are carried over from one meeting to the next for review, there is no audit trail showing that actions agreed at other meetings are systematically tracked and transmitted to the Curriculum Management Group for follow up and tracking.

10 The Welfare Officer continues to provide personal and pastoral support to students, and there are arrangements for, and regular implementation of, academic support for students. Overall, students expressed satisfaction with their course. However, some students stated that they hesitate to provide candid feedback as they are required to disclose their details on the online feedback form. Staff maintained that students provide anonymised feedback to avoid the objectivity of the process being compromised. Although the online forms made available to the review team did not provide for student identification when completing the forms, this is not made clear to students.

11 In response to the recommendation to measure the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives, the School has made additional support sessions available to students to improve key performance indicators. Staff maintain that some improvement has been made, but that full tracking of student progress and achievement still needs to be implemented, and will be reported at the next Curriculum Management Committee and Senior Management Team meetings. An interim report on student achievement scheduled for December 2016 will now be produced in July 2017 when all the data becomes available. The School's evaluation of the effectiveness of its Digital Strategy includes student surveys and discussion of the results at Senior Management Team meetings. Student surveys in 2017 show that 90 per cent of students are satisfied with their access to IT facilities.

12 Staff stated that the action on the development of new pedagogical approaches has been well received. Linked to the action is a target that 70 per cent of staff would be working towards teaching credits. According to the teachers' qualification records and CVs seen by the review team this target has been achieved.

13 The affirmation concerning the School's development of a new process for the approval of new courses could not be implemented as there were no new programmes.

The School introduced the policy to ensure that during its efforts to seek new partners it would consider only provisions that are aligned with its strategic vision. Negotiations are still under way with a potential university partner.

14 Although the School maintains that it has strengthened its admissions process to more effectively match applicants to courses, the effectiveness of this action cannot be evaluated as the School did not recruit any new students. It also lists as one of its actions the analysis of retention and progression data to inform the review of entry requirements and procedures linked to its widening participation strategy. However, there is no evidence that this action has yet been implemented.

15 At the April 2016 review the School had taken steps to ensure that online students benefit more fully from the range of available support to enable completion. The School continues to monitor progress of these students on a regular basis, offering encouragement to fast-track completion where possible. Pearson external examiners commented on the effectiveness of this strategy.

16 The School has appointed an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support students in gaining parity of work experience and careers advice. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with the support they received from the School, although the majority of students find their own work placements. A database of placement providers for Higher National Diploma (HND) students is maintained. Students and staff confirmed that all students achieved the required placement hours to complete the placement unit.

17 The Quality Assurance Handbook provides the basis for monitoring and review. The School participates in the Pearson Annual Management Review process and addresses recommendations arising from reviews with action plans, and in the University of Bradford's Programme Enhancement Plans. Regular student feedback is collected, analysed and discussed at the Curriculum Management Group, which maintains oversight of the monitoring processes. Each programme produces an Annual Monitoring Report.

18 Retention rates for students on the Pearson HND Health and Social Care and the BSc Health, Wellbeing and Social Care (Top-Up) programme are generally above 80 per cent. The retention rate for the September 2015 cohort on the Health, Wellbeing and Social Care programme was 95 per cent, with a 95 per cent pass rate. On the January 2016 cohort, the retention rate was 100 per cent, with a 92 per cent pass rate. The remaining three students on the programme are resubmitting their work and are due to complete in August 2017. However, pass rates for the September 2014 and January 2015 HND Health and Social Care cohorts, which include 39 repeat students who are now expected to complete their studies in January 2018 and 33 students who have completed their course but are still resubmitting their work, are below 50 per cent. Current HND Health and Social Care cohorts, which started in September 2015 and January 2016, and comprise 102 students, continue to maintain retention rates above 80 per cent. For the Higher National Business programmes, retention statistics remain below 50 per cent. This includes the online Higher National Certificate cohort. The School continues to extend additional support available to full-time students to online students in order to improve completion. Statistics for the Hospitality Management programme remain within the 60 to 70 per cent range.

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

19 The School's policy and other key documents are either mapped against, or reference, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). There is also

evidence of staff development activities relevant to the Quality Code. Staff confirmed that they had received some training on the Quality Code.

## **Section 5: 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 Dr Laila Halani, Reviewer, and Christopher Mabika, Coordinator, on 3 April 2017.

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