Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Fairfield School of Business Ltd

Partial review

October 2018

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) partial review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Fairfield School of Business Ltd. The review took place on 4 October 2018 and was conducted by one reviewer, as follows:

- Dr Carol Vielba.

The main purpose of the partial review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

This was a partial review following an original review undertaken in November 2017 which resulted in a published report. The QAA review team made judgements on one area requiring improvement: the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

---

[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk//en/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

Judgement

2

The QAA review team formed the following judgement about the higher education provision.

- the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the work being undertaken to develop structures and processes that strengthen planning at School level and draw more effectively on quality assurance processes.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

About the provider

Fairfield School of Business Ltd (the School) began to deliver higher education programmes in 2012 in the form of Pearson BTEC level 5 HND in Business. A few years later it entered into a partnership with London Metropolitan University (LMU) and in 2016, the University validated three BA/BSc (Hons) top-up programmes and three Foundation Degrees in Business, Hospitality Management, and Public Health and Health Promotion for delivery by the School. Not all programmes are operational yet.

The School is one of three higher educational institutions which form a group under common ownership. Each college or school develops and delivers its particular portfolio of academic courses. However, administrative functions, including human resources, registry and quality assurance, have been centralised in an office that supports all three colleges. The Head of Quality is a new senior role with responsibility for overseeing and managing quality assurance and enhancement activities across the three colleges. A full-time Quality Manager for the School works within the central quality office.

The School operates from two campuses. It recently relocated to a new campus in Croydon where it now delivers the Pearson HND Business, the LMU top-up programme and Foundation Degree in Business but existing students on the foundation degree continue at Alperton House in Wembley. The student body is made up almost entirely of mature local students who under achieved at school and have few formal academic qualifications. Many have been out of education for some years. The School's mission and strategic direction remain unchanged since the November 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). It aims to provide a supportive and inspiring student experience that is inclusive, seeks to reduce barriers to learning, and equips students with the knowledge and skills they need to progress into further study or employment. At the time of the partial review, 447 students were registered on the HND Business, 147 students studied on the Foundation Degree in Business and 71 students were enrolled on BA (Hons) top-up in Business. Delivery of the Foundation Degree in Public Health and Health Promotion is due to commence soon.

The 2017 review made a number of recommendations and identified enhancement of the student learning experience as one area that required improvement. The School produced a detailed action plan to address the recommendations made at that time and has monitored progress in implementing the actions identified. In relation to enhancement, changes have been made to the School's academic governance structure and a number of enhancement strategies, policies and plans have been developed to strengthen planning and oversight at institutional level. The management of quality and standards has also been strengthened through the appointment of senior quality staff.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

1.1 The School's approach to enhancement is set out in its Enhancement Policy. Enhancement activity is guided by the quality enhancement framework and Strategic Enhancement Plan. Responsibility for enhancement is spread widely across the School and overseen by the Quality Enhancement Committee. The quality monitoring cycle facilitates the identification of good practice and opportunities for enhancement at module, programme and School level. Enhancement activity is supported by centrally located quality assurance staff. The structures, policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.2 In order to test the impact and effectiveness of the School's recent work related to enhancement, the review team considered a range of evidence including: strategic policy documents and plans; committee terms of reference and minutes; job descriptions; monitoring templates and reports; and details of training and development events. The review team also discussed the School's approach to enhancement with members of the senior management team, teaching staff and students.

1.3 The School has taken a number of steps to strengthen its approach to enhancement as set out in the action plan produced after the November 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers). New structures and policies have been developed and signed off by the Executive. The School has commenced the implementation and embedding of these changes and has plans to monitor and review their effectiveness.

1.4 The School has revised its governance structures. The new governance framework was approved by the Executive in summer 2018. The framework is not yet fully implemented. For example, some committees are not yet fully operational. The Board of Governors has oversight of the new structure and will undertake a committee effectiveness review at the end of the academic year. It is currently considering the format which the review will take.

1.5 The new governance framework has added a number of committees and panels, including the Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC). This senior committee, which reports to the Academic Board, and thence to the Executive Committee, has a wide remit for the management of quality assurance and enhancement. It is chaired by the Head of Quality. Membership includes those responsible for programmes from both academic and support services as well as student representatives. Minutes of its initial meetings demonstrate that it plays a key coordinating role in overseeing the implementation of quality assurance policies and processes.

1.6 A Teaching and Learning Forum has also been established, which provides an opportunity for teaching staff to exchange ideas. The collection of statistical data to inform enhancement is encouraged by the establishment of a Data Management Panel. Other new structures include a Publications Panel that reports to the QEC and changes to programme management structures through Standardisation Panels. These panels give

students a new role in enhancing programme delivery, among other things through comment on proposed teaching materials. In addition, ad hoc enhancement meetings have been held, which bring together staff and students to focus on particular programmes or themes.

1.7   The newly appointed Head of Quality has been instrumental in developing the School's quality policies and processes. The Enhancement Policy sets out the principles that underlie the School's approach to enhancement. These principles include the expectation that enhancement will be informed by data, focused on outcomes, holistic, inclusive, and undertaken in a collaborative way. The policy recognises the importance of both strategic initiatives and continuous improvement. Implementation is through the revised governance framework and the development of strategic plans.

1.8   In order to take the Enhancement Policy forward the School has developed a quality enhancement framework. The framework is intended to define the structures and processes required to support, improve, enhance, develop and deliver the academic provision. The complete framework encompasses strategy and planning, academic policies, governance arrangements, handbooks, monitoring and review processes, staff development and mapping onto the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

1.9   The School has developed a two-year Strategic Enhancement Plan (SEP). The plan has been developed around three pillars of quality, culture and employability. It indicates the expected outcomes and impact of proposed activities. Activities completed during the first year of the plan include staff development sessions; cultural events; a staff/student discussion on global citizenship; establishment of an Employers Forum and increased focus on careers. Activity has commenced on the second year of the plan. This will include the embedding of the new governance framework, further staff development events, a new annual quality conference, and events focusing on employability. The QEC monitors the implementation of the SEP. Enhancement is now a standing item on committee agendas, including Executive Committee.

1.10   The review team noted that the School has developed its strategies and plans in a more coordinated way than previously. The SEP is seen by the School as a component of its Business and Strategic Plan. It is also linked to the Student Engagement Strategy and the externality framework.

1.11   As part of the 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) action plan the School has revisited its programme monitoring and review processes to ensure that they contribute more fully to the enhancement of student learning opportunities and that there are appropriate levels of oversight. The core of the system remains the completion of end-of-module evaluation forms by students, which feed into module reviews. Module reviews in turn feed into programme reviews. A revised module feedback template is being considered. The School has committed to producing an annual institutional level self-assessment report that uses the outcomes of the annual monitoring process to develop a critical evaluation of student performance, teaching, student engagement, public information, learning resources, employer engagement and external feedback. The report, written by the Head of Quality, will be presented to QEC and Academic Board at the end of the quality cycle. The first such report is expected to be completed at the end of the current calendar year following the completion of programme reviews for last academic year.

1.12   The School has taken steps to strengthen the role of students in quality assurance and enhancement. As part of its action plan the School has revised its Student Engagement Strategy to align with the SEP. The new governance framework provides for student representation on a wide range of committees up to and including the Executive Committee. Two new committees, Standardisation Panels and the Programme Approval and Review Group allow students to participate as partners in the monitoring, review and enhancement

of provision. This is in addition to student input through Programme Committees. The review team noted that student attendance at meetings defined in the new governance framework was absent in a number of cases.

1.13   Several significant developments, such as the adoption of the new governance framework, took place during the summer months when students were not in attendance. The School has made efforts to compensate for this, for example by holding an additional meeting of the QEC to discuss, among other things, the action plan at a time when students were able to attend. A student representative development programme has been established providing briefings and support. Student representatives who met the review team stated that they found these initiatives helpful. They also stated that they felt able to make their views known in committees and that their opinions were listened to and acted upon by the School.

1.14   The review team concludes that through the Strategic Enhancement Plan and the underpinning Enhancement Policy and quality enhancement framework, the School now has a more strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities in place. The SEP is linked to the institutional level strategic plan. Responsibility for the implementation of the SEP is clearly defined with a central role played by QEC, but responsibility for addressing enhancement is widespread throughout the School. The School has strengthened the links between its quality assurance processes and decision-making through revised governance structures and the provision of greater opportunities for staff and students to contribute to discussions and plans. The implementation and embedding of these changes is at an early stage and their effectiveness has yet to be evaluated. The review team, therefore, **affirms** the work being undertaken by the School to develop structures and processes that strengthen planning at School level and draw more effectively on quality assurance processes in the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

1.15   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. The Expectation attracted one affirmation relating to the work being undertaken in the development of structures and processes that strengthen planning at School level and draw more effectively on quality assurance processes. There are no good practice features or recommendations in this judgement area.

1.16   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook](#).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer Glossary on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Awarding organisation
An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical

term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

Framework
A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document
A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.