



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd, July 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 ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the July 2018 [Higher Education \(Alternative Providers\) Partial Review](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The College currently has 1,489 students registered on five HND courses, an increase from 1,060, reported in July 2018, for which Pearson is the awarding body. The HND Business Management and HND Computing were approved in 2016 and 2017 respectively; and the HND Health and Social Care, HND Hospitality Management and HND Travel and Tourism Management were approved in 2018. There are currently 62 members of staff, employed as full and part-time academic staff, and three members of staff in senior management roles. This is an increase from 41 staff, as recorded in the 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) report.

3 Since the Partial Review visit, the College has made a submission to become a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Year 4 Provider. In addition, the College is seeking to achieve registration with the Office for Students (OfS).

### Findings from the monitoring visit

4 Over the past two years, the College has systematically reviewed and enhanced its operations in order to meet the requirements of its published action plan, developed after the July 2017 HER (AP). Progress is monitored systematically at a unit and course-level, with the Academic Board responsible for monitoring progress against the requirements of the action plan. It is clear that the actions taken are leading to improvements in the student experience and in meeting the needs of a larger student body and, over time, the College will be able to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the actions on student outcomes. In addition to monitoring the actions arising from the good practice and recommendations identified in the July 2017 HER (AP), feedback and student performance metrics are outlined in unit-level reports which are summarised in subject-specific Annual Course Review documents and College reports. The processes evidenced are robust and affirm the College's commitment to audit and review, and provide a platform for future enhancement of its provision; consequently, it is concluded that the College is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision.

5 The College continues to build on its identified good practice and works with the student body to review the effectiveness of its virtual learning environment (VLE). There are plans to further enhance the VLE provision with better access to e-library resources, wider integration with the student management system and the provision of home-based lab work sessions. The College has strengthened its student support mechanisms through the

introduction of academic writing sessions, a hardship fund and additional student-led extracurricular activities. The College has also further engaged students through their representation systems and this continues to empower the students to contribute to the development of their learning experience.

6 In response to the July 2017 HER (AP) review recommendations (see also paragraphs 7-10), the College has introduced academic writing throughout its provision with dedicated sessions embedded within all first semester modules to ensure new students are adequately and consistently supported. Induction sessions and weekly drop-in support classes provide further opportunities for students to develop their skills in academic writing.

7 The College operates a hierarchical and robust process for resolving issues with the verification and agreement of student marks. The assessor and internal verifier can refer cases to the Head of Department for arbitration and, should disagreement prevail, then it is referred to the College Assessment Board for a binding decision. The College also ensures that actions and recommendations identified by its external examiners are implemented appropriately. The key points are listed in subject-specific external examiners' action plans which are reviewed formally at the subject Assessment Boards.

8 The College uses formative assessment to support learning and differentiates its strategies by level of study. Students are provided with regular feedback opportunities through timetabled sessions and individual meetings with their tutors. Students are also able to access plagiarism detection software prior to formal submission, and this supports their understanding of academic integrity. The formative assessment opportunities that have been implemented across the provision effectively support the development of students as independent learners.

9 The College periodic review process requires the evaluation of unit, course and annual review reports, and other learning and teaching related policies and supporting documents. The process, which requires input from external subject specialists, appears to be well-designed and in accordance with sector norms. College reviews are scheduled to take place in advance of those to be undertaken by its awarding body, Pearson, and the impact of the process will be evaluated after the Pearson review.

10 The College has reviewed the Health and Social Care work experience processes. Documents and staff confirmed that placements are managed effectively and monitored in accordance with the published Placement Assessment Guidelines and an Assessment Handbook.

11 With regard to admissions, the need to strengthen the College admissions processes was noted in the 2017 HER (AP). The College has since implemented a number of improvements as outlined in its published action plan.

12 There is a robust process to assess and appoint the agents that are used to recruit students to the College. The Director of Admissions is responsible for monitoring the performance and integrity of all agents used by the College.

13 The College Admissions Policy is designed to ensure it aligns with the requirements of its awarding body and adheres to the principle of fair admission. The Director of Admissions has overall operational responsibility for ensuring adherence to approved process and policy. The criteria for admission is consistent across all provision. The College places emphasis on widening access and consequently will consider applicants with lower level prior qualifications if they have work experience that is aligned to the field of proposed study.

14 The admissions process follows a series of logical steps with initial documentation checks leading to the creation of an applicant file that is populated with the required documentation and distributed to staff that approve admission to the College. Applicants who meet the criteria for admission are invited to interview to assess their genuine intention to study and those that are unsuccessful can appeal or complain against the outcome. The College has a process for assessing prior learning for the recognition of credit towards their final award.

15 The criteria for admitting students whose primary language is not English, states that applicants must be competent at CEFR level B2 and the College benchmarks requirements using standard IELTS, whereby applicants must achieve a minimum of 5.5 across the assessed components. Many applicants take a reading and writing language proficiency test as part of the interview process. The test is overseen by staff with appropriate skills to set and mark the assessments. The process for testing listening and speaking skills against the stipulated CEFR B2 requirements is carried out by the Admissions Tutor. The College confirmed that Admissions Tutors sit in and observe a number of the interviews and feed back to the Head of Quality and Enhancement in order to further test this process; and that the Head of Quality and Enhancement feeds data from the process into the Course Review which is evaluated at the Academic Board.

16 To meet the recommendations of the 2017 full review, the College has implemented a number of quality assurance processes. All staff involved in the admissions process attend NARIC training sessions. Procedural and quality audits are undertaken to ensure staff adhere to defined process, and standardisation sessions are undertaken with all admissions tutors to ensure a consistent approach is adopted when interviewing candidates.

17 The College complies with the assessment requirements of its awarding body, Pearson. These requirements are published by Pearson in course specifications and are summarised in the College course handbooks that are provided to students. The College is responsible for setting, marking and internally verifying all assessments, with external oversight provided by examiners who are appointed independently by Pearson.

18 The College uses a range of summative assessments such as reports, essays and work experience portfolios, and some oral presentations and examinations. Formative assessments are also used across course provision to support student learning. The College follows assessment criteria as defined and published by Pearson in their unit syllabus. The College designs the assessments to ensure alignment with the published learning outcomes, with assessment criteria clearly articulated to support learning and achievement in accordance with the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

19 The available data shows the overall College annual retention rate has fallen from 87% in 2015-16 to 84% in 2017-18. The lower annual retention in 2016-17 is a direct result of non-standard entry dates. At a cohort level there is no clear pattern and retention rates vary from 72.3% to 88.9%. Pass rate data is available for four cohorts and varies from 73.7% to 86.3%, with the latest April 2017 cohort falling back to 78.7%, which is similar to the average rate over the previous academic year. The number of students achieving the award for which they enrolled varies from 62.1% to 73.9%, with the April 2017 cohort falling back to 64.1%. The College confirmed that financial reasons primarily impacted on the rate of students that achieved the award for which they enrolled and this was attributed to the failure of many students to secure a student loan.

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

20 The College works with the Pearson Academic Framework, which is based upon *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England* (FHEQ), and external examiners monitor that threshold academic standards are maintained.

21 The College ensures that all staff are kept up-to-date with regard to developments related to the Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) through twice-yearly continuing professional development meetings. Information about the Quality Code is also shared with students through induction.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

22 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.

23 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Neil Lucas, Reviewer, and Ms Nadine Baker, QAA Officer, on 16 July 2019.

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