



Partial Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of International Business College Manchester Ltd

December 2018

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About this review

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) conducted a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) at International Business College Manchester Ltd in May 2018.

The main purpose of the 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.

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.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

The May 2018 review report indicated that the College met UK expectations in three of the four judgement areas, but the quality of the information about learning opportunities was found to require improvement. This outcome led to QAA conducting a Partial Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) at the College on 20 December 2018. The review was conducted by Dr Nick Dickson and focused on action taken by the College to improve the quality of information about learning opportunities. This report presents the findings of the partial review.

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/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

Judgements

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

- The quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

No features of **good practice** were identified.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation**:

By July 2019:

- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of public information policies and procedures to ensure that the College is aware of relevant external developments in higher education and that information published about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team makes no **affirmations**.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

About the provider

The International Business College Manchester Ltd (the College) formed its own company in 2011, having previously operated as part of Berlitz Manchester, a language school based in Manchester City Centre. It continues to share premises and facilities with Berlitz.

The College is accredited by Pearson to deliver level 4 and 5 Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes in Business, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. It also delivers level 7 programmes leading to Pearson awards in Strategic Management and Leadership (Award, Certificate, Diploma and Extended Diploma). The College has previously offered an HNC and HND in Petroleum Engineering leading to awards of the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

The College also offers a level 3 International Foundation Diploma (IFD) programme and is accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) to deliver a level 5 (as well as a level 3) programme leading to an ILM qualification (Award, Certificate or Diploma). The ILM programmes are offered through face-to-face and distance learning study modes. Currently there are 29 students registered by the College, including 15 students on online programmes of study.

There are dedicated Programme Leads for the Business and Engineering Higher National programmes and for the IFD and ILM programmes. They provide academic leadership for each accredited programme and serve as the point of contact for the programme for which they are responsible. Most of the academic staff work on a freelance basis.

The College mission is to 'provide a friendly and enjoyable learning experience delivered by professional and supportive staff who are committed to supporting their students study and career goals'.

The last review took place in May 2018 when the College received a 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' judgement in relation to the quality of information about learning opportunities. The review team made two recommendations, which were to be addressed by September 2018 (paragraph 1.1).

The May 2018 review team identified one feature of good practice: the highly personalised approach to learning and teaching that supports students' needs and achievements. It also affirmed action taken by the College to improve the educational provision offered to students through the introduction of new procedures to formally record evaluation of the quality of learning opportunities at programme level.

The College has produced an action plan and provided a self-evaluation document (SED) together with supporting evidence for the purposes of partial review in order to demonstrate that it has now addressed the two recommendations associated with the 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' judgement.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

1.1 The previous review recommended that the College 'develop and implement a formal strategy for the production and approval of public information ensuring that information reflects current legislation and Competition and Markets Authority guidance', and 'revise student terms and conditions to meet statutory and regulatory requirements'.

1.2 In response, the College has produced an action plan and reviewed its Development and Improvement Plan for 2018. It has revised its public information policy and published this on the College website. In addition, it has produced a revised application form which details the terms and conditions students would be signing up in the event of them accepting a place to study at the College. These terms and conditions include a cooling off period of 14 days should a student wish to cancel, and students are all sent a cancellation form to reinforce this. The College has also produced a risk register, as well as a student protection plan, and these are available on the College website.

1.3 These policies would allow the Expectation to be met in practice. The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing information in the College's SED; through consideration of a range of documents including the new public information policy, application form, student protection plan; and through meetings with the Principal and senior College staff.

1.4 Public information is reviewed at each quarterly management meeting. The Public Information Policy also defines key roles in the approval of public information, with the Principal holding overall responsibility to ensure that published information complies with current legislative and regulatory requirements. The Principal manages relationships with external bodies including the Federation of Small Businesses and Manchester Metropolitan University. The Quality Manager and Business Development Manager have designated roles in the revised Public Information Policy, and these staff members are clear about their responsibilities in relation to public information.

1.5 The College's SED stated that the College had been previously unaware of key regulatory policies affecting it as a higher education provider because it was not a Higher Education Funding Council for England registered centre. While the Quality Manager is aware of changes in awarding body practice through direct links with those bodies, there appeared to be less awareness among staff of other relevant initiatives, including the publication of the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Despite the Principal being responsible for managing relationships with external partners, there is a lack of appreciation of the need for active environmental scanning to ensure that the College is aware of new developments, including regulatory reform and legislative changes, which have potential implications for it as a UK higher education provider. The review team therefore **recommends** that IBCM monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of public information

policies and procedures to ensure that the College is aware of relevant external developments in higher education and that information published about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

1.6 In conclusion, the College has instigated processes and revised policies, which allow this Expectation to be met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

1.7 In reviewing its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.8 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.9 The College has taken appropriate action in response to the two recommendations identified in the May 2018 review report. It has developed and published a Public Information Policy, which outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in publishing general information about the College and programme-specific information. Taking account of current legislation and guidance, the College has also reviewed and produced new student-facing documentation including a new application form, terms and conditions, acceptance of offer agreement and cancellation form in addition to preparing a student protection plan and risk register.

1.10 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. The quality of the information about learning opportunities at the provider now **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: <https://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.

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