Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Kensington Education Foundation Ltd t/a Kensington College of Business, November 2017

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 the Kensington Education Foundation Ltd t/a Kensington College of Business (the College) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the October 2016 [Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)](.

2   Changes since the last QAA review

2   There are currently 627 students at the College following programmes at levels 4-7 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), of whom 281 are registered on Pearson HNC/D programmes and 176 on professional Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) programmes; the remainder (170) are enrolled on validated or franchised degree programmes of the University of Chester (UOC). The College also offers the UOC Master of Business Administration degree which has yet to recruit. Currently, there are 26 academic staff, equating to about 14 full-time equivalents. Currently located in Holborn, London, the College intends to relocate during this academic year to new premises elsewhere in central London.

3   Findings from the monitoring visit

3   The College has made acceptable progress in its implementation of the action plan arising from the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report of October 2016. The College could demonstrate continuing appropriate action on the two areas of good practice (paragraph 4) and the two affirmations (paragraph 11). Substantial progress has been made on most of the seven recommendations (paragraphs 5-10). However, continuing evolution of procedures to ensure that information is fit for purpose and trustworthy, and that robust procedures are consistently implemented and regularly reviewed, is encouraged (paragraph 9), along with finalisation of procedures for the scrutiny, analysis and improvement of student progression and achievement through programme monitoring (paragraph 10).

4   Pearson confirms that the College sustains its good practice of provision enhancement by providing a dynamic and integrated model for continuous student learning and development. Overall, external verifier and examiner reports remain positive. Additionally, the reports indicate that the College continues to operate highly effective practices and systems that facilitate the coherent transition and academic progression of students within and between pathways. The UOC mapping exercise clarified the Pearson modules that best prepare students for its programmes, thus facilitating transition. Students confirm the clarity of their progression activities.

5   There are effective systems in place which engage students in ensuring quality of provision and identifying enhancement. The student cohort elects representatives to membership of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and the Academic Board. Students are

fully trained for this role. Following discussion with students and with their agreement, the College felt there was no need to form a student council.

6   Additionally, the College encourages suggestions and recommendations from all students, together with completion of module feedback forms. Students confirm that the quality loop is completed verbally in meetings, and student representative suggestions are recorded, together with action taken or not taken in response, in the minutes of the meeting, which are emailed to all student representatives. In addition to this, examples of enhancement were indicated. The College now participates in the National Student Survey. Students met by the team expressed satisfaction with current arrangements.

7   Students have full access to external examiners' reports through the student portal. They do not meet the external examiners because the process happens virtually, so are unclear about who the examiners are but understand their function.

8   The College has worked to ensure that there are clear and systematic records of deliberations that occur in meetings by producing more detailed minutes. These have helped to promote effective planning and completion of action plans. While the process by which action points from one group passes upwards to another could be clearer, the process works effectively.

9   To specify ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all information is fit for purpose and trustworthy, the College has produced a public information flowchart to clarify lines of responsibility and verification of public information. The review team heard that the Chairman of the Board of Directors has ultimate responsibility, delegated to the Principal of the College. However, this is not reflected in the flowchart, which documents the process rather than clarifying which staff are responsible for which level of documentation.

10   The processes for programme monitoring and completing actions are currently incomplete for the 2016-17 cycle as the College is awaiting information from UOC. The introduction of the annual monitoring report, which provides institutional oversight through individual programme Annual Programme Reviews, and the institutional annual monitoring review, first produced in 2015-16, is in principle sound. The University of Chester external examiner reports refer to all business programmes at all centres and some minor issues were raised in the first year. The evidence suggests that the College's processes are appropriate to resolve any outstanding issues. The recommendation to develop further processes to ensure the identification, integration and evaluation of enhancement initiatives has progressed by ongoing enhancement of existing systems and procedures, through deliberative committees and student engagement, and with reference to annual programme reports and annual monitoring reports. Peer review of teaching takes place, and the College identifies staff development needs through appraisal, supporting staff to attend training events.

11   The Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report 2016 affirmed the progress made by the College in introducing an institutional annual monitoring overview. This is being used effectively and should encourage enhanced oversight of the full provision (see also paragraph 10). The 2016 report also affirmed the College's progress in introducing strengthened terms of reference for Academic Board to promote College-wide enhancement. The role of the Academic Board has been strengthened to include student representation, together with a wider staff representation, and has enhanced decision-making powers.

12   The College recruitment strategy focuses on HNC/D courses as a progression route to a bachelor's degree. The College Admissions Department oversees the application process described on the College website. This includes any necessary engagement with UK NARIC, the OFQUAL register or other awarding bodies. All candidates for undergraduate admission are interviewed, involving both administration and academic staff. The process is

entirely in English, with International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores of at least 5.5 (HNC/D) and 6.0 (undergraduate) or their equivalent required. The College has its own entry requirements in addition to those of awarding bodies, including online English and essay writing tests, for those without GCSE English/IELTS, which align with national requirements. The three-part interviews use a standard template and consider each applicant's academic potential and suitability for study. About 38 per cent of applicants for undergraduate courses are rejected as a result of the admissions process.

13   The College's procedures for annual monitoring ensure that its Academic Board takes an institutional view of the processes and the quality of evaluation, supported by the Quality Assurance Committee. Quantitative information arising from assessment results and statistical analysis of module questionnaires is evaluated and discussed in the annual programme review. Supporting qualitative information, such as information on drop-out or problems identified by student representatives, is considered in relevant committees, and used to inform the annual programme monitoring report. An institutional Annual Monitoring Report has been produced by the College for the last two years, summarising key aspects of programme reports and identifying areas for enhancement (see also paragraph 10). For example, following the first annual monitoring cycle for Pearson Edexcel programmes, the College has introduced a new module to the programme in response to student feedback.

14   The College aims to provide opportunities for flexible learning. There are three entry points per academic year. The HNC is taken over three semesters (one-year duration), while the duration of the HND programme is usually two years (six semesters). HNC students can progress to the HND programme on satisfactory completion of the requisite units or directly onto UOC's BA programme. Additionally, students can enter the HND directly at level 5 subject to requisite accreditation of prior learning. Achievement rates ranged from 94 per cent to 47 per cent, though these reflect small cohorts who opt to take the HNC/D qualifications.

15   In 2015-16, students entered the UOC BA Business Management programme at levels 4-6, some transferring from HNC/D and others from HND directly to level 6. Retention rates range from 72 per cent to 94 per cent. Two other UOC degree programmes are offered by the College: BSc Computer Science and LLB Law with Business, with retention rates in July 2016 of 83 per cent and 71 per cent respectively.

16   Since 2016, the part-time professional ICSA level 7 programmes (Chartered Secretaries Qualifying Scheme) are of six months' duration, while the part-time level 4 Certificate in Company Secretarial Practice and Share Registration Practice programme is either 10 or 13 months long. Two hundred and thirty-four Level 7 students entered within two entry points; the retention rates averaged 78 per cent and subsequent pass rate 64 per cent.

17   The College is aware that completion rates for some programmes are low. Initially, HND students who wished to proceed to the University of Chester degree programme were enrolled at level 6. However, it was found that these students did not have the confidence and experience (particularly of examination-based assessments) to succeed. Therefore, the College, in the second year of delivery, recommended all HND students to enter the degree programme at level 5 after completion of HNC, and most students have followed this advice. It was agreed that entry should now be to level 5 of the degree programme, and students supported this change. However, this meant that a large number of the HNC students transferred or progressed to the UOC level 5, which reduced the numbers progressing onto the level 5 HND. Other changes included embedding more research skills into the HNC/D programme, and including more examination-type assignments in the diet of formative assessment. As noted above in paragraph 3, continuing evolution of procedures

for scrutiny, analysis and improvement of student progression and achievement is encouraged.

18   The ICSA Chartered Secretaries Qualifying Scheme programmes are designed and examined by the awarding organisation. The College benchmarks these results with those recorded nationally, as individual assessment centre results are not published. These actions, together with enhanced annual monitoring and the introduction of an institutional monitoring report for the whole provision, should clarify reasons for low completion rates, allowing progress to be made for their improvement, although the College pass rate exceeded the national pass rate by 70 per cent overall. The Certificate in Company Secretarial Practice is designed and examined by the College, with an average pass rate of 90 per cent.

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

19   The College engages with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education across all aspects of its provision and regards this as an overarching reference point. It draws on the FHEQ to ensure that its programme design, assessment and monitoring align with the relevant levels of the framework. It has also mapped programmes against the new Subject Benchmark Statement for Accounting, and they align with the Law Society for the law programme. The UOC undertook a due diligence visit followed by a partnership review in July 2017. The College was commended on the engagement of staff and commitment to student support. The only condition was a requirement to provide audited accounts for 2016, upon which the College was awaiting production from the auditors. The seven recommendations were to be completed by July 2018, but the majority had been addressed by September 2017.

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 Mr Mark Langley, Reviewer, and Dr Chris Amodio, Coordinator, on 1st November 2017.