



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Le Cordon Bleu Limited, October 2018

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 Le Cordon Bleu Limited (the Institute) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the September 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The Institute delivers vocational higher education awards accredited under a 'Customised Qualifications' Licence from the awarding organisation NCFE. There are 69 full-time students enrolled on the Institute's 'Superior' level 4 Cuisine and Pâtisserie specialist programmes and 68 full-time students on other level 4 diploma programmes in Culinary Management; Wine, Gastronomy and Management; and Gastronomy, Nutrition and Food Trends.

3 In September 2018 the Institute commenced the delivery of the culinary skills and related elements of the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Culinary Industry Management in partnership with Birkbeck, University of London, leading to a University of London award. There are 12 full-time students on this programme. The Institute has 59 members of staff, three of whom are part-time.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Institute uses a comprehensive action plan to monitor and manage the actions arising from the 2017 review, which also incorporates actions generated internally through a rigorous strategic planning process. All actions arising from the 2017 review have been fully implemented and the Institute demonstrates thorough engagement with an extensive range of relevant external reference points to support academic and professional standards and teaching quality. Actions relating to the two recommendations from the 2017 review have been put into practice. An enhanced strategic planning process is in place to guide the deployment of resources for staff development (paragraph 5). Library opening hours have been amended and usage reviewed to promote greater access (paragraph 6). The good practice identified in the 2017 review has been maintained and further developed. The Institute's systematic monitoring and rigorous planning have ensured the learning environment continues to provide students with access to modern, state of the art kitchen and demonstration facilities (paragraph 7). The virtual learning environment (VLE) has been extended to offer more facilities for students and staff (paragraph 7). The online icon system, which effectively identifies students' additional support needs, has been extended to provide classroom-based staff with information to further support teaching and learning (paragraph 8). Guest lectures and demonstrations by leading industry practitioners enhance learning programmes and extend students' knowledge (paragraph 9). The comprehensive system of termly and annual reviews has been maintained with strengthened oversight (paragraph 10).

5 The Institute has reviewed its Staff Development Policy to make explicit its relationship to strategic planning. Annual strategy document templates have been amended to include planning for staff development related to departmental objectives. This allows staff development to inform the annual strategic planning process and appropriate budget allocations to be made. This process has been effectively implemented in preparing the 2018-19 Strategic Plan. The team heard how the strategic ambition to ensure all teaching staff were teaching to the highest professional standards, even in niche specialist areas, was being supported by enabling staff to attend master-classes internationally and then to cascade this training to the wider team. Staff who met the team confirmed that these internal training sessions were beneficial and well received and that the appraisal process was successful in identifying individual development needs.

6 Following the 2017 review recommendation to enable greater access to the library, the Institute extended the daily library opening hours but the change did not produce the anticipated increase in usage. The Institute reviewed this in consultation with the Student Representative Group and as a result amended the opening hours to focus on the period immediately before teaching sessions to enable greater student access. Library usage is being monitored to evaluate the impact of this adjustment. Additionally, the Institute is actively promoting the availability of journals and online resources to students and has recently established a new email address for enquiries. Students who met the team were supportive of these developments, with some individuals confirming the effectiveness of library resources generally.

7 The 2017 review identified five features of good practice relating to the quality of student learning opportunities. The Institute continues to effectively manage and enhance the learning environment through systematic monitoring of routine maintenance needs and ongoing investment in equipment and resources. The VLE continues to be developed and its use extended to all programmes. This enables written assignments across all the culinary programmes to be submitted online and targeted formative and summative feedback to be provided. Students confirmed to the review team that the VLE was increasingly effective in supporting their learning.

8 The Institute has maintained its learning management system to identify students' additional support needs. This has also been further developed in the last year to ensure that all teaching staff have access to information about students in their teaching sessions enabling them to be responsive to students' learning needs and to any approved reasonable adjustments to assessment tasks.

9 Enhancement of students' industry awareness through the scheduling of a programme of regular guest chefs and speakers has continued. Students who met the team confirmed that the Institute is responsive to their suggestions for inclusions in this programme and that it provides valuable perspectives on professional practice.

10 The regular reviews of the provision on an annual and termly basis, identified as good practice in the 2017 review, have been further developed. A strategic plan tracker for managing programme content reviews has been implemented and is overseen by the Academic Director. Heads of programmes regularly report updates to the Academic Director and progress is monitored by the Institute's Teaching and Learning Committee. The new Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) programme taught in partnership with Birkbeck, University of London, is monitored and reviewed in accordance with University requirements and will be incorporated into the Institute's internal review processes.

11 The Institute has a robust Admissions Policy and Procedure, which was reviewed in 2014 to ensure alignment with *Chapter B2* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The policy was further updated in 2015 as part of a review of student

contracts. Admission to programmes is managed by an admissions team and the processes followed are set out in the Quality Manual. The Institute recruits students internationally and currently has students from over 80 countries enrolled on programmes. All admissions decisions are made internally although introductions are made by both Le Cordon Bleu hubs and, in some cases, independent agents. Admissions to the BBA programme are managed by Birkbeck, University of London, in partnership with the Institute. The admissions processes have been designed to ensure no single member of staff has sole responsibility for an admissions decision. English language ability is assessed in a range of ways. For Tier 4 visa students a verified specific International English Language Testing System score is required. For other students a range of tests is permitted along with evidence of either education or employment in an English-speaking setting and a telephone interview. A clearly defined process for the recognition of prior learning is used for entry where appropriate.

12 Intent to study is assessed through a statement of motivation detailing the applicant's reasons for applying, their objectives for the course and their aspirations on graduation. Students met by the team confirmed they had undertaken this and reported positively on its effectiveness. Students' experiences of the applications and admissions process are regularly surveyed by the Institute. The Institute monitors retention and completion and the Admissions Manager is present at examination boards in order to advise on students' options if required.

13 The Institute has developed its approach to assessment in response to the specific needs of its predominantly practice-based subject provision. Students are assessed on their performance during practical sessions as well as through submitted assignments. Assessment tasks are approved by the external examiner.

14 A panel marks practical assessments using standard criteria. Marking of the students' performance in the kitchen in relation to technique, safety, hygiene and method is separated from the marking of outcomes, which are marked blind on presentation and taste by a separate panel. An external assessor may also take part in panel marking and an internal quality assurer undertakes an internal moderation procedure.

15 The VLE has been extended in the last year to enable the submission of portfolio assignments and online feedback to students across the provision. The VLE is integrated with plagiarism-detection software, which is used where appropriate for courses with predominantly text-based assessments.

16 Assessment information is provided to students through comprehensive course manuals, an assessment guide and scheduled taught sessions. Students who met the team had a clear understanding of how both their practical work and portfolio submissions were assessed.

17 In 2017-18 there were 613 student enrolments on the Institute's level 4 'Superior' culinary courses and diploma programmes. Of this total, 12 enrolments were discontinued. This makes an average retention rate across all programmes in 2017-18 of 98 per cent, compared to 99 per cent in each of the two previous years. Of the remaining 601 student enrolments during 2017-18, the qualification pass rate was 594, giving an achievement rate of 99 per cent, compared to 97 per cent in the previous two years. These trends are consistent across all programmes. Academic Board monitors student retention and performance. Student attendance is monitored and there are clearly defined attendance requirements for each programme. A variety of mechanisms is in place to identify and support students at risk of leaving or failing.

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

18 Le Cordon Bleu demonstrates highly effective engagement with a wide range of relevant external reference points. The Institute designs its own programmes, which are accredited through a 'Customised Qualifications' licence from NCFE. Under the terms of the licence, the learning outcomes of all accredited courses are mapped by the Institute against the National Occupational Standards and are benchmarked using level descriptors of Ofqual's Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The programmes are reviewed against NCFE's seven Quality Statements during its bi-annual quality visits. The Institute's level 4 programmes also take account of relevant parts of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism.

19 In September 2018 the Institute commenced the delivery of the culinary skills and related elements of a joint degree in Business Administration in Culinary Industry Management with Birkbeck, University of London. The new award is aligned to *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*, the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England* and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The expectations of the Quality Code are mapped to Le Cordon Bleu policies and practices.

20 The Institute has set up an Industry Reference Group, consisting of senior practitioners and managers in the food industry, which meets annually to advise on how its programmes can teach up-to-date methods and remain relevant to the sector.

21 Le Cordon Bleu underwent an inspection by the British Accreditation Council in October 2016 resulting in full re-accreditation. The Institute continues to employ an external agency to monitor and improve food safety, and health and safety compliance. The Institute has been selected by the Royal Society for Public Health to be a recipient of the Centre of Excellence Award at the Hygeia Awards 2018.

5 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 Ms Francine Norris, Reviewer, and Dr Judith Foreman, QAA Officer, on 2 October 2018.

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