



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of London School of Commerce, October 2017

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 London School of Commerce has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the October 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 The London School of Commerce (the School) had a total of 853 students enrolled on its undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. This is a reduction of 458, or nearly 35 per cent compared to the 2016 review. The total includes 329 Tier 4 Sponsored overseas students. There are 122 academic staff, including eight full-time and numerous fractional staff, the latter teaching on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, as well as supervising research degrees.

3 Significant changes since the 2016 review include changes to the School's relationships with partner awarding bodies. The agreements with Cardiff Metropolitan University and Anglia Ruskin University are being discontinued, with clear and mutually agreed arrangements in place for teaching out the programmes. The range of programmes will remain largely the same, with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David as the main awarding body. The School is actively seeking links with other UK universities, as well as an increase in the recruitment of UK students. Other developments involve the leasing of parts of the School's campuses to the University of Bedfordshire and the University of the West of Scotland.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The overall outcome of the monitoring visit, that the School has made acceptable progress, has been informed by the following findings. Actions in response to the one area of good practice and six recommendations arising from the 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) are being implemented in line with the action plan schedule. The good practice has been maintained, with the role of international marketing officers remaining a distinctive feature (see paragraphs 5 and 9). The School has made substantial progress in addressing the six recommendations, although some actions require further refinement (see paragraphs 6 and 7) and parts of the evaluation are not scheduled until the annual monitoring cycle in autumn 2017. The thorough and supportive arrangements for the admission of students clearly meet the Expectations of The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) (see paragraphs 8 and 9), while the strengthened procedures for annual quality monitoring provide an explicit cycle of evidence gathering and reporting (see paragraphs 7 and 10). The use of relevant external reference points, particularly the Quality Code, is being maintained through the regular mapping and updating of policies and procedures (see paragraph 12).

5 Students attest to the continued high level and quality of support, induction and mentoring available to them, which was reported as good practice in the 2016 review.

The role of international marketing officers, many of whom are former students, remains a key feature of the support. Officers are allocated to applicants through the admissions process, after which they continue to support the same students throughout their time at the School, as mentors and guides (see also paragraph 9).

6 The actions taken in response to the six recommendations from the 2016 review have been effective overall, though with some initiatives still to be fully embedded. Student representation has been strengthened to include membership of the School Council. Representatives are given training in the role and now contribute to the management and governance of the School at all levels. Actions to extend the oversight and monitoring of formal student complaint systems include new complaint forms for pre-enrolment and on-programme use, and a central system for recording all complaints. Information about the complaints procedures is readily accessible to students, although the procedures for admissions complaints are not clearly explained on the School website. The establishment of the Programme Development, Design and Approval Committee is a valuable initiative within the new internal operational procedures. The programme development and design stages of the Committee's remit are clear and robust, and allow for the engagement of external contributors. There is the potential, however, for the independence of the internal approval stage to be compromised by the proposed role for School staff who have been centrally involved in developing the programme.

7 Internal procedures for annual monitoring have been strengthened by the increased use of published calendars and an explicit schedule for the annual monitoring cycle of each awarding body. The changes have been underpinned by related staff development. Staff now recognise the need to complement existing procedures with an overarching annual institution report. A range of valuable information is collected to identify staff development needs. This information includes monitoring report action plans, teaching observations, staff reviews, student feedback and external examiner reports. While each of these is subject to careful scrutiny, it is less clear where there is systematic analysis of the evidence overall in identifying and embedding staff development across the School. The School does not have an overarching enhancement strategy, but the actions taken since the 2016 review reflect a strategically-driven approach to enhancement at all levels of the Institution. The actions include enhanced student representation and more rigorous action planning.

8 The School admissions process is clearly aligned to the Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*, as reported from the 2016 review. The thorough process is prescribed within the School's Academic Regulations and a published admissions flowchart. Each awarding body sets the entry requirements for the programmes offered in its name and provides clear guidance on the accreditation of prior learning. English language competence is carefully checked through IELTS scores and at least one interview. Clear information is available to applicants on the School website and in programme documentation, while appropriate records are maintained for each stage of the admissions process.

9 The three stages of the admissions process are overseen by a senior member of staff. Designated members of the marketing team conduct the initial application stage, offering individual advice and support for applicants. A distinctive and successful feature of the arrangements is that the member of marketing staff who deals with the initial application from international applicants maintains contact with the student throughout their time at the School. This contact may include intervention to support students should attendance or achievement issues arise. One of the marketing team leaders approves applicants for the second stage, which comprises a formal academic interview, used to determine the applicant's suitability for the programme. The Director of Marketing is responsible for the final stage, including the decision on whether to offer a place, prior to approval by the awarding body.

10 The School has a range of appropriate procedures and reporting arrangements for annual quality monitoring, which are described in the extensive Quality Handbook. Annual monitoring reports are produced for each of the awarding bodies, covering the programmes leading to awards in their name. The monitoring process draws systematically on a variety of formal evidence, including the analysis of retention, progression and achievement data, external examiner reports and student surveys. Enhancement has been strengthened, as described in paragraph 7. Annual programme review reports, together with their action plans are considered at the relevant Programme Management Committee prior to formal approval by Academic Board and receipt by the awarding body. Issues arising from these reports together with other forms of evidence, including student feedback, external examiner reports and reviews by external agencies feed into the overarching School action plan. The School does not currently produce an institutional-level report, which staff acknowledge could provide a critical evaluation of evidence from across the provision, including key performance indicators, as a basis for the action plan. The Academic Board maintains responsibility for programme monitoring, including the review of progress against the associated action plans, and reports to the School Council.

11 The School's data return includes details of progression and achievement for all recently completing cohorts across the multiple annual entry points. The School's analysis of this data, alongside its own more detailed internal statistics, indicate that for cohorts admitted in 2014-15, 78 per cent of recruits completed their programme (1,394 of 1,790) and of these, 98 per cent (1,372) gained their intended qualification. A further 8 per cent of starters (144) achieved an interim award. For 2015-16 intakes, 80 per cent of recruits have completed on programmes that have been taught for their full term (619 of 767) and 92 per cent of those completing have achieved their qualification. It is too early to measure completion and achievement rates for the 2016-17 entrants, but the retention rate is in line with previous years at the same stage of the programmes.

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

12 The School has continued to engage regularly and appropriately with the Quality Code through the regular checking and updating of its policies and procedures. Some additional operating procedures have been introduced in support of policies where gaps have been identified. This is evident in the establishment of a new Programme Development, Design and Approval subcommittee, which is discussed in paragraph 6. Staff have used *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and Subject Benchmarks Statements, as well as guidance on the preparation of programme and module specifications, in preparing programmes for validation by Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The same validation process also involved staff in working extensively with the expectations and indicators of the Quality Code *Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality*, notably in respect of admissions, recognition of prior learning, assessment and learning and teaching.

Background to the monitoring visit

13 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.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Colin Fryer, Reviewer, and Mr David Lewis, Coordinator, on 12 October 2017.

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