Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Nelson College London Ltd, 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 Nelson College London Ltd (the College) is making acceptable 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 visit

2   The College continues to deliver Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes in Business and in Hospitality Management awarded by Pearson as well as BA (Hons) top-up programmes in Hospitality Management and in Business, validated by London Metropolitan University (the University). The 2017 visit report noted that the College was delivering a University-validated foundation degree in Hospitality Management. The College has revised the foundation degree course specification, which has been approved by the University, but it will not be offering foundation degree-level study in the 2018-19 academic year. The College is now developing a new taught master's programme in conjunction with the University.

3   Currently 1,136 full-time students are enrolled on the College's programmes. Of this number, 897 students are on the HND and 239 students on the BA (Hons) top-up programmes. The College has mapped its admissions policies against Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) guidance. It has also strengthened its student support mechanisms, particularly for those students identified as being 'at risk' of non-completion.

4   The College has registered with the Office for Students since the last review and has published its Student Protection Plan on the College website.

3   Findings from the monitoring visit

5   The College has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2017 review. Progress has been made against the one feature of good practice and the three recommendations made. Effective management of the virtual learning environment (VLE) has continued, supported by a comprehensive range of training activities for staff and students (paragraph 6). Two detailed reports have been completed responding to a recommendation to undertake an analysis of students' entry qualifications and subsequent achievement to inform future admissions. These have resulted in changes to marketing, recruitment and admissions policies and practices (paragraph 7). A second recommendation has resulted in changes being made to monitoring and review processes to include an analysis of student retention and achievement and a comprehensive range of interventions has been put in place to identify and support students at risk of withdrawal or failure (paragraph 8). It is too early to evaluate the impact of the actions taken but there are appropriate plans to monitor their effectiveness. A range of cross-College mechanisms

has been developed to facilitate the sharing of good practice to support the enhancement of learning opportunities in response to the third recommendation (paragraph 9).

6   The highly effective management of the VLE, identified as good practice in the September 2017 report, has continued. The College has taken further steps to increase awareness of the various features of the VLE by providing timely training to students and staff by various means including presentations uploaded onto the VLE; notice board displays; the College Newsletter and YouTube channel; webinar activity; the Knowledge Exchange Centre Prospectus and website; and a booklet showcasing past and future events and workshops. As part of its oversight and monitoring of the VLE, termly and annual audits of the VLE are conducted for the HND and degree provision. Students were enthusiastic about the VLE and the positive contribution it made to their learning.

7   A comprehensive analysis of entry qualifications and subsequent achievements for students entering the HND provision in 2014 and 2015 was completed in 2018. A second report included an analysis of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education data and entry qualifications to better understand student progression, achievement and destinations after completion of study and made some further recommendations. These reports have led to a greater understanding of the characteristics of students who did not complete their programmes and their recommendations have informed recruitment and admissions policy and practice for the 2018 intake. Greater focus is now placed on student commitment and to ensuring that students have appropriate skills and knowledge during the recruitment process (paragraph 5). The College intends to evaluate the impact of the changes made with the aim of reducing the number of students who fail to complete their programme while retaining its mission to offer access to people from the widest possible range of backgrounds.

8   The College has completed a detailed analysis of student retention and achievement leading to changes in the annual monitoring process, including a requirement for analysis of student retention and achievement data. Mechanisms to identify and support students who are at risk of withdrawal or failure have been significantly strengthened. A consultation session was held with staff to help identify appropriate approaches and a register of students at risk of withdrawal has been created to ensure staff can focus their activities effectively. The Personal Tutoring and Student Support policy now includes a section on early interventions and staff training events have taken place.

9   The College has devised cross-College mechanisms for staff and students to come together and share good practice to support the enhancement of learning opportunities. These include the Learning, Teaching and Engagement Conference and Enhanced Learning through Creative Assessment workshops. These events were well attended and received very positive feedback from staff and students who participated. There are plans for further staff and student events to share good practice for the 2018-19 academic year. The College has developed an enhancement strategy which has recently been approved by the Academic Board. This provides a framework for ensuring that enhancement is embedded within all College activities and a report on effectiveness will be presented to the Academic Board.

10   The College has appropriate admission policies and procedures that meet the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and the awarding organisations. All aspects of the recruitment process are managed effectively. Information on admission requirements is clear and accessible. To ensure that recruitment, selection and admission processes are conducted effectively all staff involved undergo training. A formal training pack, bringing together all the relevant policies and processes, has been developed. Applicants are interviewed and undergo a series of tests to assess their English language, Mathematics and Information Technology abilities. The team reviewed a sample of student files which indicated the nature of the tests undertaken and test scores. The comprehensive

admissions process provides opportunities to assess applicants' attitude and commitment to the programme of study. The College reviews and updates its Recruitment, Selection and Admission Policy annually. Admissions-related policies take account of awarding organisation requirements and have been mapped recently against CMA and SPA guidance. Students found the admissions procedure to be thorough and complex and confirmed that the information they received was comprehensive and support was provided throughout the process.

11   The College's policies and procedures ensure that assessment enables students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved intended learning outcomes and that awarding organisation requirements are met. Rigorous processes, including internal and external verification processes, assure the integrity of assessment. The College also conducts an audit of internal verification of assessment decisions to ensure assessment processes are valid and reliable. External examiner reports are used to further enhance College processes. Students indicated that the College takes academic misconduct seriously and were aware of the use made of plagiarism-detection software to identify academic malpractice. They were positive about the information they received on assessment and the support provided throughout the assessment process to enable them to demonstrate good academic practice.

12   Of the 211 students who enrolled on the HND Business course in 2016, 149 (71 per cent) achieved their award. For the HND Hospitality Management programme, 150 out of 222 students (68 per cent) who enrolled obtained their award. For the BA (Hons) Business top-up, the equivalent figures are 43 out of 89 (48 per cent) and BA (Hons) Hospitality Management top-up 47 out of 75 (63 per cent). Eleven out of 27 students who commenced the Foundation Degree in Hospitality Management (41 per cent) obtained the award. Final figures for the top-up students for the 2017 intake are not yet available. As noted above, the College has undertaken a detailed analysis of the progression and award data to better understand the reasons for students not achieving their award. It has developed a series of measures with the aim of reducing the proportion of students who do not complete their studies and has mechanisms in place to assess the effectiveness of the arrangements it has made. These include changes to the recruitment and admissions procedures and to the way in which students at risk of non-completion are identified and supported.

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

13   The HND programmes leading to Pearson awards and degree programmes leading to London Metropolitan University awards are aligned with *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*. The College has used a range of relevant external reference points, including CMA and SPA guidance to develop its admissions procedures and information provided to prospective and current students. The Student Complaints Policy and Procedures also takes account of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's *Good Practice Framework for handling complaints and academic appeals*. The College's academic policies and procedures meet the requirements of the awarding organisations and are mapped against the relevant sections of the Quality Code.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

14   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.

15   The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Catherine Symonds, Reviewer, and Dr Irene Ainsworth, QAA Officer, on 4 October 2018.