Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Oxford Business College UK Ltd, May 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 the Oxford Business College UK Ltd (the College) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision from the 2017 [Annual Monitoring Visit](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2   The College continues to deliver HNC and HND programmes awarded by Pearson. The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) qualification was introduced in October 2016. The College taught to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the RQF in parallel during 2016-7, with the final teaching of the QCF in August 2017. The students confirmed that this change had proceeded smoothly. There are 10 teaching staff on fractional contracts.

3   The College currently has 51 students, 14 less than at the previous monitoring visit. 14 students are registered for the HNC and 37 (51 in 2017) for the HND Business programmes, including pathways in Accounting, Human Resource Management and Marketing. The College joined the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) system in October 2017.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4   The College has continued to make acceptable progress in its implementation of the action plan arising from the 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers), which maintains academic standards and enhances the quality of student learning opportunities. The College's own clear action plan is considered and updated regularly at Senior Management Team meetings (SMT). The College continues to address the 2016 review recommendations (see paragraphs 5 and 6) and is progressing the actions from the identified affirmations (see paragraph 7). Moreover, the College has also maintained and developed the good practice identified, including the clear and supportive admissions processes, extending the sharing of good practice among staff, and their effective partnership with students, as well as developing the implementation of digital technology.

5   The College continues to ensure that accurate programme specifications fully meet Pearson requirements. Staff and students have access to these both in hard copy and electronically. They reflect the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and are tailored to the College's needs. There are now regular, well established and comprehensive assessment boards, in line with Pearson requirements, which fairly and consistently apply the regulations for the award of credit and qualifications.

6   The College now fully articulates its strategic approach to enhancement. There are a range of policies and procedures that support and demonstrate more fully its approach to the enhancement of learning. The staff enthusiastically describe their wide use of the Tutors'

Information Guidance intranet, the successful implementation of the structured student support system and the flexible, free English language sessions, delivered according to a student's needs. All staff are observed and have annual appraisals to identify development needs. The College is taking considerable steps to improve staff continuing professional development (CPD). This includes supporting staff to improve their academic qualifications and the publication of a scholarly peer reviewed College journal.

7   The College continues to develop the actions from the affirmations identified in the 2016 review report. In order to improve student achievement and increase central oversight of programmes, the College has recently introduced regular, online attendance monitoring, induction workshops, and electronic submission of assignments. It is too soon to observe results of these initiatives and these recent steps taken by the College to improve achievement through close monitoring and support have yet to show significant improvement. Referral rates and non-submission for assessed work across modules remain areas for improvement. For example, one module had a 55 per cent non-submission rate. The College uses the analysis of performance to identify students in need of further support, particularly in written English, and to warn students of approaching deadlines. The SMT has appropriate and regular oversight of attendance and student submissions.

8   The examples of good practice identified in the 2016 review remain as strengths for the College. The admissions system remains clear and supportive. All students receive an interview either in person or by electronic means, with admissions staff following a detailed pro forma. The College Admissions Officer checks language competency qualifications and prior qualifications to ensure that students enrolled are likely to succeed in their chosen studies. A recently revised Admissions Policy informs the process. A clear pre-arrival pack and comprehensive induction programme prepare students for study at the College and in the UK. A programme of English for Academic Purposes, close monitoring of attendance and submissions, follow-up support and assignment clinics help students to complete and achieve a qualification. Students confirmed the admissions processes to be fair and effective, allowing them to make informed choices about their study.

9   The partnership between the College and its students remains effective, with positive comments from students who praise the individual attention and high level of personal and academic support provided. This includes a newly-developed personal tutorial framework including study skills, personal tutors, drop-in assignment clinics, extra English classes and support for mental health.

10   Students also praise the quality of tuition that they receive using digital technology. Students and staff use a web-based file sharing service for learning and teaching and the College is considering a range of specialist pedagogical open-source learning management systems within a virtual learning environment (VLE) to further enhance student learning. This is part of the process of introducing electronic record keeping, attendance monitoring and electronic assignment submission.

11   A new Tutor Council allows the College to further strengthen its team ethos and effective sharing of best practice. Information for tutors is extensive with a detailed Staff Handbook and Teaching Learning and Assessment policy. New tutors receive thorough induction training, coupled with peer support. Tutor meetings and the new Tutor Council provide useful opportunities for staff to receive updates on curriculum and regulations, discuss feedback from students and committees and to share practice. Observation of teaching and staff appraisal further facilitate the sharing of good practice and identifying opportunities for staff training.

12   The College's monitoring processes provide effective oversight within SMT meetings, with regular consideration of student progress and action planning. Programme

monitoring focusses on data analysis, with student surveys articulating student views of tutor performance and module content; and attendance submission and achievement tracking identifying performance for different student cohorts. SMT meetings take quarterly reports on academic matters, admissions, marketing, finance and human resources. The committees identify actions, target dates and persons responsible, with monitoring of progress at subsequent meetings. SMT meetings are designated SMT Operational or SMT Strategic, according to the nature of business, with student attendance considered at SMT Strategic.

13   The College monitors and analyses data regularly and systematically within its own quality assurance procedures, as described in paragraph 12. Student achievement data, incorporating the new initiatives for improvement (see paragraph 7), are not yet available, consequently the data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 shows limited improvement. Cohort sizes for most programmes are small with HNC and HND Business being the largest groups, with 17 students in each in 2016-17. Retention rates show many cohorts at 100 per cent. The HNC and HND Business programmes' retention rates for 2016-17 are 76 per cent and 71 per cent; and achievement 77 per cent and 58 per cent respectively. Achievement figures for other programmes vary, with figures of 0 per cent, 33 per cent and 100 per cent, but small group sizes make these unreliable as indicators of performance. Aggregate figures for 2016-17 show 69 enrolments, 11 discontinued and 28 passes, which is a pass rate of 48 per cent. The 2016-17 achievement figures show an improvement over the previous year which ranged from 0 per cent through to 43 per cent, to a high of 67 per cent. However, the termination of the Pearson QCF in 2017 programmes makes comparison problematic with many students taking an exit award.

14   The College has an extensive and effective system of student representation. Student representatives sit on all committees, including the SMT Strategic, and confirm making an effective contribution to discussions. Student representatives meet at a Student Council, with formal minutes which feed into the Tutor Council and subsequently to SMT. Module level questionnaires gather student views on curriculum and teaching which are also formally considered by the SMT.

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

15   The College demonstrates effective engagement with relevant external reference points. The College bases its quality assurance and enhancement processes on the Expectations and best practice indicators established within the Quality Code. Senior staff attend QAA consultations and cascade information down to the teaching staff.

16   The College uses further external reference points to help assure academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. These include the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The College adheres to Pearson's quality management processes and the requirements set out in the awarding organisation's programme specifications, unit specifications and assessment policies and procedures. Compliance with Pearson expectations is monitored through the external examiner system and the annual monitoring review visit. The College is a member of Independent Higher Education.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

17   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.

18   The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Glenn Barr, Reviewer, and Mrs Catherine Fairhurst, Coordinator, on 2 May 2018.