

Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Pearson College Ltd, trading as Pearson College London, May 2018

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Pearson College Ltd, trading as Pearson College London (the College), has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision since the May 2017 [monitoring visit](#) report.

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The College has effectively implemented a planned increase in student numbers through further recruitment. This increase warranted an extended monitoring visit. Teaching, accommodation and staffing, as well as other resources such as IT, have been increased to maintain the quality of the student experience. Since September 2016, most of the teaching has been brought together on one refurbished site and there are further plans to develop capacity at this same site ready for the further increase in students in September 2018. The College continues to work with a number of awarding bodies (see paragraph 3) but is moving to rationalise its provision by working solely with the University of Kent (the University).

3 At the time of the monitoring visit, the College had 776 students compared to 395 in 2017 and 239 in 2016. There are 79 students enrolled on the BA (Hons) Business and Management associated pathways, validated by the Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust. A further 467 are enrolled on programmes validated by the University of Kent which include BA (Hons) Business and Management and associated pathways; BSc (Hons) Professional Accounting in Business; MSci Advanced Professional Accounting in Business; LLB (Hons) and associated pathways; and the MLaw (Integrated Master's) Professional Legal Practice award. At Escape Studios (School of Creative Industries), 223 students are studying across the following: MA Visual Effects Production; MA Game Art; and suites of BA and MArt programmes in Visual Effects, Game Art and Computer Animation. These programmes are also validated by the University.

4 In the Pearson Business School, four students remain on the Level 5 Pearson Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Studies (which is no longer recruiting) and three students are studying, by direct entry, on the BSc (Hons) Business and Enterprise top-up programme validated by the Royal Holloway and Bedford New College. This validation is coming to an end. All existing students are being fully supported while they complete their awards.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 As noted in the report of the May 2017 monitoring visit, the College has fully addressed the recommendations from the May 2014 Higher Education Review (Plus). It has also provided evidence of how it has assessed the continuing implementation of actions since May 2017. The system for dialogue between staff and students is operating well, although there is an acknowledgement that student attendance at formal meetings could be better (see paragraph 6). Observation of teaching operates to policy and is effective in enhancing the teaching and learning experience for students (see paragraph 7). The systematic approach to identification of learning resources continues to operate effectively and has resulted in enhancements to the student learning experience (see paragraph 8). At

the College level, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) includes 14 wide-ranging strategic actions emerging from monitoring processes. Since the annual monitoring visit in May 2017, the QEP has become embedded and is operating effectively (see paragraph 10). The admissions policy includes clear procedures and criteria for prospective students with non-traditional entry qualifications (see paragraph 11). Design Concept teams continue to be used in programme development and have been further enhanced (see paragraph 9). The College actively engages with annual monitoring and completes Annual Programme Monitoring Reports in accordance with its own requirements and those of validating partners (see paragraph 13). The College has developed a Retention Strategy which is used to inform College action plans. Progress with this strategy is captured in the QEP (see paragraph 10).

6 The College continues to provide opportunities for effective dialogue between staff and students. The staff-student liaison committee (SSLC) meets regularly throughout the academic year with students elected as Student Experience Associates for their school committee. Minutes of committee meetings evidence discussion, debate and follow-up of issues raised by students. Attendance by students at their school committee is variable with recent meetings showing relatively low attendance. Staff stated that they are aware of this issue and will look at ways of increasing attendance, perhaps by using remote access and by reviewing timetabling of meetings. Students put themselves forward for membership of key committees, such as the Academic Board and Review and Enhancement Committee (REC), and to date have been allocated to committees of their choice. Again, staff acknowledged that attendance by students at these committees needs to be improved. The committees with student representation operate effectively and to their terms of reference. Feedback to students continues with the provision of 'You Said, We Did' posters, as well as at SSLC meetings. Students reported that training is provided for student representatives and they find this of value.

7 Peer observation of teaching is now well embedded both in terms of the implementation of the policy and its perceived value for staff and students. The process is managed by programme leaders with oversight by the Dean of each school. New tutors are observed during their first term at the College and experienced tutors at least once during the academic year. Each school produces summary reports based on action plans developed by programme leaders. At College-level, an annual evaluation report of peer observation summarises participant feedback on the process and gives examples of resulting teaching enhancements. The 2016-17 summary report identifies two recommendations for enhancement of the process - one of which is to identify and share good practice. The summary report is considered at the Review and Enhancement Committee.

8 The College continues to use its formal system for annually identifying, providing and reviewing learning resources. The refurbishment of two floors at the High Holborn location, which took account of student input on design, has resulted in a learning environment appreciated by staff and students. Refurbishment of another floor of the building is planned for 2018-19. The College's online learning environment, generally appreciated by students, offers good quality learning resources and effective learning support. However, law students commented that whilst literature is adequate for their needs, they would like to have a wider range of resources available. Lectures are routinely recorded and made available on the online learning environment. Students value the live webcasting facilities and the e-learning initiatives.

9 Further improvements have been made with Degree Concept Teams (DCTs), used in developing new programmes. Since the May 2014 Higher Education Review, a DCT was used in the design and development of the Escape Studios for undergraduate students. Further, Studio Projects to evaluate methodologies for learning, teaching and assessment feedback were developed with student and alumni involvement. Since May 2017, the College has developed and implemented its own internal programme approval process and has approved new programmes through this process, prior to validation by the University of Kent. The four projects informed the development of degree programmes and resulted in a paper being presented at a European conference.

10 Internal monitoring processes operate at institutional, programme and module level. At the College-level, the QEP includes strategic actions emerging from routine monitoring processes and comprises 14 wide-ranging actions, or 'projects'. These include review of governance, pedagogic review in the Business School, production of a retention strategy and integration of postgraduate students. Each project identifies the committee responsible for monitoring progress, the responsible officer and the extent of progress. There is evidence that, since the annual monitoring visit in May 2017, the QEP is now operating effectively. A pedagogic review of the Business School, based on student feedback, has resulted in the redesign of the Principles of Business Module and the incorporation of a major project in which students set up their own business. The College has responded to student feedback regarding the timeliness and quality of formative feedback on assignments by requiring submission of a draft plan prior to the full assignment. Whilst some students commented favourably on this development, others reported that feedback on assessed work for some programmes could be more informative. A new member of staff has been appointed in the Business School to manage and support teams in the provision of assessments. All projects in the QEP have been progressed and monitored effectively by the appropriate committee. Students have been involved at those committees where they have representation.

11 Admissions processes are operated in accordance with the admissions policy, which includes clear procedures and criteria for prospective students with non-traditional entry qualifications. The College does not rely solely on UCAS tariff points, with each School operating specific procedures for assessing a prospective student's aptitude, commitment and potential to succeed. The Business School uses either UCAS tariff points and interview or a professional workshop for applicants. Prospective students have the opportunity to discuss the programme and the College with current students. Admission decisions are made by a Candidate Review Panel. Escape Studios assess prospective students at an applicant day which involves participation in a creative workshop which includes portfolio review and a group exercise. Staff use a scoring system in deciding on whether offers are made to applicants. Students were satisfied with admissions processes, appreciating transparency and fairness of decision making. Successful and unsuccessful applicants can obtain feedback on their application and the process. Decisions concerning the accreditation of prior learning (APL) follow a rigorous internal process which includes a mapping exercise. Agreement to grant APL has to be agreed by the awarding body.

12 All programmes have an English language requirement for applicants whose first language is not English. Oral communication skills are assessed by the Business School at interview. Escape Studios' applicants have English understanding and communication skills assessed during the creative workshop day.

13 The College's academic governance structure is headed by its Governing Body, to which the Academic Board and Executive report. The Academic Board has two committees - the Review and Enhancement Committee (REC) to which the Schools report, and Admissions, Progression, Retention and Attainment Committee (APRAC). The College completes Annual Programme Monitoring Reports (APMRs) in accordance with its own requirements and those of its validating partners. External examiner reports are positive and available to students on the virtual learning environment. APMRs are produced on a template which requires analysis of management information, production of an action plan and the identification of potential areas of good practice. Reports are reviewed by both REC and the Academic Board. Currently, reports are scrutinised by the Academic Board in January for approval by the Governing Body in February, but this is being changed to October and November respectively in 2018-19. The data to be scrutinised is currently being reviewed together with the timescales and the template.

14 A Retention Strategy has been developed to inform College action plans. Progress is captured in the QEP and monitored by APRAC. The Academic Board has overall responsibility for monitoring these and any developments identified as part of the enhancement plan. Degree programmes have been designed as far as possible, with a common first year allowing students to transfer at the end of that year to another pathway.

The College reports its Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data as indicating that continuation rates are 94 per cent for Escape Studios and 90 per cent for the Business School, with an overall rate of 91 per cent, which is above the intended College Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of 90 per cent. Progression for the HND Business, at 67 per cent, is significantly lower although the College no longer recruits to this programme and is currently supporting the remaining four students. Almost all students who completed their programmes in 2016-17 (95.4 per cent) passed.

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

15 The College has identified acquisition of taught degree awarding powers as an organisational goal and recognises the need for robust academic regulations. There is mapping against subject benchmark statements as part of programme development, for example, in the development of the Accountancy and Business Management programmes prior to validation by the University of Kent. All new programmes are also standardly mapped to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. Committee terms of reference are mapped to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Programmes and the College's academic policies and procedures are annually reviewed by partner institutions with respect to the setting and maintenance of academic standards.

Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Donald Pennington, Reviewer, and Dr Heather Barrett-Mold OBE, Coordinator, on 23 and 24 May 2018.

QAA2159 - R10018 - Jul 18

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