



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Pearson College Ltd, May 2016

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 (the College) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision since the 2014 [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 Pearson College changed its trading name to Pearson College London in 2015. The name 'Escape Studios' has been designated for its school of creative industries and 'Pearson Business School' for its business school. These changes have been reported to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) as part of their monitoring for designation.

3 A major refit of the College's High Holborn teaching and student space is due to be completed for the new student intake in September 2016.

4 In the Pearson Business School, 41 students are studying on the Level 5 Pearson Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Studies while 36 students are studying, by direct entry, on the BSc (Hons) Business and Enterprise top-up programme validated by Royal Holloway and Bedford New College. There are 147 students enrolled on the BA (Hons) Management and associated pathways, validated by the Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust. At Escape Studios, 11 students are studying on the MA Visual Effects Production, validated by the University of Bradford and four on the new MA Game Art, which commenced in January 2016 with a new validation partner, the University of Kent.

5 A suite of new programmes in Game Art, VFX and Computer Animation at Escape Studios and in Business, Law and Accountancy at the Business School were validated in September 2015 and February 2016 by the University of Kent. The new programmes will be delivered from September 2016, apart from the MA Game Art, which has already commenced. The programmes were developed partly in response to Ashridge ceasing its validating arrangements with external institutions, although its current arrangement with the College remains unchanged. An HND in Paramedic Science has also been approved by Pearson Education Ltd but has not yet commenced. There have been no changes to permanent members of teaching staff but some additions to the teaching team.

6 The College has not applied for a Tier 4 sponsor licence and has no immediate plans to do so.

Findings from the monitoring visit

7 The College has made progress in addressing the recommendations from the May 2014 Higher Education Review (Plus) and in developing and evaluating its action plan. The team was able to view documentary evidence and meet with the principal, senior staff, teaching staff and students. The College has embedded a range of opportunities for effective

dialogue between students and staff (paragraphs 11 to 13). The peer observation process has been clarified and developed, although it is not yet fully effective (paragraph 14). A more systematic approach for the identification and provision of learning resources has been implemented (paragraph 15). Actions are being taken to integrate Escape Studios further into the College's processes and procedures, although these are not yet fully operational (paragraph 11). The College plans to gain taught degree awarding powers (paragraph 20).

8 The May 2014 Review identified the role of the Degree Concept Teams in developing new programmes as good practice, and the College has continued to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these teams. The College has invested thought and strategy in its potential future development, which includes new partnerships and planning for expansion.

9 The College has further developed its systems for gathering and responding to the student voice. The Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) is now a primary forum for staff and students to discuss issues raised by student representatives. The output from these minuted meetings feeds into other boards, committees and systems, such as the Review and Enhancement Committee (REC), the Academic Planning Committee (APC) and the College's You Said, We Did response system.

10 SSLC minutes show that this committee is an opportunity for useful and meaningful dialogue. Students confirmed that their views are listened to and acted upon and that satisfactory responses are given to matters that cannot be acted upon due to constraints of space or funding. The College also publishes a detailed handbook that clarifies their position and their ambitions with regard to student engagement.

11 The student representative Co-creator role has been enhanced. This role, and the SSLC, sit alongside the Pearson College Student Association (PCSA) and together provide several means for the student voice to gain attention and initiate actions. Currently only the Business School has an SSLC but representatives from Escape Studios are also planned once numbers increase with the commencement of new programmes in autumn 2016. The PCSA will continue to function as a student union type of organisation.

12 Other documents, including the minutes of the Review and Enhancement Committee and the Academic Governance Structure, show that the College includes students as full members.

13 An online feedback system called Unitu has been introduced. This is a pilot scheme to explore the usefulness of online feedback and the College is still evaluating its effectiveness and usefulness.

14 A peer observation process has been developed and embedded after internal consideration and input from both managers and teaching staff. A peer observation guide outlines the process and each observation is formally recorded. However, record forms are not always completed in full or in detail. The system includes induction training and output from the process is intended to inform annual review, but this has not yet been fully implemented.

15 The College has created a formal system for identifying and providing learning resources for all programmes. Resources are reviewed annually and students are consulted on resourcing decisions and new developments, such as the upgrade of the High Holborn premises.

16 The College maintains internal systems of quality assurance and all meeting minutes contain assigned actions, arising from both internal and external sources, and

follow-up. The College has responded appropriately to external examiner reports, addressing actions and following up on good practice.

17 The College publishes external examiner reports on the Online Learning Environment (OLE). Staff inform students about these reports during induction. However, no students reported having viewed any of these reports and they are not discussed at SSLC meetings.

18 Students expressed general strong satisfaction with their experience of studying at the College and raised only minor concerns. One of these was to do with group marking, an issue also raised in an external examiner report. College staff and senior management reported that collaborative work is a central element of their delivery strategy and that group marking has developed from that.

19 The College has a comprehensive admissions procedure supported by detailed documentation, including guidance on individual interviews, assessment of fitness to study, recognition of prior learning and appeals, in the substantial Quality Assurance Handbook. It has also conducted a study that analyses the admissions process and evaluates selection criteria against final achievement performance. Students describe the admissions process as individualised and very supportive.

20 The College has ambitions to achieve degree awarding powers and recognises that robust systems for internal programme monitoring will be essential.

21 The College is engaging actively with annual monitoring, including aligning with the monitoring requirements of its awarding partners. A cycle for five-yearly review of programmes has also been created but not yet implemented as the programmes have not yet run for this length of time.

22 The College currently has 239 students on five programmes. The progression rates for all of the cohorts are in line with sector averages, apart from the Level 5 HND Business cohort of 2012-13 where progression has been poor, with only two students continuing and three having completed and passed. The College has linked this to the fact that most of the cohort were heavily subsidised Pearson employees who had not invested sufficient time or commitment to the programme. This corporate scholarship scheme has been discontinued and progression rates appear to be normalising.

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

23 The College continues to engage with a range of external stakeholders in the management of its provision and academic standards. Since the last monitoring report it has undergone a number of successful new validations with the University of Kent, an Edexcel Annual Management Review of HND programmes and a Pearson PLC Efficacy Review. The new HND in Paramedic Science has been approved by Edexcel and accredited by the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC).

24 All new programmes are mapped to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and have used the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The new HND in Paramedic Science has also been mapped to the College of Paramedics Curriculum Guidance and Competence Framework (COP), the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF), the NHS Leadership Framework (NHSLF) and the HCPC's Standards of Education and Training (SETS) and Standards of Proficiency (SOPS).

25 External examiner reports are very strong in terms of the relevance of the curriculum and the standards of teaching and learning, and the College's responses show a willingness to engage with this external guidance.

26 The College actively engages in annual monitoring and periodic review with its external awarding partners.

27 The College has not yet taken the opportunity to make reference to sector-wide research and practice in peer observation, such as the Higher Education Academy's UK Professional Standards Framework, in the creation or development of its peer observation process.

28 The College consults and uses the UK Quality Code for Higher Education in the development of new programmes, and there are plans to map all of the College's policies and procedures against the expectations of the Quality Code.

Background to the monitoring visit

29 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.

30 The monitoring visit was carried out by Tom Cantwell, Reviewer, and Jacqueline Young, Coordinator, on 11 May 2016.

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