Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Regent's University London, October 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 Regent's University London (the University) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the October 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2   The University continues to offer and award a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in business, management, marketing, finance, design, psychology, performing arts, fashion, media studies, social sciences and humanities. Student numbers have broadly remained stable. At the time of the annual monitoring visit, 2286 students were enrolled across the various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. While the number of new students recruited during 2017-18 has increased compared to the previous year, they have returned to the same levels seen in earlier years. There have been changes in the distribution of undergraduate and postgraduate students and also the enrolment pattern on some programmes. The postgraduate portfolio has expanded with the validation of new taught master's programmes in International Relations, International Fashion Marketing and Marketing Psychology. In addition, the University initiated a comprehensive portfolio review to ensure financial sustainability and an excellent student experience. It identified a number of programmes that it will no longer be offering as well as new programmes or modifications of existing programmes that will be validated during the 2018-19 academic year. The University currently employs 113 full-time staff, 71 part-time staff and has a pool of 196 visiting lecturers.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3   The monitoring visit found that Regent's University London is making acceptable progress in meeting its action plan following the review in 2016. The University has continued the good practice identified in the last review (paragraphs 6-7) and adequately addressed the one recommendation regarding condonement in the academic regulations (paragraph 4). Progress with the affirmation concerning the improvement of variable progression and retention rates is limited (paragraph 5).

4   In response to the recommendation, the University has reviewed its academic regulations and introduced opportunities for condonement to make clearer links between the achievement of credit, awards and designated learning outcomes. Programme handbooks highlight any modules which are ineligible for condonement and programme leaders work with representatives from the Quality Office to ensure regulations are applied appropriately. The Academic Regulatory Handbook has been updated and staff training on the new regulations and their operation at Examination Boards 2017-18, confirmed successful practices. The impact of these changes on students' progression and retention has not yet been reviewed formally.

5   The University has continued to address variable retention and progression rates with initiatives arranged and co-ordinated through a Retention Working Group chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience. A Student Achievement Officer for each faculty was appointed in 2017 to identify students failing to reach potential. The postholder works with student support staff, for example, an academic skills tutor, personal tutors, programme teams and Jisc analytics to extend support for students' mathematics, statistics and numeracy skills, in addition to English language and academic practice skills. The University has set minimum retention targets and developed a plan to increase these to 95 per cent in 2023, and programme retention plans have been produced but initiatives are still to be finalised at University and programme/school levels. The University has identified issues with student assessment completion rates and student engagement. Contributing factors affecting attendance have been identified relating to the students, the staff member delivering the module and module content. Actions are being taken, following student feedback and increased use of data, to support review processes at the module level and in annual monitoring activity. The University acknowledged that progress has not been made as far as had been hoped in the period and that it has yet to review the effectiveness of the action plan initiatives overall.

6   Three areas of good practice had been identified in the 2016 review but not formally indicated in the University action plan. The University continues to provide approaches to strengthen professional practices amongst academic and support staff. The professional practice PGCHE qualification offered has been revalidated and sector accreditation secured to 2022. Recent internal reviews commented on the need to develop a more systemic approach to ensuring greater consistency in teaching and assessment. Increased targets have been set for staff uptake of higher education teaching qualifications with professional recognition made a requirement for promotion at all levels. Developments are being undertaken by faculties to ensure staff development is used to secure greater consistency of university policies and approaches to learning and teaching.

7   The Student Hub has continued to provide a central contact and information point for students. Support activity continues to be provided and be highly regarded by students. Monitoring of the impact of the measures from admissions to progression and retention, including roll out of Jisc analytics approaches to support the work of the student achievement officers, has yet to be assessed. Employability development has continued with an on-site Entrepreneurial Hive offering mentoring support for fledgling businesses. While the University has increased data gathering and shared practices, it has not yet evaluated the impact of the various initiatives underway.

8   The University coordinates admission processes through a central team working with academic staff to provide comprehensive admissions support. The University's admissions requirements are clearly indicated in programme information. Following a review in 2017, changes were made in admissions requirements for 2018-19 entry. These increased the English language competences required for admissions academic qualifications and introduced requirements for at least a level 2 pass in mathematics for all programmes. These changes bring the University in line with the sector. The impact of these changes will be monitored and reviewed through the University's annual monitoring processes.

9   The University uses both direct application and the UCAS system for applicants, with personal statements which are reviewed to determine the applicant's extent of interest in the programme. Interviews are only used in specific programme cases. The University discusses individual cases and determines any students who are given entry but required to complete the English for Academic Purposes module. Progress and success of these diagnostic activities are being monitored more closely through module achievements. Processes performed follow the University's Admissions Policy, and oversight of processes

and staff involved is undertaken by senior staff on a weekly basis. Internal and external audit programmes are carried out to review admissions activity. Admissions team staff at the University have clear roles and responsibilities. Staff receive training and are monitored in their roles. External agents are vetted, and their practices monitored, and direct checks are made on their activity onsite by admissions managers. Agents are supported by a handbook which is updated annually. A project to review General Data Protection Regulation practices (GDPR) has been undertaken by the University's Chief Information Officer. The agents' handbook does not yet make clear responsibilities for data protection to meet GDPR legislation when working with third parties such as agents and the related issues attendant on work in certain countries for student recruitment.

10   The Senate operates oversight of the University's assessment activity and discharges this using its committees. Annual reviews are undertaken of the University's academic regulations for taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy seeks to maximise learning, the use of feedback provided direct to students and the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students confirmed the use of formative assessment and receipt of feedback from summative assessment where a range of assessment methods are deployed. Students also confirmed that the introduction of personal tutors for all students was reinforcing engagement and offering direct discussion about assessment with staff, thereby emphasising inclusive and authentic assessment approaches. Students develop skills and understanding of academic regulations and study skills in workshops. External software support is used both to deter and detect likely academic misconduct and as an aid to learning and teaching. Staff report suspected cases of academic malpractice and programme leaders maintain an overview of assessment practices, reviewing external examiner reports. Formal reporting of assessment integrity issues and outcomes from any cases of misconduct is made annually to Senate as part of the oversight activities. The University is proactive in maintaining academic integrity and remains vigilant to threats to assessment practices.

11   Student data returns have been reviewed as a key element of the University's action plan and approaches to admissions, progression and retention activity (see paragraph 5). The University's overall retention rates have improved from 72 per cent in 2016-17 to 78 per cent in 2017-18. In 2016-17, 41 programmes had retention figures less than the benchmark set by the University (85 per cent). This reduced to 13 programmes in 2017-18. Poor retention has been identified as an institutional priority and latest retention figures for some programmes in the Business Faculty, have shown improvement. Approaches to data have been extended to provide further demographic details and the use of Jisc analytics is expected to highlight student engagement further. This data will be reviewed closely by the Quality Office and the University's senior team. Annual monitoring reporting has been revised to support closer monitoring of progression at the module level. Award outcomes for students who progress are monitored and reviewed regularly with the sector at the University's Learning and Teaching Committee and as part of the internal audit strategy.

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

12   The University continues to make appropriate use of external reference points. It is aware of upcoming changes to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and staff have engaged in developments of the Code to date. The University successfully received accreditation of their BSc and MSc Psychology programmes with the British Psychological Society in 2017. The Open University conducted a two-part review at the University in 2018, recommending continued partnership for level 8 delivery. External benchmarking practices are used to develop university policy and practices in areas such as admissions, progression and retention activities. The University continues to engage with sector activities gaining

accreditation of PGCHE qualifications through Advance-HE and more recently the University's policy and practice with Matrix.

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 Deborah Trayhurn, Reviewer, and Monika Ruthe, QAA Officer, on 25 October 2018.