



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of BRIT College Ltd, February 2019

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit the review team concludes that BRIT College (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the February 2017 [monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 The College has 596 students registered on the Pearson HND (RQF) Business programme and 117 on the related progression route, BA (Hons) (Top-up) in Business and Management, franchised by the University of Northampton and delivered from October 2017 onwards. A new Dean of Academic Quality and Enhancement and a new Programme Leader were appointed in 2018. In total it employs 30 staff, including part-time tutors. The College has secured a temporary second site for delivering the majority of its BA (Hons) (Top-up) programme and has purchased additional permanent premises to house its growing number of students, which it hopes to open in autumn 2019. The College's five-year Strategic Plan states an aim to expand the portfolio of foundation year and degree-level programmes in Business, Health and Social Care and teaching skills. The College was granted a provisional Bronze Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award for one year. Following publication of its first set of metrics, in January 2019 the College made a TEF Year Four submission. In January 2019 it also had registration with the Office for Students (OfS) confirmed.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College developed an action plan following the February 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)), which it has been continuing to update effectively. In addition, in 2018 the College developed a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) in order to draw together the range of action plans arising from monitoring procedures. These updated action plans, along with supporting evidence, reveal that acceptable progress is being made in relation to monitoring, review and enhancement of the College's higher education provision.

4 The College continues to report successful recruitment and student outcomes for its long-established HND programme. Its newer BA (Hons) (Top-up) had issues with continuation and achievement (including high rates of non-submission and failure at first attempt) in its first two cohorts, but there are early indications that the College's subsequent actions are having an impact and that the issues have been resolved. The College's approach to providing higher education accessible to students with working and caring responsibilities through the provision of different study patterns continues to be highly valued by students. The College is pleased to report receiving two awards for 'Outstanding Support for the Student Learning Experience' and 'Excellence in Student Collaborations,' at the Independent Higher Education Awards 2018.

5 The three areas of good practice and the one affirmation identified in 2016 HER (AP) have been further consolidated. The unit handbooks are reported as working well. Students spoke positively about the opportunity to select from the study patterns enabling them to study alongside work and caring responsibilities. Employability initiatives have been embedded, including a new forum, employability master classes and student involvement in organising volunteering experiences. The College has seen an improvement in its Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) employability outcomes for its HND students. The first level 6 graduates have yet to complete a national employability survey.

6 All four recommendations from the 2016 HER (AP) have been further developed, with an Annual Calendar now aiding the organisation of arrangements for both HND and BA (Hons) (Top-up) students. The retention strategy, including the process for identifying at-risk students and providing them with structured support, has had a positive impact on HND students. Student progress is monitored through regular College meetings, through teacher briefings, and with enhanced attendance monitoring. There was poor retention with the first cohort of the BA (Hons) (Top-up) programme and, in order to tackle this, further actions have been implemented (see also paragraphs 18-19).

7 The College has three ways of monitoring and improving its own provision. Firstly, it continues to keep its action plan arising from the 2016 HER (AP) report updated. Secondly, the new Dean has developed a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), which is being used to pull together all action plans, to monitor and evaluate actions taken, and to identify and implement further enhancements. Thirdly, it engages with its partners' monitoring and review activities. In addition, it develops specific action plans to address significant matters. These reports and action plans all pick up similar themes, notably a need to review and organise most of the College's policies and procedures, a continued emphasis on supporting at-risk students, and ensuring that its academic staff deliver a high quality experience to students.

8 A new enhancement introduced by the College in accordance with practice by its University partner is a refreshed approach to student representation through the establishment of a Student Council, led by two lead student representatives. The representatives are known as 'Changemakers'. The lead representatives chair the Council and sit on College committees. Students reported the system of Changemaker representatives was working very well for them and gave clear examples of its impact on both the student experience and the wider community.

9 The College operates an Admissions Policy and related procedures aligned to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), 2013-18. After an online application, suitable applicants are invited to an interview, which includes an assessment of applicants' genuine intention to study. No applicants have been admitted through Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). If this were warranted for the BA (Hons) (Top-up), such cases would be referred to the University for assessment. As part of assuring the integrity of the system, a standardisation meeting for the Admissions Team is held prior to each recruitment cycle.

10 The College's website indicates that HND applicants who are non-native English language speakers are required to demonstrate English language skills equivalent to IELTS 5.5, or B2 grade certification in line with Pearson requirements; and that for BA (Hons) (Top-up) applicants the equivalent of IELTS 6.0 or equivalent, is required. This practice was confirmed by a check of student admissions files. As all successfully recruited candidates for the HND programme from 2017 have held a level 3 qualification taken in English, the College has satisfied itself that applicants had the necessary English language skills and it has chosen not needed to undertake English language testing. For the BA (Hons) (Top-up), all applicants also complete a written statement as part of the application process to provide some additional assurance.

11 Students reported that they found information clear. The review team noted that a number of webpages had not been refreshed, some being dated 2014 and some 2017. The College are awaiting the launch of a new and upgraded website, due to be completed in March 2019, which will make the process of updating and managing information much easier than at present.

12 The College has an Agents Policy aligned to the Quality Code, 2013-18. A review in December 2018 revealed that the policy was not being fully implemented. During 2017, issues were identified in relation to annual monitoring of agent performance and record keeping. The College has acted promptly to address weaknesses and believes that the small number of continuing agents (who recruit about 20 per cent of students) are now well trained and compliant with the College's expectations.

13 The HND unit handbooks and assignment briefs and BA (Hons) (Top-up) programme specification and module information packs provide tutors and students with details of assessments. The College adheres to Pearson's assessment requirements, including external verification, and arranges training for its staff. For the BA (Hons) (Top-up), assessment briefs are provided by the University and the College runs its own internal training sessions for staff.

14 After initial marking by the tutor, the relevant Programme Leader moderates all assignments. For the BA (Hons) (Top-up), the University undertakes an additional check (double marking in the first year of the partnership and moderating thereafter).

15 The College's Academic Assessment Board tracks assessment records for each student. The Student Management Group tracks attendance and the Academic Management Team meetings track performance and any other programme management issues. Academic Board is responsible for oversight of assessment and performance.

16 The Student Handbook and sessions in class provide guidance on academic malpractice, plagiarism-detection software is used to detect high levels of similarity, and all concerns are followed up by staff in interviews with the students. The College reports low levels of academic malpractice, attributing this to the continuous feedback students receive on their draft assignments.

17 On the HND, retention rates are between 80 per cent and 95 per cent (over the last three cohorts, one of which had approximately 300 students). Pass rates are consistent at 79 to 88 per cent (for the previous three HND cohorts).

18 The 2016 HER (AP) recommended that the College should 'produce and embed a clear and detailed retention strategy that enables the identification of at-risk students with a view to further improving the current retention rate'. While the actions taken improved retention on the HND programme, as confirmed in its TEF data return, it re-surfaced as an issue on the BA (Hons) (Top-up). The College's first cohort undertaking this new level 6 progression route had significantly lower retention than the HND. The retention rate for the first cohort was 61 per cent, and, following significant adjustment to its practice (see also paragraph 19), the second cohort rose to 92 per cent (on cohort sizes of 56 and 59). Pass rates have been particularly concerning on this programme (44 per cent of cohort 1 and 13 per cent of cohort 2 passed at the first attempt - 56 and 59 enrolled). There were concerns, shared by the College and the University, that the students did not understand the demands of level 6 study, had been insufficiently prepared for the step-up from an HND, and were failing to attend sufficiently regularly to ensure good outcomes.

19 To address these issues, the College and the University implemented an action plan, increased the scrutiny of applicants during the admissions process, added three weeks of study skills and induction before module teaching began, stopped running a shortened

version of the programme, which was particularly challenging, and increased the contact hours on campus. In addition, the College improved attendance monitoring and student support, appointed a new Dean, a Programme Leader and new highly qualified teachers, and strengthened communication with students about the resit process. The College reports that submission rates for the first two modules for cohort three are 94 and 96 per cent and pass rates at the first attempt are much improved (94 and 90 per cent). The University initially recommended that the College consider reducing the number of students per intake until they were satisfied with submission rates and student outcomes, but they are now satisfied with the College's response and have lifted restrictions on student recruitment.

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

20 In January 2019 the College had its registration with the OfS confirmed. It has been through no other external reviews or accreditations since the last QAA review, other than monitoring and review activities required by its partners.

21 Its programmes are designed and approved by Pearson and the University of Northampton, who draw on the Quality Code and other external reference points. Training is provided for staff on quality-related matters by Pearson, and in-house by the new Dean and other staff.

22 The College has previously mapped its policies and procedures against the Quality Code, 2013-18 and the new Dean plans to provide training on the new Quality Code starting from this month. A review of policies is being completed following a recommendation arising from a governance review.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

23 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.

24 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Sally Bentley, Reviewer, and Ms Nadine Baker, QAA Officer, on 5 February 2019.

### **QAA2345 - R10392 - Apr 19**

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)