



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Simply Alliance Ltd t/a Docklands Academy, London, September 2015

Section 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 Simply Alliance Ltd t/a Docklands Academy, London has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in September 2014.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The Academy has seven higher education students, which is 26 fewer than at the last monitoring visit in September 2014. The students are enrolled on higher education programmes validated by Pearson or the Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality. In March 2015, the Academy lost its tier 4 Highly Trusted Sponsor licence and has stopped teaching the affected international students. The Academy has formally notified its students about this change and advised the international students to find an alternative provider for their studies. In March 2015 there were 191 higher education students at the Academy, most of whom were international students. By the time of the monitoring visit, 184 students had left the Academy either to return overseas, or to alternative sponsors with assistance from the Academy.

3 The Academy has 14 academic and administrative staff, which is two fewer than in 2013. It plans to retain the existing organisational structure and broad academic strategy apart from sponsoring international students. It seeks to recruit students from the UK and countries within Europe. The Board of Governance is exploring the potential of developing online learning courses for international students to study at a distance.

4 The Academy is accredited by NCC Education and may in future offer courses at Level 4 or 5 to prepare students for master's degrees. This would build on its current experience in the delivery of English language programmes at level 3. There are no current partnerships with universities since that with the University of South Wales was terminated by the Academy in May 2015.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The Academy has continued to build on previously identified good practice in response to requests from students for learning resources and equipment. The virtual learning environment has been developed in line with previous plans and the Academy has augmented common room facilities and laptop provision.

6 The Academy has made acceptable progress on all of the recommendations in the action plan. It has evaluated the operation of its committee structure and sought greater differentiation of function and terms of reference. The Academic and Advisory Board includes students as full members. There are clear formal arrangements for decision making on assessment, standardisation, verification and confirmation of student attainment. The Academy uses staff development sessions to strengthen awareness of good assessment practice.

7 There is a new strategic plan and a related institutional action plan, the effectiveness of which has yet to demonstrate impact. Annual monitoring includes analysis of trends in data and this broadly informs strategic planning. The Academy recognises that there is scope to improve the consistent application of management information in enhancing quality. There is clear policy and procedure for the effective prevention and management of academic misconduct which is understood by both staff and students. The procedure includes the use of plagiarism-detection software with an agreed tolerance threshold for comparability.

8 The Academy routinely considers and responds to feedback and recommendations made by external examiners. The examiners' reports are disseminated to staff and students, and some students attended meetings with the external examiner from Pearson. A three-stage approval process for authorisation of published information remains in use to assure the quality of externally published information. The Academy continues to use clear job descriptions that differentiate between essential and desirable requirements. While relying on its awarding organisations for assurance of academic standards of awards, the Academy continues to develop its quality management systems. It has simplified, shortened and modified the contents of the Academy's Quality Manual, as recommended by the review in 2013.

9 The Academy specifies an acceptable standard of English required for entry to its courses. The English language competence of prospective students is assessed through baseline testing broadly aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Additional tuition and language support is available, free of charge, to enrolling students whose English language proficiency requires development.

10 Prior to admission, the Academy assesses applicants' prior qualifications and their suitability to study through the use of referring agents. The Academy evaluates whether potential students have genuine intentions to follow a course of study by requiring them to provide a personal statement. It screens documentation provided in the process of making that decision and conducts online interviews but does not record these. The Academy acknowledges that this is an area for further enhancement.

11 Assessment and verification is conducted in accordance with the requirements of the awarding organisations. The Academy has effective internal verification procedures and engages with awarding organisations as required. The management of academic malpractice is enabled through a concurrent procedure.

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

12 The Academy has undertaken focused work to align its academic operations with the UK Quality Code for Higher education (Quality Code), the effectiveness of which has yet to fully demonstrate impact. This work has included evaluating academic policies and procedures against the Expectations of the Quality Code. The Chairman of the Board of Governance is taking a lead on the updating and development of policies and procedures. The Academy has sought to develop an understanding of the Quality Code among the student body. Despite this, the students who met the team were unfamiliar with it.

Section 5: 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 Dr Anne Miller, Coordinator, and Mr David Malachi, Reviewer, on 9 September 2015.

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