



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of St Patrick's International College Ltd, 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 St Patrick's International College (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the September 2017 [monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 The total number of students enrolled at the time of the monitoring visit was 2449. This is an increase of 410 since the previous monitoring visit in September 2017 when there were 2039. All students are full-time. There has been no change in awarding body, which is Pearson UK. The College has no Tier 4 sponsored overseas students. There are 31 full-time academic staff and 33 part-time and freelance academic staff teaching the programmes. A further eight full-time staff are in management and leadership roles. Changes that have occurred, or are in progress, include a reduction in the number of Schools within the College structure from four to two. The College is teaching out the HND Information Systems Engineering and HND Network Engineering and Telecommunications Systems. A new programme has been added to the portfolio - the HNC/HND Social and Community Work. A restructuring of the senior management team has been taking place during the academic year 2017/18. Out of a total of 13 senior management positions, four remain vacant and two are occupied by staff in acting roles, including the Principal and Deputy Principal/Chief Operating Officer.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The annual monitoring report for September 2017 concluded that the actions arising from the partial re-review of 2016, both in terms of good practice and recommendations, had overall been addressed satisfactorily but with some actions remaining to be fully embedded. These are discussed below - paragraphs, 5, 6 and 7.

4 The team reviewed documentary evidence in advance of the visit and were able to review additional documentary evidence during the visit where they also held meetings with staff and students.

5 Collectively, the elements of quality monitoring and reporting generate useful information at unit and School levels but are not currently used to provide an in-depth and evaluative review of individual programmes. The College has identified some quality issues and has begun to address them. For example, it has introduced social events and made links with charities to encourage students to identify with the College and its activities - a strategy intended to improve retention and progression.

6 The College monitors early withdrawal from its courses, using information from this to influence its student support mechanisms. The implementation of Individual Learning Plans to support students who may be at risk of early withdrawal or failure, continues to be extended more widely across the College and this, together with the deployment of Learning

Coaches, is a key strategy in its retention, progression and achievement strategy. Whilst it remains too early to judge the success of this strategy, students are very positive, valuing highly the individualised support provided by Learning Coaches.

7 A further development in the College's retention, progression and achievement strategy is its review of learning and teaching and the introduction of experiential learning approaches to pedagogy. Again, it is too early to measure the impact of these approaches but there is a clear commitment to develop relevant pedagogical and assessment strategies to meet the needs of learners who have been out of formal education for considerable lengths of time. Students value highly the care and concern that is given to them and appreciate the opportunities provided by the Student Council to raise and resolve issues.

8 The processes for recruitment, selection and admissions align with the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). An appeals process is available to students who wish to challenge entry decisions. Since the 2016 review, the College has formed an Admissions and Attendance Panel, its purpose being to ensure consistency in decision-making and shared understanding of policy between College senior managers and its parent organisation, Global University Systems (GUS). The separate responsibilities of the College and GUS are outlined in a document introduced in September 2017.

9 The admissions process has been strengthened in order to improve retention, progression and achievement through the implementation of a pre-sessional programme to improve students' readiness for study and the introduction of Individual Learning Plans. The Admissions and Attendance Panel has oversight of all admissions to and withdrawals from the College, ensuring that admissions decisions are fair and consistent and that withdrawals are monitored.

10 A dedicated Vocation Recruitment team manages the recruitment process, including the provision of advice and guidance to applicants. All prospective students are offered an advice and guidance session held at the College prior to application. Applicants who provide evidence that they meet the entry requirements are invited to attend an academic interview. Those who do not meet entry requirements undertake an entry test in reading and writing which is invigilated by the College's Department for Academic Learning and Enhancement team. This test is designed to ensure that students are sufficiently competent in English to be successful on their programmes. Non-standard and mature entrants must also demonstrate a minimum of two years' work experience. They will be invited to attend an academic interview if they pass the entry test. A new change in policy allows any applicant who fails the academic interview, but passes the reading and writing tests, to be considered by the Admissions and Attendance Panel for a second attempt at interview. Reasonable adjustments are made for those declaring disabilities.

11 A process is in place to ensure that all students are genuine in their desire to study and that they have the required level of English language to begin their programmes. All staff involved in the recruitment of students undertake training in order to fulfil the requirements of their role. An induction programme is in place to support students, most of whom have been out of education for some considerable time, in making the transition into academic study.

12 The College seeks to ensure its alignment with *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code through its Assessment Regulations. The College's recent review of learning and teaching has led to staff development on experiential approaches to pedagogy, including a review of assessment design and assessment briefs. Staff development has taken place to support staff in giving effective feedback and Experiential Teaching Practitioners employed to support staff in developing learning and teaching strategies that are relevant to the needs of the students.

13 Students are provided with regular formative assessment opportunities prior to the submission of summative assessment and the introduction of Individual Learning Plans enables early identification and tracking of students who need additional support. A coaching system is in place to work with these students in developing their academic skills and their self-confidence. All students are made aware of plagiarism and how to avoid it. Plagiarism detection software is used to check the originality of all work and plagiarism panels are held at school-level to deal with any student who is suspected of inappropriate academic practice. Processes are in place for internal verification and external verification is conducted by the College's awarding body which provides an annual report including an action plan. External examiners are appointed by the awarding body to review courses and provide feedback to College staff. The College website provides a summary of the Annual Monitoring Report.

14 Statistical data from 2015-2018 was provided as part of the College's documentary evidence and discussed during the staff meeting. Multiple admissions points continue to make analysis of data complex. However, the serious issues with retention identified in the last monitoring report show some improvement and two programmes with particularly low retention rates are currently being taught out. The most recent data demonstrates more consistency in retention rates across programmes, these ranging from 74 per cent to 95 per cent excluding those programmes which are being discontinued. It remains too early at this stage to comment on the full impact of the strategies introduced to improve retention because student cohorts have not yet completed their studies.

15 There is a great deal of inconsistency in achievement rates for those cohorts completing in 2018 where these range from eight per cent to 73 per cent with an overall average of 38 per cent, a statistic significantly adversely affected by the particularly low achievement in Hospitality Management. Whilst the College is actively pursuing strategies to improve achievement and completion outcomes, there is insufficient evidence at this point to demonstrate impact.

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

16 The College aligns its policies and procedures to the expectations of the Quality Code, acknowledging this as a key reference point in designing policy and procedure for maintaining academic standards and quality. Courses offered at the College are Pearson BTEC Higher National Awards, ensuring alignment to *The Framework for Higher National Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Lynn Fulford Reviewer, and Mr Alan Weale, QAA Officer, on 16 October 2018.

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