Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Tertiary Education Services Ltd trading as New College of the Humanities, February 2018

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 Tertiary Education Services Ltd trading as New College of the Humanities (the College) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision since the monitoring visit in February 2016.

2   Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2   The College offers undergraduate programmes validated by Southampton Solent University (SSU) together with delivering undergraduate degrees of the University of London International Programmes (ULIP). The programmes available cover a range of subjects in the humanities and the SSU programmes provide opportunities for students to broaden their knowledge and understanding through combined honours programmes. In May 2017, the College was successful in gaining approval from SSU for a portfolio of degree programmes in Law. Postgraduate programmes are validated by Swansea University and three additional programmes were approved in May 2017.

3   In February 2018, there were 162 full-time undergraduate students (23 on ULIP and 139 on SSU validated programmes) compared with 148 full-time undergraduate students (67 on ULIP and 81 on SSU validated programmes) in 2016-17. There are currently three full and three part-time postgraduate students enrolled on Swansea University validated programmes.

3   Findings from the monitoring visit

4   The College reported the successful completion of the action plan from the February 2015 Higher Education Review (Plus) in December 2016 and of the monitoring visit of February 2016. This monitoring visit report focuses on the actions identified in the College's Quality Enhancement Log. This log identifies the key actions from the College's internal monitoring process. The actions identified have been addressed and reasonable progress is being made on the aspects yet to be completed fully. These relate to the implementation of the revised governance structure; the rollout of the student 'super survey' in the Summer Term 2018; the installation and operation of the student information system; and the completion of the Academic Quality Framework (paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 9).

5   As part of its continuing development, the College identified the need to review its governance structure and the revised structure was approved by the Academic Board and Tertiary Education Services Limited Board in February 2017. The revised structure was implemented in September 2017 and presentations were made to staff and students together with supporting training activities and documentation to underpin the implementation process. Staff and students confirmed the steps taken to implement the revised governance structure; staff commented on the value of the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee (TLEC) in providing further opportunity to discuss teaching quality and the introduction of midpoint reviews. The revised governance structure is in its first cycle

and will be reviewed at the end of the current academic year and then on a three-year periodic review.

6   A review of the content and frequency of student surveys was undertaken by a working group, appointed by Academic Board in 2017, and it was recommended to and agreed by Academic Board to concentrate on providing one student survey in the Summer Term. Questions for the survey have been identified. Staff and students were aware of the rationale for the introduction of the single survey and the plans for its introduction. Plans are in place to build on the Annual Open Forum held in 2017 and staff and students spoke of the value of this opportunity to bring the College's community together to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern.

7   The College has also, as part of its continuing development, identified the need to research and resource a student information system to fully cover the student journey. An approved supplier has been identified and an implementation plan, overseen by the Chief Operating Officer, has been prepared for the installation and commissioning of the system in September 2018.

8   Progress has been made on the development of the Academic Quality Framework which sets out the College's procedures for the management of academic quality and standards in teaching and learning. The updated proposal document sets out the chapters of the framework and their current status. Chapter 4 Programme and Course Approval and Modifications and Chapter 10 Student Voice have been approved and other chapters drafted with the intention of this being completed in July 2018. The College has also brought together, on its website, a range of documents covering its activities under the umbrella of the Academic Handbook. Staff and students spoke positively about the value of this resource in providing readily available information.

9   The College has in place a range of policies overseen by the Academic Board that address selection and admission to Higher Education. In the last 18 months the processes have become more uniform across the faculties. The undergraduate Admissions Policy is intended to give guidance to applicants and staff on the College's procedures for admitting students to its programmes, and Heads of Faculty, academic interviewers and admissions staff have been trained in its use. The policy is comprehensive and provides clickable links to further information. Systems and processes are in place to ensure that an applicant has a genuine intention to study. The Head of Admissions oversees the process to ensure that all interviews have been conducted according to the criteria, and that interview outcomes show no signs of bias. All interviews are voice recorded. Standardised documentation is used to ensure consistency, and standard interview tasks appropriate to each Faculty are either set in advance of interview or carried out during the interview process.

10   Students confirmed that information provided by the College prior to enrolment was accurate. Students appreciated the support given in the admissions process, with a named member of staff as contact, and on arrival, there is an option of a buddy who is in the year above.

11   The College has in place systems to assess international applicants' prior qualifications. Applicant Assessment Forms include an item that pertains to the student's level of communication in English. International students who have never been taught in English have to provide evidence of having passed an English Test to prove that they reach the minimum English requirement, which is 7.0 in the IELTS, with a minimum of 6.5 in four components. Students requiring a Tier 4 student visa must provide a Secure English Language Test as required by the UKVI.

12   A database is used to record contact with applicants. There is an Admissions Feedback Policy that is used to support unsuccessful applicants. Students confirmed that

the change from ULIP to SSU had been explained to them and that some had chosen to remain with ULIP when SSU validation was introduced. Postgraduate applicants are considered by the Admissions Team and the Postgraduate Admissions Tutor. Numbers are currently low and most applicants are not interviewed.

13   The College undertakes internal and external annual monitoring reporting and the opportunity was taken, within the internal process, to reflect on the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy objectives. Heads of Faculty write both the College and SSU annual reports, including data from surveys and meetings at which students are present. The College complies with the requirements of its awarding bodies for the approval of courses.

14   Action planning takes place at Faculty level and is monitored by Academic Board. Within the revised governance structure, internal annual monitoring reports and action plans are now considered at TLEC before going to Academic Board, which provides effective oversight of programme review and enhancement. TLEC registers actions on the Annual Monitoring Report Action Plans from the faculties and carries out a midpoint review. TLEC also shares examples of good practice, such as the Economics Faculty's introduction of a handbook for faculty including information about how to carry out peer review and the English Faculty's creation of a document on how to write a good essay in that subject. Good practice is also disseminated through the peer review process, as well as informally and within regular events held by subject groupings. Improved library provision for History students was also the result of the annual monitoring process.

15   In 2016-17 the College took part in the National Student Survey (NSS) for the first time, and the Quality Team submitted a report to Academic Board drawing together all the student feedback, internal student satisfaction survey results and NSS results. There is one student representative for each subject cohort, and full training is provided. The student voice is also heard through student representation on Student-Staff Liaison Committee, termly meetings between the Student Union and management and at the Annual Open Forum. Levels of student engagement within deliberative committees have increased under the revised governance structure, due to student representation on the new TLEC as well as including student feedback as a standard agenda item at Faculty meetings. There is clear evidence that student concerns are acted upon; for example the meeting to address perceived issues with assessment deadlines. Students also lead 'Focus on' sessions around issues they identify, including those concerned with studying.

16   There is a range of cohort sizes for the programmes offered; where these are small, this impacts disproportionately on the statistics for retention and achievement. The average numbers of students initially enrolled on individual programmes over the three-year period for 2014-17 were nine, three, four respectively, and these figures reflect the wide range of major/minor options available. The average retention rates for the same period were 80, 78 and 87 per cent and average achievement rate for completing students was 85 per cent for 2014-15. The College identified in its data return the impact of internal transfers on the data presented and was able to provide detailed information on individual programme performance.

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

17   In 2017, the College received Qualifying Law Degree status from the Solicitors Regulatory Authority for its single honours and combined honours programme with Law as a major subject. The College is also active in its engagement with external organisations such as the Independent Higher Education Network and the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education, the latter organisation having been used as a reference point for the development of the Fitness to Study Policy. In addition to staff who have Higher

Education Academy recognition, four faculty heads are making application for Senior Fellow status.

18   The Head of Quality Assurance and their team are actively engaged with using the UK Quality Code for Higher Education as a reference point for the chapters in the Academic Quality Framework. Appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements are used in the development of programmes.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

19   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.

20   The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Helen King, Reviewer, and Mr Michael Ridout, Coordinator, on 7 February 2018.