



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Tertiary Education Services Ltd trading as New College of the Humanities, 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 Tertiary Education Services Ltd (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the February 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 In February 2019, there were 172 full-time undergraduate students, with 11 on University of London International Programmes (ULIP) and 161 on Solent University (Solent) validated programmes. There were also 13 postgraduate students on Swansea University (Swansea) validated programmes, three of whom are part-time. Students are taught by 55 staff, 28 of whom are full-time.

3 In November 2018, the College informed all external stakeholders of the change of ownership of Tertiary Education Services Limited (TESL). The shareholders and Northeastern University (NU) signed a sale purchase agreement where NU became the sole shareholder. The relationship with the degree-awarding bodies is not affected by the change in ownership of TESL. Degree-awarding bodies have been kept informed of the purchase negotiations as permitted by the commercial confidentiality agreement.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The review team considered a range of evidence, including strategic and programme documentation, information on the external website and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). The College has continued to build on its responses to the good practice identified in the February 2015 Higher Education Review (Plus) and to subsequent actions identified in the College's Quality Enhancement Log 2018. A meeting was held with senior, teaching and support staff to discuss progress made against the actions identified in the Quality Enhancement Log. The review team met a cross-section of students, drawn from different undergraduate programmes, cohorts and countries.

5 The College completed its Educational Oversight Action Plan by December 2016 (as noted in the 2016 and 2017 annual returns). A new Strategic Plan 2016-21 for the College had been developed following consultation with staff and students, and approved by the Tertiary Education Services Limited (TESL) Board in April 2017. The intention to apply for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) was included in the revised strategic plan. The College implemented a Quality Enhancement Log to carry forward institutional action planning, and to keep a record of enhancement activities across the College. The log was most recently updated in December 2018 and continues to be amended as matters arise.

6 A revised governance structure was implemented in September 2017, to rationalise the committee structure, provide clearer lines of communication and decision-making and increase student participation. Students were provided with copies of the old and new

structures to encourage feedback. The new governance structure was approved by Academic and TESL Boards in February 2017. A Fair Access and Participation Strategy Group (FAPSG) was added to the governance structure, reflecting the College's application to the Office for Students (OfS) for Approved (fee cap) registration and the requirement to have an approved Access and Participation Plan (APP).

7 Committee members were supported in their new roles, particularly in the use of new documentation templates and electronic storage of documents. A Committee Handbook was produced to support existing and new members of all committees. Students reported that the handbook provided very clear explanations of the new system. Training and continued support was provided for student representatives and staff in new roles. Posters were produced to explain the new structure to students.

8 The implementation of the new governance structure was monitored throughout its first six months of operation, and reviewed at the end of the academic year 2017-18. The College has an active system of student representation. Each faculty year has a student representative elected by peer groups. Student representatives attend a training meeting six weeks into the autumn term. The training is supported by information on the VLE and in the handbook and from ongoing staff support. Representatives attend faculty meetings and the Student Liaison Committee. One student representative from the Students' Union sits on the Academic Board; another student from the Students' Union sits on the Health and Safety Committee; and a student representative from each faculty sits on the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee. Representatives report back to the student body and track the outcome of meetings.

9 Despite the active engagement with its student representative system, the College continues to record low response rates to student surveys. In January 2017, a working party had been established to review the content and frequency of student surveys. Proposals were reported to the Academic Board in July 2018. A revised format for surveys was introduced in summer 2018, whereby academic quality and student experience issues were compiled into one 'super survey'. Completion rates remained low, despite the addition of a cash incentive. A further refinement was presented to the Academic Board in December 2018, with the intention to roll out amendments in summer 2019.

10 Students took part in the National Student Survey (NSS) for the first time in 2017, and a report was compiled combining these results and those of the internal student satisfaction survey. This was submitted to the Academic Board in December 2017. The report draft was shared with students for consultation, and the final report published for staff and on the student voice page on the VLE.

11 During 2018-19, an academic quality framework will be finalised. The intention of the framework is to serve maintenance of academic standards and embed enhancement into the workings of the College. Work was undertaken to benchmark the College against similar sized institutions. Following the approval of an index of chapters by the Academic Board in September 2017, 15 chapters of the academic quality framework have been produced.

12 The College has its own annual monitoring process, in addition to the procedures for its degree-awarding bodies - the Universities of Solent and Swansea. The College's process considers teaching, learning, assessment, student satisfaction, progression, assurance of standards and external examiner reports. The College's undergraduate monitoring template also asks the faculties to reflect on the objectives in the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Heads of Faculty are responsible for writing both the College and degree-awarding bodies' reports.

13 The College has a new framework for student recruitment and admission which was approved by the Academic Board in September 2018 and is published in the Academic

Handbook. All of the College's policies on admissions adhere to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and are published on the external website as well as in the Academic Handbook. These include an Admissions Complaints Policy and Procedure, Admission Feedback Policy, and a Tier 4 and International Students Admissions Policy and Procedure, December 2017.

14 The Academic Board retains oversight of admissions. An admissions review is held annually, and considers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes separately. No changes were deemed to be required in the review of June 2018. Entrance requirements, including those for international students and for English language, are reviewed regularly. English language competence is confirmed through interview. All undergraduate applicants are interviewed, whether in person or through a video link. All undergraduate interviews are recorded. All applicants complete an Applicant Assessment Form, which also contributes to assessing English language competency including articulacy. The interview forms a central part of the application process. The interview process is monitored for bias. Intention to study and commitment to the intended programme of study are assessed throughout the application process.

15 The College is highly responsive to the academic and welfare support of its students. All students have a personal tutor outside of their home faculty, and they meet with them routinely once per term and on demand if specific needs arise. The College is sensitive and responsive to health needs, including mental health issues. A mental health welfare group is also run by students.

16 The College's Assessment Policy defines the role, purpose and responsibilities of assessment. The College has rigorous entry requirements and high expectations of its students. Support is provided for academic writing and for examination preparation. Training in examination preparation is provided for both students and staff. All handbooks and policies relating to assessment are available on line. Students were very clear where to find the relevant policies and how to appeal an assessment decision. Details of assessments are provided on the College's virtual learning environment. Face-to-face guidance on examination preparation is provided by the student and academic services team. Assessments are submitted electronically through text matching software.

17 The College utilises both internal and external verification procedures. Coursework assessment briefs and examination papers are subject to internal peer review, intended to check the clarity of assessment criteria and relevance to intended learning outcomes. All undergraduate assessments are reviewed in addition by the link tutors from Solent University, with a final review undertaken by the appointed external examiner. Postgraduate assessments are sent simultaneously to the link tutor and the external examiner at Swansea University.

18 Penalties for academic malpractice are clearly set out at induction and in the Assessment Handbook.

19 Students meet with academic tutors for different courses on a one-to-one basis on alternate weeks. Essays are submitted to academic tutors, and initial feedback and guidance is provided on an individual basis. There is an opportunity to resubmit an essay following formative feedback. Written summative feedback is offered through a cover sheet for written assignments and through an examination report for examinations. Formative feedback is provided within one week, and written feedback within four weeks. Students confirmed that feedback provided was helpful and timely.

20 Results achieved by students are very high. The College monitors and benchmarks entry and achievement data tightly. Academic achievement on entry is high, and is comparable to highly selective universities in the UK. The College operates a one-to-one

tutorial system and external examiner reports confirm some outstanding work. Achievement data shows a steady state of about 80% of students achieving a first-class or upper-second degree since 2015. However, the percentage of first-class degrees achieved reached a high of 46% in 2018.

21 Students would welcome 24-hour access to learning resources, including greater access to online journals. Students have access to the on-site facilities of the central University of London library. The College has a section in the library which contains multiple copies of each core text. Students have access to digital book and journal resources through a licensing agreement with JSTOR, but some students cannot access this remotely, only on-site at the College.

22 With regard to recruitment, entry onto undergraduate programmes in 2018 is 84 students, compared to 74 students in 2017. This represents an increase of 21%. 10 students have been recruited onto the Swansea University postgraduate programmes. Art History has been offered as a major subject for the first time in 2018-19 with nine students taking this up. The recruitment to the MA Philosophy has remained the same, but the College has recruited to the MA Communicating Economic Policy and MA Historical Research and Public History for the first time, recruiting two and one students respectively. Law accounts for the highest number of students, with 18 new recruits, which is a three-fold increase from 2017.

23 With regard to retention and, in particular, withdrawals for the 2015-16 cohort, 15 out of 48 (31%) initially enrolled students withdrew from their programmes. This was, in part, to do with the late introduction of new major/minor degree programmes validated by Solent University. For the 2016-17 cohort, 6 out of 64 (9%) initially enrolled students withdrew from their programmes. For the 2017-18 cohort, 11 out of 72 (15%) initially enrolled students withdrew from their programmes.

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

24 The College has produced a very detailed mapping instrument for the revised Quality Code which refers comprehensively to external reference points considered. The Policy and Compliance Committee regularly reviews the alignment of academic regulations, policies and procedures within the Academic Quality Framework to the Quality Code and other relevant external reference points. The revised Quality Code has been mapped to current policies and procedures.

25 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) *Good Practice Framework: Disciplinary Procedures* has informed a full revision of the College's Code of Conduct. Other sectoral good practice is benchmarked. Student Fitness to Study has been revised by the Student Wellbeing Coordinator in conjunction with AMOSSHE (the Student Services Organisation). The new Support to Study Policy was approved at Academic Board in December 2018.

26 Staff attend networking and training events organised by Independent Higher Education (IHE), GuildHE, OfS, QAA and the Home Office.

Background to the monitoring visit

27 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.

28 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Helen Corkill, Reviewer, and Ian Welch, QAA Officer, on 7 February 2019.

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