



# Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements: monitoring report of USW Pathway College, October 2023

## Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that USW Pathway College (the College) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the October 2022 [Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements review](#).

## Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been no material changes since the full Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements (EOEA) review in 2022. Student numbers have risen by 30% during the second year of operation to a total of 96, from 74 students in 2022. Students enrolled on the International Foundation Programme (IFP) account for 90% of the provision. The College operates on a modular framework and pathways share common modules which allows for the efficient management of relatively small student numbers. The introduction of an Applied Science pathway is expected to allow for continued growth, increasing the opportunities available to students. Growth in student numbers has increased diversity in terms of gender, country of origin and subject choice of study.

3 There have been no significant changes to the staffing structure since 2022, although there have been a number of changes in staffing during the three academic cycles since the College was formed. Staffing at the College has grown from 5 FTE to 6.5 FTE and has seen developments including the introduction of a Learning Coach appointed to support student progression and retention. The increase in student numbers has also allowed more staff to be appointed, contributing to the overall small rise in staff numbers.

## Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The monitoring team studied the Annual Monitoring Return, and the Action Plan, together with the supporting evidence submitted by the College, and concludes that the College has continued to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the EOEA review of 2022. The College continues to work in close partnership with the University of South Wales (the University) and QA Higher Education (QAHE).

5 The College has continued to develop the two areas of good practice identified by the previous review (paragraph 6). The College has clearly demonstrated how the findings from the review report of 2022 have been actioned. The evidence contains a full action plan of issues identified. Actions taken have been audited through the College's quality assurance processes and there is clear evidence of consideration through the governance system, which has overseen their journey to implementation (paragraphs 7 to 10).

6 The areas of good practice have been further evidenced with developments in the effective use of peer observation of teaching as an opportunity for sharing good practice

between English for Academic Purposes tutors and subject-specialist staff. Actions have included the introduction of progression events and a proposed awards ceremony to be initiated in 2024. Students continue to be well integrated within the wider university environment and the Progression Event, which includes staff from QAHE and the University. Classes are often scheduled in locations where students' potential progression degrees are taught. Developments related to good practice from the 2022 review are not explicitly evidenced in the Action Plan and further refinement and work on this would be advisable.

7 All six desirable recommendations have been fully considered and actions are reflected in the action plan produced following the review. Actions have been put in place and mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives to improve student retention and the use of data. These actions include consideration through the internal governance processes. There have been changes in the recruitment of students and the introduction of an experienced Learning Coach has resulted in a positive impact on the reduction of student withdrawals for non-engagement. Extra intervention has been introduced to support, where required, financial processes necessary to enable payment of fees. Retention factors have been considered at the Student Route Compliance Group and through discussion at the Pathway College Board. However, the annual return and Action Plan provides limited detailed evidence of how the strategies have been systematically reviewed or evaluated.

8 Good progress has been made in introducing a programme of e-safety training for students as part of the induction process and through the Student Assemblies. Students are provided with access to the University's *Getting Ready to Learn* online course which includes a section on e-safety. As part of the Induction programme, students are signposted and provided with access to the e-safety training materials. The Welcome Pack for students has been revised to include information on the meet and greet system for student arrivals in the UK. An agent survey is now being undertaken to supplement the views of students in understanding the various processes leading up to enrolment. The student entry survey elicited a limited number of responses and the College is now taking action to encourage further participation through induction sessions and revising the survey form, and through undertaking the survey in class sessions.

9 There is now a programme of training for Student Representatives which takes place under the auspices of the University Students' Union, working collaboratively with the College. Engagement with student representatives has increased, and further training is planned for November 2023 and February 2024. Training has underpinned the requirements of the role and demonstrated the importance of providing student feedback and participation. Although training is evident and information exists in explaining the processes of representation in various handbooks, there appears not to be any manual for student reps to take away and reference to expedite their duties during the course of the academic cycle.

10 Students' awareness of academic policies has been enhanced through a section added to the student handbook specifically referencing the Student Complaints, Academic Appeals and Sickness Absence procedures, and where to find guidance on the processes. Policies are also highlighted during induction and are available on the student website. The Learning Coach is also able to signpost students to the policies. Planned enhancement activities scheduled for 2023-24 include further embedding policy awareness in induction activities, and to develop peer interactions.

11 In 2021-22, 13 students (38%) who enrolled passed the International Foundation Pathway programme and were eligible for progression. In 2022-23, 36 students (72%) are expected to pass and progress onto the University; this represents an improvement of 34%. 94% of students passed the programme in the Applied Science, Creative and Sports Science pathways.

12 In 2022, 72% of students passed the programme - an increase of 44% on 2021. The pass to completion rate in October 2022 was 92% - an increase from 72% - with 100% achievement in Science, Creative and Sports Science; while Computing and Engineering achievement are 92% and 86% respectively.

13 Students from the 2021-22 International Foundation Pathway (IFP) courses have progressed onto a wide range of courses within the University. These include 60% of IFP Computer Science students progressing onto BSc Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence with Computer Science, and 57% of the IFP Engineering cohort onto BEng Aeronautical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering courses.

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

14 The College uses its close engagement with the requirements of the University and QAHE to ensure there is appropriate scrutiny of provision. There are comprehensive governance arrangements, including the annual monitoring process, which provides effective oversight to ensure engagement with the requirements of UK higher education. The QAA annual monitoring activity continues to be one of the College's key mechanisms to benchmark their work against external reference points.

15 The British Council undertook an inspection of QA Higher Education in March 2023. The outcome was to recommend continued accreditation. Overall, the report stated that the QAHE met the standards of the Accreditation Scheme with one recommendation, and five areas where further improvement could be made. Actions that have been taken include: enhancing the safeguarding training process; the Academic Integrity Charter and procedures for teacher status; and including qualifications in job specifications.

16 Following the publication of the QAA Characteristics Statement for International Pathway Courses in October 2022, the University's Quality and Academic Services department undertook a mapping exercise against the USW Pathway College International Pathway Courses (IPCs). This provides assurance to the Partnership Quality Sub-committee that the University is aligned with guidance on the distinctive features and structure of such courses as stipulated in the Characteristics Statement.

17 The University signed up to the QAA Academic Integrity Charter in June 2021 and undertook an initial mapping exercise in May 2022. Further work is being undertaken to prioritise the recommendations and to consider how the work is aligned to other quality assurance activity.

18 The Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) was established to ensure alignment to the principles set out in the Academic Integrity Charter. It identifies sector good practice and recommends enhancements to University Regulations and Procedures. The AIC also supports strategies for ensuring the consistency of approaches to academic misconduct and provide guidance to empower the student body to engage with upholding the importance academic integrity.

19 External oversight of academic standards and quality procedures remain under the direction of the College's Academic Board, in partnership with the University and QAHE. This board provides the necessary mechanisms to set, maintain and secure standards, and assure the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment, and ensure the student experience is enhanced.

20 The College's Annual Return does not refer explicitly to the Quality Code for Higher Education. However, the College has produced a summary demonstrating how it engages

with the intentions of the Quality Code's Core practices through reference in other documentation including the University's paper which provides specific areas of alignment.

## **Background to the desk-based analysis**

21 The desk-based analysis 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

22 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Professor Paul McDermott, Reviewer, and Simon Ives, QAA Officer, in October 2023. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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