



USW Pathway College Limited

Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements

October 2022

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at USW Pathway College Limited. The review took place on 6 October 2022 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Professor Graham Romp
- Dr Sandra Summers (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner
- make judgements on the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 1. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. More information about this review method can be found in the [Handbook for providers](#).

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at USW Pathway College Limited (the College), both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the review visit. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgement about USW Pathway College Limited.

- **Confidence** can be placed in USW Pathway College Limited's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.
- **Confidence** can be placed in USW Pathway College Limited's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at USW Pathway College Limited.

- 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.
- The extensive integration of pathway college students within the wider university environment.

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to USW Pathway College Limited.

It is **desirable** for the provider to:

- introduce a programme of e-safety training for students as part of the induction process
- raise student awareness of the existing policies on complaints, appeals and sickness absence
- provide a programme of training for student representatives
- introduce a systematic on-entry survey of the student experience of recruitment, admission and induction to provide timely data to inform the continuous monitoring process
- improve the quality and content of the welcome information pack, including details of the student meet and greet scheme
- put in place mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives in place to improve student retention.

About USW Pathway College Limited

The USW Pathway College is a limited company established through a Joint Venture between the University of South Wales (the University) and QA Higher Education (QAHE). The College was established in April 2021 for the purposes of providing a fully embedded on-campus delivery of pathway programmes to students, supported by online and blended learning in accordance with UKVI requirements for an embedded pathway college.

The College delivers an International Foundation Programme at Level 3 which operates as a bridging programme to over 80 degrees across the University's three faculties, and an International Year One Business programme at Level 4. The Level 4 programme operates both as a bridging programme and as an equivalent to Year 1 of the University's degree programme and guarantees successful student progression to Level 5 of four BA (Hons) business programmes: Business and Management; Human Resource Management; Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain Management; and Marketing Management.

The joint venture with QAHE aligns with the University's vision which is to *change lives and our world for a better tomorrow*. The University has a long history of enabling access to higher education to those from underrepresented backgrounds. The USW 2030 Strategy and USW Internationalisation 2030 Strategy aim to increase the University's global reach, create opportunities to widen students' horizons through mobility, and grow its overseas recruitment. The programmes offered through the USW Pathway College provide opportunities for international students who do not have the qualifications for immediate entry onto degree programmes to develop their English language, academic and study skills to enable them to progress onto an undergraduate programme of study.

The University of South Wales in recent years has made significant progress towards achieving its strategic goal of increasing the number of undergraduate students studying at its campuses. The partnership with QAHE provides an opportunity to further achieve this goal through utilising established experience in teaching international students.

The strategy and vision of both the University of South Wales and QAHE is to create a supportive learning and experiential environment that allows students who would not normally have the opportunity, to be accepted into university. By working collaboratively, a portfolio of programmes has been validated which prepare international students - academically and linguistically - to successfully transition to undergraduate degrees. The creation of an embedded college at the University's Treforest Campus provides an integrated approach to student support by focusing on the individual academic and pastoral needs of students.

The USW Pathway College sits within an established portfolio of three other QAHE Pathways at Northumbria University, University of Roehampton and Solent University. QAHE's experience of embedded pathways has helped to inform the development of the USW Pathway College.

In the first year of operation, the College had 72 students enrolled on two programmes of study - the International Foundation programme and the International Year 1 Business. There are two student intakes per year in October and January, and all programmes are delivered within one academic year. All of the awards of the College are granted by the University of South Wales who maintain ultimate oversight and responsibility for the setting of academic standards.

Detailed findings about USW Pathway College Limited

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The College has effective processes for maintaining academic standards which are overseen by both QAHE and the University. The College delivers an International Foundation Programme at Level 3 which operates as a bridging programme to over 80 degrees across the University's three faculties and an International Year 1 Business programme at Level 4. The College has adopted the University's regulations and its awards are conferred by the University which maintains ultimate responsibility for academic standards.

1.2 Collaborative arrangements between the University and the College were approved in accordance with requirements specified in the University's Partnerships Manual. The University's Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for signing off partnership approvals following recommendations from its Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). Following successful partnership approval, college programmes are then considered and approved in line with the University's Quality Manual. At this stage, course and module specifications are approved that specify the level and credits associated with each award/module to ensure they align with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)* and *Credit Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)*, and relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. Course learning outcomes are mapped to modules within the course specification. The International Year 1 Business subject modules are aligned to the Level 4 learning outcomes of the degrees and the equivalent Level 4 modules.

1.3 All the University's partners, including the USW Pathway College, adopt the University's standard quality assurance policies and procedures as laid out in its Quality Manual. The College has developed its own Quality Framework that incorporates relevant aspects of the University Quality Manual, the University Partnership Manual and the University Regulations for Taught Courses.

1.4 The University monitors academic standards at the College through a combination of its standard academic governance structures applicable to university-delivered programmes and those offered at partner colleges. University oversight of academic standards and quality has been delegated by the University Board of Governors to Academic Board. Academic Board receives and monitors summary reports of partnership activity relating to continuous monitoring, external examiner reports and the Partnerships Register.

1.5 To enable more detailed scrutiny, the University's Quality Assurance Committee has delegated authority for oversight for taught programmes, including those delivered at the College. This committee receives reports from both Faculty Quality Assurance Committees (FQAC) and the University Partnership Quality Sub-Committee, responsible for the oversight of collaborative provision. During the first year of operation, reports on the College were considered by each of the three FQACs and actions identified. It was subsequently agreed that, to enhance communication and the timeliness of action, the Faculty of Business and Creative Industries would take ownership of the College programmes and monitor them from a quality perspective at the faculty level.

1.6 At college level, a Company Board has been established to oversee policy and management decisions. A Pathway Partnership Oversight Group reports into the Company Board and exercises management oversight including responsibility for performance management, portfolio enhancement, corporate matters and operational considerations.

Two groups report into the Oversight Group and are responsible for operational oversight: the Pathway Academic Oversight Group and the Pathway Operations Group. The Pathway Academic Oversight Group receives and considers pathway manager update reports, link officer reports, outcomes of assessment boards and external examiner reports, and monitors actions from continuous monitoring for all programmes. Membership of the Board and associated groups consist of both QAHE and university representatives. In the first year of operations, the Company Board was closely involved in more of the detailed strategic and operational aspects of the College. At the time of the review visit, the Pathway Partnership Oversight Group has not met as regularly as anticipated.

1.7 The combination of a thorough quality assurance governance structure and processes at the University, with appropriate management oversight within the College, ensures that academic standards are effectively maintained and monitored.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.8 The Board of Governors of the University is ultimately responsible for academic standards of awards as required by the HEFCW Quality Assessment Framework. The alignment of College programmes with the FHEQ and the CQFW is secured through the University's programme approval and modification processes through which modules, programmes and awards are mapped to these frameworks.

1.9 The University, primarily through Academic Registry, liaises closely with sector bodies, particularly the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), QAA and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), to maintain awareness of requirements, codes of practice and guidance. The University regularly conducts reviews to ensure its policies and procedures align fully with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

1.10 The Director of Pathways for QAHE oversees each of its Pathway Centres and is responsible for ensuring all academic management and operations are aligned to required university and compliance regulations. QAHE has established a Pathway Board, a planning, review and advisory body of representatives from all departments across QAHE which is responsible for managing the academic quality, teaching and learning, and success of all of the QAHE pathway centres. Additionally, QAHE is accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC) and the British Council. English language standards are mapped to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

1.11 Key external reference points are fully embedded within the University's policies and procedures which have been adopted by the College and embedded in practice. This process ensures that external reference points are used effectively to support the management of academic standards at the College. However, college staff demonstrated limited specific knowledge of certain external reference points although this understanding is being further embedded.

How effectively does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?

1.12 The College uses external examiners, verification and assessment effectively to assure academic standards. Programmes delivered by the College are subject to oversight and scrutiny by external examiners. The College follows the University's policies and procedures for the appointment and use of external examiners as specified in the University's Quality Manual and External Examiner Handbook. External examiners are

appointed by the University, attend Assessment Boards and submit an annual written report to the University that is distributed to the College. Appropriate actions are put in place and responses made to examiner reports.

1.13 Assessments are initially designed by teaching staff and subsequently approved for use by the University link officer and the external examiner. Summative assessments are first marked and moderated by teaching staff within the College. The moderation sample is then sent to the University link officer to ensure assessments have been marked in line with the approved learning outcomes prior to scripts being sent to the external examiner for review. Assessment marks are formally considered and approved at module and programme assessment boards constituted by the University.

1.14 The College is required to engage in the University's continuous monitoring process. This engagement enables the University to confirm that academic standards are being met for its awards and to monitor the quality of the student learning experience. This process involves the College producing and maintaining a rolling report and action plan at course level. Monitoring reports are monitored by FQACs, and the University committee structure also considers a Partner Overview Report and summary report which takes a holistic view of all university collaborative provision. This report is prepared by the Head of Quality and Academic Services.

1.15 External examiner and link officer reports are considered and responded to within the continuous monitoring process. In some of the external examiner reports considered by the review team there is little explicit comment on college programmes. Examiner reports cover a large number of modules delivered both within the University and across multiple partners. The review team was informed that both the workload, and potentially the external examiner report template, is under review. This is intended to ensure that external examiner feedback provides more specific commentary on programmes delivered at the College and on student achievement.

1.16 Through the use of internal and external moderation, external examiner oversight, and university monitoring and review processes, the College is able to effectively assure the maintenance and management of academic standards.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in USW Pathway College Limited's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 The College shares responsibility for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities with the University. The operational and day-to-day responsibility for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities lies with the College. The College fulfils these responsibilities to a large extent by adhering to the partnership agreement, and working actively within the range of management mechanisms which guide the partnership. This provides an effective basis for the management of learning opportunities. Quality assurance requirements and processes are detailed in the USW Quality Manual and the USW Partnerships Manual. Resourcing requirements are considered

at course proposal and programme validation stages, and are included in the USW Partnerships Manual.

2.2 An effective governance structure ensures oversight of the partnership provision. The USW Pathway College Company Board brings together senior management from both USW and QAHE, and includes both the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University and the CEO of QAHE. The Pathway Academic Oversight Group and the Pathway Operations Group report to the Pathway Partnership Oversight Group and provide effective oversight. This structure allows responsibilities for management and enhancement to be considered at different levels. One of the main strengths of the partnership is seen as the extensive collaboration between the USW and QAHE where frequent opportunities are presented to raise and address issues as they arise. This activity has been particularly effective during the first year of the new partnership.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

2.3 The College, in partnership with USW and QAHE, has a robust frame of reference through which to manage and enhance learning opportunities. The USW Partnerships Manual is a key document for the College, and sets out very clearly the external and internal reference points necessary for managing learning opportunities. Additionally, the QAHE-USW Partnership Management Handbook provides another reference point which sets out the operational details of the partnership, through which enhancement of learning opportunities can be introduced and developed systematically.

2.4 All the programmes at the College are awarded by the University, and the College adheres to all regulations and quality processes associated with the University's awards. Through the USW academic regulations and quality framework, the College works with all the requisite national frameworks including HEFCW's Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), CQFW, FHEQ and the Quality Code. USW's system of programme proposal and approval is based on all these frameworks, which guide the management and enhancement of learning opportunities at the College effectively.

2.5 In addition, the College utilises the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as external reference points for the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). External examiners confirm a comparison of standards achieved in the College with similar higher education programmes elsewhere.

2.6 The USW quality framework is mapped to the Quality Code and the Core and Common practices are embedded throughout the relevant policies and procedures of the University. The USW Partnerships Manual and university validation processes reflect the expectations of the external reference points and these have been central to the development of the College and its programmes. QAHE and the University work closely with business-focused professional bodies to accredit programmes, and adherence to the Quality Code is important for these processes. However, individual staff at the College as yet have limited explicit engagement with the Quality Code although staff development activity is planned.

2.7 QAHE and the University have shared responsibility for student admissions. QAHE is responsible for recruiting students to the College, in accordance with the University's published academic and country-specific requirements for each programme and the English language entry criteria. All students complete a personal statement, intended to help assess intention to study. Depending on geographical origin, some students are also interviewed for compliance reasons, adhering to UKVI Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)

requirements. The University Admissions Department undertakes a final check on application documentation and eligibility to enrol and issues the CAS.

2.8 QAHE makes significant use of recruitment agents in order to maximise student recruitment. A higher proportion of college students utilise an agent in comparison to the University's main body of international applicants. QAHE recruits, contracts, trains and updates agents, and a manager is responsible for ensuring contractual compliance. QAHE also monitors the quality of the approach and services provided by the agents, including conversion and withdrawal rates. Students met by the team and those who responded to the USW Students' Union student submission questionnaire are happy with the help they had received from agents.

2.9 All USW students complete a survey, which includes questions about admission and arrival. However, these surveys are often not undertaken until much later in the first year of study and the surveys are not specifically focused on the experiences of college students.

2.10 There is a lack of clarity about whether the College routinely surveys its students about their experiences of the recruitment, application, admission, arrival and induction processes - including their experiences of being recruited through international regional agents. The College indicated that it had conducted on-entry surveys for the two student cohorts in 2020-21. However, the data and information was not available at the time of the review as it had not yet been analysed, and it was not clear how this would be used to make improvements to the process. The review team considers it **desirable** that a systematic on-entry survey of the student experience of recruitment, admission and induction be put in place, providing timely data to inform the continuous monitoring process.

2.11 The College adopts the University's regulations and procedures on complaints, academic misconduct and academic appeals. These are aligned to the Core and Common practices of the Quality Code. The College is identified as the first point of contact for any complaint or academic appeal from its students. Students are aware of informal means of raising a complaint, including approaching the course leader or student representative. However, they were unaware of the possibility of raising a formal complaint or an academic appeal, and also unaware of the University's policies for complaints and appeals. The policies are available on the student regulations' website, and linked to the course handbook. However, neither of these policies is explicitly discussed with students in the College's induction process.

2.12 Students are confused by the College's processes for sickness absence, the necessity to obtain a medical certificate and the implications of absence through ill-health for their study visa. Inability to obtain a sick note had resulted in students attending classes while unwell as they had been unable either to contact a doctor in person or to obtain medical certification for absence. Students had raised complaints about having unwell students attending classes. The review team considers it is **desirable** for the College to raise student awareness, including during induction, of the existing policies for complaints, appeals and sickness absence.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.13 The College has robust mechanisms in place for reviewing the quality of teaching and learning which are supported by its adherence to the University's quality framework. The principal review procedure is the cycle of continuous monitoring of programmes. The cycle is informed by a variety of sources, including reports from link officers and external examiners, management and peer observations of teaching, and module feedback from students.

2.14 There are regular meetings with subject teams from the University and with link officers who produce a subject-based annual report. External examiners confirm standards achieved at the College are comparable with similar higher education programmes elsewhere. External examiner reports are considered, responded to and actioned through module reviews within the continuous monitoring process. Students complete end-of-module surveys, the outcomes of which are reported within the continuous monitoring process and may inform minor modifications and enhancements to courses.

2.15 The College is responsive to student feedback - for example, students reporting that there was too much repetition of material in some of the modules - and action is being taken to address this. Programme development has been enhanced through increasing interactivity and participation, with a greater emphasis being placed on digital and study skills development. Student feedback has encouraged the College to identify the need to enhance its induction programme. The College has put in place measures, including extending induction through student assemblies in the weeks immediately following induction week. The assemblies are intended to embed induction themes and to support students arriving in the UK after the start of term. Students stated that the pre-arrival online induction session had been well-received, including meeting the staff online, and that the in-person induction week sessions had been useful.

2.16 QAHE has responsibility for the selection of teaching staff and the University approves their appointment. New staff have a teaching observation within their probationary first six months at the College. All teaching staff undergo a thorough management observation at least annually, using British Council methodology as an external reference point. From these observations, each tutor is provided with two or three action points to develop their teaching style. Peer observation is organised among colleagues on an informal basis, often across disciplines, and involves feedback through a post-observation discussion and peer reflection.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.17 All staff are required to submit an application for Recognised Teacher Status (RTS). If this is not met, new staff are matched with existing staff acting as a mentor. Subject module tutors are required to have at least a master's-level qualification in the relevant subject along with teaching experience. English language teachers are required to have a specialist qualification. Language tutors have often worked internationally and one had experience as an international student.

2.18 The College is managed by a full-time head who is a DELTA-qualified (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) language teacher, supported by a similarly qualified programme leader. These staff work closely with the established network of university link officers who act as points of contact for college staff. Link officers are identified at the point of programme approval. They play a critical role in establishing effective communication channels, providing support to the pathway staff to engage with the quality processes - such as those related to assessment and moderation - and work to aid student progression. There are currently three full-time and five part-time staff teaching language and subject modules.

2.19 The College enhances the quality of teaching and learning through a variety of mechanisms. These include engagement with other QAHE pathway colleges and associated conferences, module review meetings, meetings with university departments, and through formal monthly working groups on teaching and learning. Staff have attended development events - both internally and externally - including a QAHE pathway conference attended by all college staff. The College encourages staff to take up external opportunities for

pedagogic development, whether through QAHE conferences, Advance HE or events at other universities. Staff development is offered by USW, including through the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) and through an annual learning and teaching conference. College staff were not fully aware of these activities and stated that they had not yet engaged with the staff development opportunities at the University. The College has identified the need to further publicise and raise awareness of staff development opportunities within the University as an intended enhancement for the current academic year.

2.20 Staff are encouraged to work towards fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Currently, two staff members have attained this status.

2.21 A programme of peer observation takes place among teaching staff. These development activities are less formalised than management observations but still involve a post-observation discussion. Peer observations are considered a vital opportunity to identify and disseminate collective teaching knowledge and the different experiences of staff, and to share good practice. Peer reflection templates have been created to support this process, and teachers collectively develop action points from the observation.

2.22 As a result of the formal teaching observation programme, it was identified that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers and pathway subject teachers demonstrated different skills and teaching styles. As a result, efforts have been made to encourage peer observations, particularly between EAP and pathway tutors. 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 is **good practice**.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that students are appropriately and effectively supported?

2.23 QAHE is responsible for recruiting students onto the programmes in accordance with academic entry criteria. International recruitment agents are trained by QAHE's staff and kept updated through email, telephone calls, virtual meetings and at training days. The University is responsible for issuing the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) authorisation. The Student Submission identifies concerns about the demographics of the student population and about possible delays in obtaining the CAS. Students commented that they found recruitment processes swift and straightforward. However, they stated that CAS notification was more problematic and letters were provided late. Students stated that the College had kept them informed by email and frequent communications so they felt ready for study.

2.24 Induction week allows students to become familiarised with university services and with college staff. Sessions are run with staff from university support teams, as well as several sessions run by the Head of the USW Pathway College and Programme Leader. This process is effective in allowing students to receive information about the programme, as well as clarifying any questions that they have. However, many students had not arrived by the start of induction week. Students were pleased that online sessions were provided before they arrived. However, there were some concerns raised by students about the induction programme regarding the volume, accessibility and timing of the information provided. Changes have been made for the new intake with induction taking place on campus and changes to the timing of providing information. Additionally, the newly-appointed Learning Coach will have responsibility for supporting students and ensuring they are ready for academic study.

2.25 Information about the support the students received on arrival in the UK is conflicting. Staff stated that students were told they could be met at London Heathrow

Airport and provided with information on how to get to the College. However, students reported having problems at the airport, with no information provided, late night arrivals and some concerns about personal safety.

2.26 The arrivals and welcome information for the 2021 intake informed students of the need to plan their travel but did not provide sufficient guidance. Supplementary information informed students that the Internal Student Advice (ISA) service would support them with setting up bank accounts, finding a doctor or religious centre and with visa advice. However, it does not specifically provide support for arrival in the UK. The welcome pack has since been updated for the 2022 arrivals. This information pack mentions 'meet and greet' arrangements for those arriving at Cardiff Airport, but not at Heathrow Airport, where the bulk of new students arrive. College staff clarified that this facility was available although students were not consistently aware of this option. The review team considers it is **desirable** for the College to improve the quality and content of the welcome information pack to include comprehensive information on the meet and greet scheme.

2.27 Students stated that there is no specific training or information provided on e-safety on arrival in the UK, although there are broad references to online safety in some modules of study. College staff stated that some modules cover information security although not all students take those modules. Additionally, some information on e-safety has more recently been made accessible on the virtual learning environment (VLE). However, students confirmed that they had not received any specific training and would welcome it as two of them had been the target of potential scams. The review team considers it is **desirable** for the College to introduce a programme of e-safety training for students as part of the induction process.

2.28 All students are introduced to university support services and facilities during induction week. However, as the College confirms in its self-evaluation, support services have not been as well-utilised by students as anticipated, although plans are in place to increase student awareness of these mechanisms. In order to encourage and enable students to participate further, a Learning Coach has been appointed to provide more pastoral support as well as tailoring advice and workshops specifically for college students. This staff member will be a primary contact for student support and be able to run both group and individual sessions to meet student needs and boost student engagement. Additionally, each student has a designated teacher, who provides two individual tutorials per term.

2.29 The International Year 1 programme has more contact teaching hours than Level 4 students at the University in order to enhance academic study skills and English language fluency. Programmes encourage a specific focus on the development of group working and team building together with skills targeted at future employability. Developing these team skills had been problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of remote online learning. However, with the return of on-campus teaching these skills will be embedded further in delivery. Support from the University Study Skills team will be available in 2022-23 academic year for students at the College. More pastoral support will also be provided to students by linking with the International Challenge Programme run by the International and Immigration Student Advice team.

2.30 Each programme supports a period of settling in upon students' arrival in the UK and during their start at the College. Following this initial induction period, the College focuses on the acculturation of international students within UK society and in particular guides them in the expectations of the UK higher education environment. This is achieved through a combination of careful curriculum design, the intensity of teaching hours, embedded academic tutorials, task-based learning, assessment strategies and a study skills module. Together, these approaches help provide appropriate and effective academic support for students. Programmes are designed to specifically develop linguistic

competence, with a focus on the use of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These elements sit alongside the development of core academic skills and subject-specific pathway knowledge.

2.31 Students feel well supported in completing their assessments. Information is provided in a timely manner with supporting materials available through the VLE. Tutors are effective in providing helpful support, further clarification and guidance. Feedback provided on assessments is timely and helpful. However, some students stated there is an element of repetition in their English language studies and they would prefer greater focus on their subject specialism.

2.32 Student withdrawal rates were higher than anticipated during the first year of delivery. During 2021-22, the College's target pass rate of 85% was not achieved. The International Year 1 Programme had intakes totalling 12 students of whom 10 completed - eight passed first time and two undertook resits. The International Foundation Programme had intakes totalling 60 students of whom 26 were withdrawn - 24 of them for lack of engagement. The majority of students who failed to complete the programme came from a single geographical region in Bangladesh, although they had been recruited by multiple agents. Acceptance of students from the identified region has now been capped while a full review is concluded. Further training and development for recruitment agents has also been put in place ensuring the accuracy of information given to prospective students.

2.33 The College works closely with University's Compliance department to ensure the UKVI's regulations are followed. UKVI's rules clearly state, if attendance falls below 70% in three consecutive months, sponsorship must be withdrawn, which was the case for the majority of the students who withdrew. Other students were placed on Attendance Action Plans but did not fulfil the requirements to remain on the programme.

2.34 The USW College Board reacted quickly to this situation, and in May 2022 produced a report and put in place an action plan. Owing to continuing monitoring and ongoing concern, in August 2022 the Board requested a further report, including progression and benchmarking data and examples of good practice drawn from other pathway colleges.

2.35 Strategies have subsequently been put in place to try to minimise withdrawals and improve progression rates. These activities include improved recruitment checks, face-to-face interviews with students shortly after arrival, and additional support for students. A dedicated learning coach was appointed in August 2022, intended to boost student engagement and to help identify higher risk students. The effectiveness of this role in supporting retention is yet to be evaluated. Joint meetings between the University compliance manager and the College management now take place every three weeks. These meetings help identify students at risk due to poor attendance or engagement, and to offer targeted support.

2.36 The College has also considered that factors other than recruitment methods and lack of intention to study may have contributed to retention issues. Students had noted concern over the lack of gender diversity in the initial intakes, and the current 2022-23 cohort also remains male dominated. The student submission queries whether the way in which the College was marketed and the extensive use of recruitment agents, contributed to this lack of gender diversity. The College has introduced new programmes in Applied Science and Creative Industries to try to address gender diversity. Work is also underway to consider extending the age range downwards to include under 18s and to increase the number of sponsorships offered. The review team considers it is **desirable** that the College puts in place mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives to improve student retention.

2.37 Students are involved in the quality assurance and enhancement of the programmes and there are two main ways for student to provide feedback. Feedback

occurs through student representative meetings and, for individual modules, through an electronic feedback system built into every module page on the VLE. Student feedback is welcomed and acted upon where possible. Some changes had been made to modules as a result of student feedback. The student representatives stated that they were able and encouraged to provide feedback, actions were taken as a result, and responses were generally received from staff at the College.

2.38 Student involvement in quality assurance and governance processes is through attendance at relevant boards and committees, although attendance has been variable. There is a student member - SU Education Officer - on the Pathways Academic Oversight Group and it is intended to include a student member on the Partnership Group. Feedback and engagement with the student body is provided primarily through the student representation scheme. Student representatives nominate themselves for the role within their cohort and there is at least one student representative for each programme of study reflecting the mixed profile of nationalities. Student representatives meet on a monthly basis, and then respond to their fellow students following discussions with staff.

2.39 The Student Charter confirms that student representatives will be trained and this process is in operation for university representatives. The College's self-evaluation states that student representatives are trained by College staff. However, staff and students confirmed that formal training had not taken place with the first cohort. It is the College's intention to work with the USW Students' Union to integrate the scheme more closely with university arrangements and for formal training to be provided. Additionally, the College intends to review the meetings with student representatives to align them with the Student Staff Liaison Groups to allow greater engagement. The review team considers it is **desirable** for the College to provide a programme of training for student representatives.

How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible and sufficient to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?

2.40 The Partnership Agreement 2021-22 sets out the collaborative arrangements between the University and the College. This agreement confirms that college students are full members of the University and have access to the full range of university services, including learning resources, welfare, IT support and facilities, and libraries. Students are introduced to the University's services and resources at induction, although there are plans to amend this to introduce students to the library facilities at a more appropriate time.

2.41 The University provides the College with teaching and administrative space. Teaching is undertaken in a variety of general purpose teaching rooms across the Treforest Campus. All teaching rooms are equipped with computing facilities, internet, projectors, whiteboards, webcams, and microphones. Some classrooms also have digital whiteboards. High speed wi-fi is available to students across the Treforest Campus. Through the VLE, students have access to a range of applications including specialist plagiarism software. Module materials, assessment information and university support services are also electronically accessible. Students confirm that they value the support services that are offered through the VLE and the extensive support they receive from tutors. Student class sizes are generally small and interactive workshops are used to support effective learning.

2.42 The aim of the College is to have extensive, interactive engagement between staff and students within the University. This interaction creates a strong case of identity for students as both members of the College and of the University. Students speak highly of the effectiveness of this interactivity. The University Link Officer provides the formal link between the University and the College.

2.43 The monthly student representatives' reports demonstrate that the early meetings concentrated on reviewing module material and assessments, but by the end of the year students were also interested in social activities and membership of university sports teams. Students consider themselves to be fully integrated within the University. They spoke highly of the facilities available and the extensive support they receive which effectively supports the College's objective to prepare students to progress to study at the University. The extensive integration of pathway college students within the wider university environment is **good practice**.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in USW Pathway College Limited's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

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