



**EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT INSPECTION OF PRIVATE FURTHER  
EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COLLEGES**

**EMPIRE COLLEGE LONDON**

Full Name of College	<b>Empire College London</b>
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Head of Centre	Ms Rita Sandhu
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Age Range	18+
Total Number of students	173
	19+: 173
	FE: 173
Inspection dates	<b>8-10 May 2012</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the framework for Educational Oversight of private further education colleges and English language colleges. The inspection consists of a three-day team inspection of the college's educational provision.

The ISI is an approved educational oversight body authorised by the UK Border Agency to inspect privately funded further education colleges in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and English language colleges.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Standards for private colleges;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations to colleges outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the quality of colleges, and by placing reports in the public domain, makes this information available to students, Government and the wider community. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success.

The inspection of the college is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on students. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the college, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the college or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the college's compliance with employment law.

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLEGE

- 1.1 Empire College London was established in 2003 in Ilford on the outskirts of London. It is a company limited by shares with a single director and proprietor. There is no governing body, but the senior management team has very regular formal and informal meetings with the director. In 2008 the company also set up a branch college in Birmingham, which began teaching in 2009. The two colleges operate and are managed separately, with cooperation on a range of issues. The college's aim is to provide career oriented further education to students from diverse backgrounds through learner-centred teaching, support and guidance, using internationally recognised British qualifications to prepare students for successful careers or higher education.
- 1.2 The college runs higher national diploma (HND) courses in business management, computing and engineering. Engineering students spend one day a week at a university to undertake the practical element of their course. It also runs a teaching diploma (DTLLS), a Level 7 strategic management and leadership diploma and Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) accountancy courses. It offers Level 3 courses in information technology (IT) and business administration, and an intensive English language course, but these are not currently running. All college courses are full-time.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection there were 173 students, all of whom were on Tier 4 student visas. The college accepts students aged 18 years and over and most students are between 19 and 35 years. Two thirds of students are male. Most students are from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and the Philippines. No students have English as a first language.
- 1.4 All students are interviewed, and their qualifications validated, before they are offered a place on a course. All students undergo diagnostic assessment on their arrival at the college. At the time of the inspection no students were identified with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

## 2. THE SUCCESS OF THE COLLEGE

### 2.(a) Executive Summary

	Section of the Standards	Grade awarded 1-4
3.	The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievement	2 Meets expectations
4.	Students' welfare, including health and safety	1 Exceeds expectations
5.	The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	1 Exceeds expectations

- 2.1 The college's admission and selection procedures are very good and are implemented consistently. Initial assessment and individual interviews result in the effective placement of students on courses. Information provided to students about the college is clear and comprehensive. Course provision is very good. There is a coherent programme of courses, complemented by an effective tutorial process and good support for the development of students' English language skills. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching and learning are well planned, and good use is made of resources. However, in a few less effective lessons teachers use a limited range of teaching and learning methods and do not challenge students sufficiently. Students enjoy studying at the college and are very well motivated. The assessment of learning is thorough and systematic. Students' progress is closely monitored and they are regularly set individual targets. Teachers provide students with regular feedback on their progress. However, the written feedback provided on students' assessed work is variable.
- 2.2 Comprehensive procedures ensure the health, safety and security of students and staff. Risk assessments are undertaken thoroughly and lead to clear actions for improvement. The quality of accommodation is good and fit for purpose. Attendance monitoring is excellent and student attendance is good. Reporting to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) is undertaken effectively. Students report feeling safe and secure, and that relationships between staff and amongst students are very good. Inspection findings support these views. Students receive an excellent level of support on academic and welfare issues. The college provides a very caring environment which students appreciate and benefit from. They report that if they have any academic or welfare concerns the college is very responsive.
- 2.3 Leadership and management are excellent. The college has clear educational aims and direction which it shares successfully with all staff. The relationship between the director and managers is very good. The director meets all staff regularly, closely monitors the college's performance and ensures that legislative requirements are fulfilled and monitored. There is a very effective management structure. Roles and responsibilities of staff are clear, and communication between staff and managers is very effective. Managers have a strong commitment to identifying priorities and raising standards and quality assurance is good. Student and staff feedback is collected and analysed systematically and regularly results in actions. Managers have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. The college appoints high quality staff and provides good opportunities for continuous development.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with standards for Private Colleges**

2.4 At the time of the inspection, the college met all the key standards for private further education colleges and quality is high. **The college exceeds expectations for the quality of education**

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

2.5 The college is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Improve teaching and learning through the use, by teachers, of a range of teaching and learning strategies that engage and challenge students.
2. Ensure consistency in grading and feedback on assessed work by introducing standardisation procedures and sharing good practice.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) Assessment of students prior to or on arrival**

- 3.1 Assessment of students prior to and on arrival is very good. This results in students being placed on courses appropriate to their personal objectives and their abilities.
- 3.2 Students' applications are closely checked and references are requested in most cases. Course entry requirements are stated clearly and are appropriate. Applicants' qualifications are checked to ensure they directly meet, or are equivalent to, the entry requirements. English language test results are also checked to ensure that they are at the appropriate level and, wherever possible, these are validated through the relevant examination board.
- 3.3 All students are interviewed either online or face-to-face. At these interviews students are asked focused questions regarding educational and career intentions in order to confirm their language skills and their commitment to study.
- 3.4 On arrival at the college there is an initial assessment of students' numeracy and information communication technology (ICT) skills, and they complete a learning styles questionnaire. Along with relevant details from the application form and interview, this information is immediately placed into teachers' files. This information is used effectively to plan teaching and learning and appropriate tutorial support.

#### **3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum**

- 3.5 Course provision is well designed and clearly organised. As a result the curriculum meets students' needs very well. Course provision is coherent and reflects the college's statement of educational purpose and direction. All courses offered are in accordance with UKBA requirements for international students.
- 3.6 Course information provided on the website, and in the college's prospectus, is accurate and comprehensive. Students are well informed about their courses and they report that the courses they follow, and the academic support they receive, closely meet their expectations.
- 3.7 Progression opportunities are good. Within the college students can move from level 3 to levels 4 and 5 HND courses. Students completing HND courses can progress to the level 7 strategic management diploma. Progression routes are being developed to external higher education courses.
- 3.8 Strategies for supporting students' English language needs are effective and well understood by students. English language skills are assessed by tutors through assignments and class activities, and students undertake a monthly self-assessment of their English language skills. This self-assessment is used by personal tutors to determine students' progress and identify needs. An English workshop is continuously available for students who feel they need additional support and for those referred for such support by their tutors. Personal tutors also advise students on strategies for developing language skills.
- 3.9 The college organises enrichment activities, largely for cultural and social development purposes. These are not extensive, but they do develop a sense of



community in the college and are appreciated by students. They include recreational visits, self-development workshops, regular celebrations of students' birthdays and a monthly student achievement awards presentation.

- 3.10 Students are given regular opportunities to evaluate and provide feedback on provision. This is done through questionnaires and meetings between managers and course representatives. The college clearly values feedback from students and it has an impact upon provision.

### **3.(c) The quality of teaching and its impact on learning**

- 3.11 Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and this results in effective use of time in the classroom. Classrooms are well equipped with resources to support lecture delivery and these are used effectively by teachers to support learning. Teachers demonstrate very good knowledge of their subjects. As a consequence students make good progress. They acquire knowledge and increase their understanding of the subject.
- 3.12 Most teachers use an appropriate range of teaching and learning strategies which successfully result in the engagement of students and the achievement of lesson objectives. However, in a few less successful lessons teachers only use a limited range of strategies and do not fully engage and challenge students.
- 3.13 Throughout the college there is a friendly and relaxed atmosphere and this extends to lessons. This helps to motivate students and make them feel comfortable about asking for support on academic issues. Students show a good level of confidence and self-esteem.
- 3.14 There is an effective tutorial system. Students complete an individual learning plan (ILP) which is reviewed at each tutorial. This is a student's self-assessment of their progress and aspirations. Students also complete a personal tutorial record in consultation with their personal tutor in which clear academic targets are identified. Their progress against these targets is then reviewed in a subsequent tutorial. This encourages students to take responsibility for their own progress.
- 3.15 The college's assessment policy identifies the key procedures with regards to assessment. These procedures are effectively implemented and help to ensure good assessment practice. The internal verification policy is clear and is implemented rigorously for all course work that contributes to students' course qualifications. There are good procedures in place for the submission of final course work which assures the timely achievement of final award. For all courses that are assessed through course work, external examiner reports confirm that assessment decisions and procedures are good.
- 3.16 The college undertakes internal assessment of students on a regular basis. This provides a good picture of students' academic progress. Personal tutors produce monthly tracking reports for each student. This helps tutors to identify and respond to any student issues. A standardised form is used for providing feedback on internal assessments. However, teachers' feedback on assessed work is variable. Some feedback is good, but in some cases it is limited and teachers do not identify areas for improvement.

### **3.(d) Attainment and Progress**

- 3.17 Students make very good progress on their courses. Most students complete their courses and successfully achieve their course qualification. The retention rate of

students is high and has improved over the last three years, and the qualification pass rate is also very good on most courses.

- 3.18 Students' assessed work demonstrates that they are making progress and that the level of achievement is good. Similarly, there is clear evidence in lessons of learning taking place and students making progress. Students report that they feel that they are making good progress and that the college keeps them informed about the progress they are making.

## **4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises (in line with expectations of educational institutions)**

- 4.1 The college has very effective arrangements for ensuring the health, safety and security of students and staff. Policies and procedures for health and safety and emergency procedures are comprehensive. Fire equipment is appropriate and well maintained. Signage relating to fire and evacuation is very good, and fire drills are undertaken regularly and monitored for their effectiveness. Staff and students are well informed about these procedures; they receive information on health and safety issues during induction and in their handbooks.
- 4.2 Annual risk assessments are carried out for fire and for the premises, supported by regular checks of health and safety risks across the college. These result in action points which are implemented. This helps to maintain good levels of health and safety.
- 4.3 The first aid policy is thorough and fully implemented. Three members of staff are trained first aiders and the college maintains an accident book for recording all accidents and incidences of emergencies.
- 4.4 The college premises are well maintained and are fit for purpose. Classrooms are spacious and well equipped. There is a well stocked library and an IT room. There is no student common room and the area for prayer is limited, but the college is currently undertaking development work to provide these areas.
- 4.5 Security of the premises is good, and the health, safety and security arrangements make it a safe place to study and work. There is a lift to all floors and the site is accessible to all students, including those with mobility issues.

### **4.(b) Student registration and attendance records**

- 4.6 The college maintains an accurate record of admissions and an accurate attendance register. Procedures used for monitoring attendance are very good and there is a strong and continuous focus upon good attendance.
- 4.7 There is an appropriate attendance policy which is rigorously implemented. Students and teachers receive regular reminders about the policy and the need for students to attend regularly. Attendance requirements are posted in every classroom and the names of students who have been reported to the UKBA for poor attendance are also published on notice boards. The student record system produces detailed attendance reports which are used to issue warning letters to students whose attendance causes concern. As a result the attendance rate is good. The punctuality of students is also good.
- 4.8 The college makes all necessary reports to UKBA. There are clear procedures for the collection and refund of fees made available to students.

### **4.(c) Pastoral support for students**

- 4.9 Support for students is outstanding and all staff provide excellent advice and guidance. Students and staff confirm, very positively, that relationships between

staff and students and amongst students are very good. Most students say that they would recommend the college to a friend.

- 4.10 Students state that college managers welcome their feedback, and that they are extremely responsive to issues being raised. Inspectors support this view, seeing many examples of actions taken by the college in response to student feedback. Course representatives are identified; they meet regularly with managers to discuss issues raised by students, and to take issues raised by managers back to students.
- 4.11 The college has a clear equality policy and anti-bullying and harassment procedures. There are no reported incidents of bullying or harassment, and the large majority of students report that staff treat all students equally.
- 4.12 Students are very positive about the caring and supportive environment the college provides. They enjoy coming to the college and attending lessons. Student induction is detailed and effective; it provides clear information and guidance regarding college policies and procedures, courses, facilities and living and studying in the UK.
- 4.13 All students have a personal tutor and students have regular individual tutorials. These address academic, personal and welfare issues. Students can also make arrangements to meet tutors at a mutually convenient time, and this happens often. In addition, four members of staff from administration and management act as welfare officers and are always available to provide advice and guidance. Students' career or higher education ambitions are recorded in their ILPs, and these are used by staff as a basis for offering specific information, advice and guidance. Students are extremely positive about the quality of advice and guidance.
- 4.14 The college has a disability policy which promotes the effective integration of students with SEND and confirms that additional support will be provided for students when necessary. It has a partnership with an external agency which, on request, assesses students with specific difficulties and advises on support required. Students have the opportunity to declare any learning need or physical disability on the college application form and during their interview.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) Ownership and oversight**

- 5.1 The leadership and management of the college are very effective. The educational direction is clear and has been shared successfully with all staff across the college. There is a clear and continuous focus upon improvement.
- 5.2 The sole director of the college provides effective ownership and oversight. He works closely with the college's management team. Consequently he has very good knowledge of the college's operations and monitors the college's performance closely. He meets all staff regularly and attends formal meetings when significant issues are to be discussed. He works closely with the management team on development planning, and is clearly aware of his responsibilities for ensuring that legal requirements are met. Consequently the college's policies are comprehensive and regularly reviewed, and the necessary legal permissions are in place. As director of a second college, he encourages the sharing of good practice and expertise between the two institutions.

### **5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities**

- 5.3 There is a very effective management structure, supported by an appropriate framework of meetings. It is a flat management structure without a single principal or head of college. However, roles and responsibilities are clear and well understood across the institution. Communication between staff and managers is very good.
- 5.4 Managers are responsive to feedback from students and staff and they are very effective in identifying priorities, and implementing actions. They are aware of the college's strengths and areas for development and have presented a realistic assessment of these in the college's first, recently produced, self-evaluation plan.
- 5.5 The college is committed to appointing high quality staff. Staff performance is reviewed effectively. Staff receive annual appraisals in which their job role and performance are reviewed. Teaching staff have lesson observations at least twice a year. These result in recorded feedback and development targets which are discussed in some detail. Staff have many opportunities for professional development, with some development activities resulting from needs identified within observations and appraisals.

### **5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback**

- 5.6 Quality assurance is very good. The college has a strong commitment to raising standards and providing a high quality service for students. Student feedback is collected and analysed systematically. The feedback is discussed in management meetings and actions are agreed and recorded.
- 5.7 Managers also meet elected course representatives regularly. These meetings are minuted, actions are agreed and the college subsequently reports progress on these actions to students. Staff have opportunities to provide feedback informally and in meetings. There is clear evidence that the college implements actions identified as a result of feedback from students and staff.

- 5.8 Qualification results are analysed to provide a picture of student achievement, and attendance rates are monitored continuously. As a result the college has strong evidence for identifying priorities for improvement. Until the writing of the recent self-evaluation report, there has not been a whole-college analysis of all of this evidence, or an overall statement of strengths and areas for development.
- 5.9 The college's complaints policy and procedures are clear and comprehensive. They are explained to students and staff at induction. Most complaints are resolved informally but there is a system in place for the recording of complaints.

#### **5.(d) Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks**

- 5.10 Staff recruitment is very well managed. The school has an appropriate staff recruitment policy which provides guidance to those involved in the selection of staff.
- 5.11 Staff are well qualified and all appropriate checks are made to ensure their suitability for appointment. These are recorded systematically. While the college does not accept students who are under 18 years of age, they have recently introduced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for all newly appointed staff as an additional check of suitability.

#### **5.(e) Provision of information**

- 5.12 The college's website provides comprehensive information about its facilities, courses and procedures. This covers all the information required in the educational oversight standards. Information presented on the website and in college literature is clear and accurate.
- 5.13 The college was prompt in providing all the information required within the inspection process.

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with students and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietor, and attended registration sessions. The responses of staff and students to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

### Inspectors

Mr Neil Haynes	Lead Inspector
Ms Fiona Hyndman	Team Inspector
Mr Ahmed Junaid	Team Inspector