



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Empire College London Ltd (London Campus), April 2016

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Empire College London Ltd (London Campus) (the College) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2014 [Adapted Review for Specific Course Designation](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 In the two years since the 2014 Adapted Review for Specific Course Designation there has been a substantial transition in recruitment from international to UK students, and to students from elsewhere in the EU. The number of international students has decreased from 82 in May 2014 to three. The total number of students enrolled is currently 128.

3 In 2015-16 students are enrolled on the Pearson Higher National Diploma in Business Management, the City & Guilds Diploma in Education and Training, and the Awards for Training and Higher Education level 6 programmes. Currently, no students are enrolled on the Higher National Diploma in Computing or the level 7 Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership. There have been no changes in management structures or personnel since the last visit. The number of teaching staff has remained unchanged.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The College has completed and evaluated the action plan from the 2014 review report, and has continued to develop it in relation to the areas of good practice and recommendations. In addressing the recommendation relating to the formalising of its policies and procedures the College has introduced and updated a Quality Manual, which might nevertheless benefit from further development. The recommendation in relation to the identification of opportunities for enhancement has been addressed by a mapping of policies to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). A coherent and effective programme monitoring process takes place each semester and is linked to actions to maintain standards and improve quality. There are well developed processes of quality management appropriate to the size of the College, including thematic staff meetings and student representative meetings, although the results of management actions arising from these meetings could be more clearly documented. The programme monitoring and quality assurance processes culminate in an effective process of annual review. Admissions processes are systematic and fully documented, and overall retention is above 80 per cent, although the College is still addressing the consequences of the changes in its intake. Although some elements of the action plan remain under development, the College continues to review and update its processes particularly to address its changing intake. The College has made acceptable progress since the 2014 review.

- 5 The action plan from the 2014 review has been completed and evaluated. Individual managers are responsible for monitoring progress, and evaluation takes place in the annual self-evaluation process reported to the Senior Management Team meeting with the Director. The latest revision of the action plan shows further development in many areas, including monthly internal audit of student individual learning plans and tutorial sessions, staff interim performance reviews, an annual student submission by student representatives, and the introduction of a 'Prevent' process. The College has acted on the recommendation in the last review to consolidate its policies and procedures into a formal Quality Manual. While the manual comprises a useful internal source of reference for the College's staff, stronger guidance on implementation and process, greater detail and exemplars on semester quality review, and cross-referencing to external reference points would further strengthen its contribution to the College's quality assurance processes.
- 6 The College has a thorough and effective system of twice-yearly programme monitoring, with comprehensive quality reviews at the end of each semester. The process is designed to identify issues as quickly as possible and to plan arrangements for the following semester. There is clear evidence of the use of internally produced quantitative and qualitative data, including enrolment, progression and achievement data; feedback from students (questionnaires, student meeting minutes and tutorial feedback); outcomes of teaching observations; and the consideration of external reports. The monitoring report for each semester systematically checks the action points from the previous report, ensuring continuity within and between academic years. The semester report is finalised at a meeting between managers and staff to agree upon the content, recommendations and actions. The College's practice of holding an induction session for staff at the beginning of each semester supports the monitoring process by highlighting actions or changes derived from the previous monitoring report.
- 7 The College has appropriate and effective systems in place to manage the quality of its provision through a series of meetings whose agenda and composition is determined by senior managers. Meetings may be topic-specific, for instance on topics including student academic achievement, external observations of teaching, or management updates. Staff confirmed the value of the meetings, many of which are developmental, and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the agenda.
- 8 Monthly student representatives' meetings are chaired by the senior administrator and also include management updates. The minutes demonstrate the breadth of discussion and the extent to which students are consulted on matters that affect their learning, and their experience within the College more generally. Students confirmed the value of these meetings and commented positively on the speed with which the College responded to their feedback in general.
- 9 Meetings are reported in a standard format that concludes with an action table. This is followed up through management action, as the thematic approach to meetings does not facilitate systematic action-checking at meetings. The College confirmed that checking is conducted through internal audit of course files, but this does not consistently provide a transparent record of management actions for staff and students.
- 10 The College reports on the quality of its provision in the annual self-evaluation. It is informed in large part by the semester quality reviews discussed in paragraph 6 above. The self-evaluation generates a development plan that identifies areas for continuing and further development, and sets out an action plan focused on developmental objectives. There is clear articulation between the system of managing through meetings, the semester monitoring process, and institutional evaluation and planning.

11 The College's arrangements for admissions are transparent, thorough and supportive, and meet the requirements and standards of the awarding organisations. Entry criteria are clearly stated; applicants are interviewed individually and take an online pre-entry assessment in functional skills. Applicants without adequate evidence of an English language qualification are required to take an additional test in English language and to achieve International English Language Testing System level 5.5 or 6 according to the programme. All stages of the admissions process are carefully documented and kept in individual student folders. Folders seen during the visit included a document checklist, application form and supporting evidence of qualifications, references, interview recording sheet, acknowledgement of induction materials form, student agreement (the learning contract) and copies of personal documents relevant to the entry and enrolment process. Information about the Tier 4 visa status of each international student is recorded in student folders.

12 Students confirmed that the processes for application and admission had been thorough and supportive, and that induction arrangements were helpful. They appreciated the fact that induction takes place at the beginning of each semester to allow refreshing and updating. They also confirmed that the College had been quick to resolve any issues raised in the students' induction feedback. Information gathered during the admissions process feeds into individual learning plans, which in turn become the focus of individual tutorials. The College publishes a formal admissions policy and procedure on its website, but unlike its published policies on recognition of prior learning, and registration and certification, this is not included in the Quality Manual.

13 The College carefully monitors its retention and completion rates. These are analysed in an annual statistical summary, which is reported to and signed-off by the College Director. The report for 2014-15 shows an overall successful completion rate of 88 per cent. Retention rates for programmes completing in 2014-15 were above 80 per cent in all but one group (Higher National Certificate in Business) where one of the four enrolled students withdrew. In all but one course 100 per cent of retained students successfully achieved their qualification, and in 2014-15 only one retained student failed. The College has identified a concern related to its transition from international student recruitment to UK and EU student recruitment - in 2014-15 the success rate for UK and EU students was 77 per cent. The College has set itself a target retention rate of 80 per cent on all programmes. While it is too early to judge if the College has successfully managed the transition in the nature of its student intake, it has shown an understanding of the different needs of mature adult returners, and has strengthened its tutorial and support provision with additional monitoring from January 2016.

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

14 The College uses centre reviews and external examiners' reports from its awarding organisations to ensure that it meets academic standards. It mapped its policies to the Quality Code in 2015. Although the Quality Manual is not explicitly cross-referenced to the Quality Code, the College uses the Quality Code toolkit available on the virtual learning environment, supported by staff briefings, to ensure alignment with the Quality Code. This, together with outcomes of internal reviews and external examiners' comments, form the drivers for enhancement to provision.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Jenny Steer, Reviewer, and Dr John Hurley, Coordinator, on 28 April 2016.

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