



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Empire College London Ltd, June 2019

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Empire College London Ltd (the College) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2018 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The College continues to offer two higher education programmes: a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business (Business Management) from Pearson and a Level 5 Diploma in Education and Teaching (DET) awarded by City & Guilds. The College has 147 students enrolled on the two programmes. Out of this number, 125 were on the HND and 22 on the DET programme. Numbers are very similar to those reported at the previous monitoring visit when a total of 145 students were enrolled. The College has a Tier 4 Sponsor Licence, but no such students are currently enrolled.

3 There have been no material changes to the academic infrastructure used by the College since the previous review visit. The College has, however, been successful in obtaining registration with the Office for Students and as part of this process published its Student Protection Plan on its website. The established senior management team (SMT) comprises the Managing Director, Head of Centre, the Admissions and Marketing Manager, the Academic Manager and Senior Administrator, and effectively maintains consistent monitoring, review and enhancement of the College's higher education provision. There are currently six lecturers (three full-time equivalents), and the College occupies the same premises in Ilford as at the previous review.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The College has made commendable progress in implementing actions from its action plan of 2018. The good practice identified within the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) 2017 has been significantly enhanced (paragraph 6) and the two recommendations made have been implemented and are now fully embedded within College processes (paragraph 9).

5 The College continues to demonstrably maintain its academic standards and enhance the quality of the learning opportunities of its provision. Quality and standards in relation to Admissions (paragraph 12) and Assessment (paragraph 13) have been maintained and further developed. The College processes also demonstrate highly effective engagement with external reference points and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) (paragraph 15).

6 The College continues to prioritise the need to fully support students to ensure that they have a positive academic experience. The good practice identified in the previous HER (AP) has been further enhanced with the introduction of new support services. These include extensions of the time available to support students outside of the teaching timetable, and making available a targeted and structured two-week period of additional support after each of the teaching blocks. The students confirmed that these additional sessions were extremely useful in further supporting them in their studies. In meetings with the review team staff also noted that these sessions have contributed positively to the reduction in the number of referrals in student assessments. The College has also introduced mental health and well-being workshops for creating a greater awareness of such matters to enable both staff and students to support themselves and others, and there are plans to engage further in such initiatives.

7 There has also been targeted expansion of the opportunities to support students' choice of progression routes after completion. The students were very complimentary about the nature and variety of resources available, which are tailored to their particular courses and future career aspirations, including visits from employers and higher education institutions and opportunities to visit local employers. An employer engagement event held in May 2019 at the College provided an opportunity for students to effectively participate in a range of activities to support both their learning and future employment or study opportunities. Students were enthusiastic and very appreciative about the wide range of support mechanisms covering teaching, the College environment, and support from the SMT during their time at the College.

8 The actions put in place to address the two recommendations are firmly embedded. External examiner reports continue to be made available to the students within the virtual learning environment (VLE) and are discussed in course meetings. The recommendation to articulate and disseminate the provider-level approach, including leadership responsibilities, to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities resulted in changes to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy. Management responsibilities are detailed in this document and all staff involved in programme delivery are made aware of their own and senior staff responsibilities, by way of a system of regular updating for all staff which ensures currency on all aspects of College management systems. The system of comprehensive bi-annual semester reviews also provides information on the continued appropriateness of College policies as well as being a useful mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of enhancement activities. All changes to policy documents require the approval of the SMT and are considered on an annual basis.

9 Since the 2018 review visit the College has undergone several external reviews. These include Pearson external verification visits, a Pearson Academic Management Review, a City & Guilds external verification visit and an Independent Schools Inspectorate monitoring visit. All of these reviews were very positive and identified a number of areas of good practice including the quality of learning and teaching, support for student welfare and the effectiveness of governance at the College. The quality assurance arrangements were assessed by the Inspectorate as excellent, all previous recommendations had been taken forward and any new recommendations were linked with enhancement of the provision.

10 There are well established and regular management meetings, course meetings and Assessment Boards as well as meetings to discuss teaching and learning activities, recruitment and admissions. Student representatives attend all meetings unless the specific subject matter dictates otherwise. Minutes of these meetings indicate that actions arising are clearly identified and reported on at subsequent meetings. The College is currently undertaking a review of its governance structure to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, in line with the Office for Students' registration process.

11 There is a comprehensive admissions policy and procedures which meet the requirements of the Quality Code and those of the awarding organisations. All aspects of the recruitment process continue to be managed effectively by staff based at the College. Information on admission requirements is accessible for applicants, which includes the requirement to provide evidence of English language competence. All applicants are interviewed in order to assess their commitment to study, and also complete an initial assessment of competence in English. Once enrolled, students are assessed on numeracy and information communication technology skills. A learning styles questionnaire is also completed, which is used to plan teaching and learning as well to target tutorial support.

12 Recruitment and admissions related policies and procedures are reviewed annually to ensure that they remain fit for purpose in meeting internal and external requirements. A detailed analysis of recruitment data is undertaken to recognise and identify trends in order to inform any changes in policy as well as to plan for future recruitment activities. To ensure that recruitment, selection and admission processes are conducted effectively all staff involved undertake training. Student feedback on the process is used as part of the review process, and students met by the review team confirmed the admissions process to be comprehensive and supportive.

13 Assessment of students is conducted in line with the College's assessment policy and awarding organisations' guidance documents and unit specifications. The awarding organisations are responsible for developing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. College staff are responsible for setting assignment briefs and initial marking of assessed work, and the College makes use of an external organisation as part of the process of developing assignment briefs, and the Pearson checking service. It also has an internal verification process to ensure the appropriateness of assignment briefs and to ensure that marking has been completed in line with College and awarding body requirements. The integrity of the assessment process has been further enhanced through additional student viva sessions to support the existing plagiarism detection systems and guard against bad academic practice. Both students and staff groups confirmed in meetings with the review team that the process for promoting a shared responsibility for good academic practice was effective. The College has a close working relationship with the awarding organisations, and both of these confirm that there are a comprehensive range of fully documented policies and procedures in place covering all aspects of assessment, internal verification, quality assurance and programme administration, and that these are implemented appropriately.

14 The data return for the past two academic years shows that retention and progression rates have been consistent for both courses, with particularly strong retention on the DET programme at, or very close to, 100 per cent. In addition, achievement rates on the Business Studies programme are high, with 100 per cent of completers in both years achieving a pass grade. Some cohorts are relatively small, which can affect the percentage after any withdrawals, resulting in a biased value. The College completes a detailed annual analysis of retention and success data to ensure that it understands the reasons for individual cohorts' patterns in retention or attainment, and uses this to identify additional actions going forward.

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

15 The College has comprehensive quality assurance arrangements which continue to make appropriate use of external reference points. As noted in the previous monitoring visit the Quality Code serves as the main standard for benchmarking and the College has mapped its policies and procedures to the relevant section of the Quality Code. Appropriate use is made of the reports and recommendations provided by the two awarding

organisations in order to ensure that the students' experiences of higher education are in line with expectations across the sector and within the Quality Code.

Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Catherine Symonds, Reviewer, and Mrs Roshani Swift, QAA Officer, on 12 June 2019.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk