



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of London School of Commerce, October 2018

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the London School of Commerce (the School) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [2017 annual monitoring visit](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There are 907 students enrolled on programmes, an increase from the number of students (853) enrolled at the time of the previous monitoring visit in 2017. There are 161 staff, 40 administrative and 121 academic staff (seven full-time and 114 on fractional posts) who teach and/or supervise research students. Since the 2017 monitoring visit there has been a restructuring of the management team, which included appointment to a new post of Provost and Global Academic Director.

3 The School's awarding body arrangements are at a transitional stage, and there is a strategy to develop more programmes for UK/EU applicants. Partnership arrangements with Cardiff Metropolitan University and Anglia Ruskin University are being taught out. Final cohorts of students were admitted to the University of Wales Trinity St David MBA and BA Business Administration in June 2018. The School has developed a new partnership with the University of Suffolk, and recruited 246 students to the foundation stage of a new BA Business Studies programme, which commenced in July 2018. Additional programmes have been validated by the University of Suffolk but these have not yet started.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The overall outcome of the monitoring visit, that the School has made acceptable progress, has been informed by the following findings. The School has continued and developed the good practice identified in the 2016 QAA Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) concerning the extensive support, induction and mentoring provided to students (paragraph 5). Actions taken to address the six recommendations from the 2016 review have continued and been further developed. Student engagement has been strengthened and continues to be embedded (paragraph 6). There is appropriate oversight and systematic monitoring of complaints, although the information provided on the website to support the admissions complaints form is not complete (paragraph 7). The role of the Programme Development, Design and Approval subcommittee in the internal procedures for the design, development and approval of programmes has been clarified and is operating effectively (paragraph 8). The annual monitoring process has been further enhanced (paragraphs 9 and 10), and there are systems in place for identifying staff development needs (paragraph 11). The arrangements for admission of students are thorough and supportive and clearly meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) (paragraph 12), while assessment practice is robust and assured through internal and external moderation (paragraph 13). The use of relevant external reference points is being maintained through the regular mapping and updating of policies and procedures (paragraph 15).

5 The School has maintained the high quality of student support, induction and mentoring that was highlighted as good practice in the 2016 review. Induction sessions have been further enhanced since the 2017 annual monitoring visit to include information on student representation and feedback mechanisms. Positive features of the support for students include ongoing involvement of marketing staff with individual students after recruitment to monitor attendance and achievement.

6 The School continues to actively encourage student engagement in the management and governance of the institution at all levels through its deliberative structures. Reference to the student voice is reinforced through the induction process and supporting documentation. A range of internal and external training has been undertaken to support students in understanding their role as representatives on the deliberative committees. Student attendance at committee meetings has been improving and students are increasingly recognising the personal benefits of being a representative. The School acknowledges that student engagement can be a challenge and is continuing to refine its approaches in this area.

7 Complaints are systematically logged and recorded, demonstrating that appropriate action has been taken. The Head of Quality reviews the complaints procedure annually and evaluation of complaints received takes place regularly. Information about the complaints procedure is readily accessible to students while on their programmes. The admissions complaints form is accessible from the School website; however, it is not accompanied by a formal procedure or guidance to assist applicants in its completion.

8 The programme development, design and approval process has been strengthened by clarifying the role and responsibility of Academic Board and the Programme Development, Design and Approval subcommittee, to avoid the potential conflict of interest which was identified by the 2017 monitoring team. The successful implementation of the process was demonstrated during the development and approval of the new University of Suffolk undergraduate Business Studies degree and is scheduled to be evaluated in autumn 2018.

9 The School has further enhanced its annual monitoring procedures and extended the use of academic calendars in the management of provision to ensure that the internal procedures for annual monitoring are applied systematically. This annual monitoring schedule sets out the key dates for the receipt of data, completion of draft reports, meetings with awarding bodies to discuss reports and the updating of action plans. The management of the annual monitoring cycle is more tightly controlled and systematically applied through the introduction of a flowchart showing the lines of reporting and the locus of responsibility for the monitoring and review of reports and action plans. The annual monitoring cycle integrates the outcomes of annual programme monitoring and action planning. Programme review reports together with their action plans are considered at the appropriate Programme Management Committee and formally approved by Academic Board before being considered by Council. The annual monitoring process has been further developed since 2017 to include an institutional-level report and action plan.

10 Issues arising from annual programme reports and reviews by external agencies feed into the institutional-level report and action plan. The report, together with its action plan, draws heavily on existing action plans such as from the 2017 review and those from programme annual reports. While this draws together outcomes from reviews into an institutional level action plan, it does not explicitly identify enhancement initiatives informed by an overarching enhancement strategy and hence is narrower in focus than might be achieved through a critical evaluation of institutional-level systems and processes including, for example, partnership arrangements and research. However, the actions taken since the 2017 review demonstrate that enhancement is taking place, including student representation

initiatives, enhanced research seminars for staff and students, a more rigorous approach to annual monitoring, a supportive programme of staff development and the recent appointment of teaching assistants.

11 A range of information is collected and analysed to identify staff development needs. This includes monitoring report action plans, teaching observations, staff reviews, link tutor reports, student feedback and external examiners' reports. The findings from the analysis of these sources of information (including a summary report on the outcomes of observations) are then used to identify areas for improvement, which are addressed through staff development events provided by the School. Further development opportunities are provided by partner universities.

12 Recruitment, selection and admissions operate in the context of the School's Academic Regulations. Awarding bodies set the entry requirements for applicable programmes and provide clear requirements in respect of the accreditation of prior learning. Qualifications are checked for authenticity and suitability with overseas qualifications being evaluated using UK NARIC (the National Academic Recognition Information Centre). The admissions process is overseen by a senior member of staff, with designated marketing staff working closely with applicants throughout the process. There is a process for approving agents involved in international recruitment. Marketing staff deal with applicant enquiries, support the completion of the application form and verify supporting documentation. Suitability for the programme is determined through academic interview following which the final stage of the process leads to a conditional offer or rejection. There is an additional interview stage for international applicants to ensure that UK Visa and Immigration requirements are met. Clear information is available to applicants on the School website and in programme documentation. Appropriate records are maintained for each stage of the admissions process. Students met by the team at the visit were positive about the admissions process, the induction arrangements and the information they received from the School.

13 The structure of assessments alongside the relevant learning outcomes is defined in the programme specifications. The assessment structure for all modules is articulated within the module specifications. All assessments are designed by staff at the School and are internally approved prior to external approval by the awarding bodies. The School's processes of marking and moderation are derived from the degree-awarding bodies' requirements. The first marking is carried out by School staff who also carry out blind second-marking after sampling of work. In some instances, for example projects, all the assessments are second-marked. Mark variance is dealt with by the involvement of an independent third marker. External examiners review student work and provide detailed comments on the overall achievement at module and programme level. These reports are received by the School programme management committees and outcomes are considered by Academic Board. Academic staff from the School attend assessment boards where student grades are formally approved and agreed with the external examiner. Students told the monitoring team that they found the assessment processes and requirements clear, and commented positively on the quality and usefulness of the feedback they receive.

14 Retention and achievement levels have been maintained over the past three years, alongside decreases in new student enrolments over this period. Overall, the retention rate for the last three completing cohorts is 91 per cent (1,313 of 1,441). The rate has been sustained at around that figure in each year, with 93 per cent (760 of 821) of students recruited retained in 2015-16, 87 per cent (316 of 364) in 2016-17 and 93 per cent (237 of 256) in 2017-18. For the 2015-16 cohort, 87 per cent (629 from 727) of eligible students have achieved their qualification, and a further 44 students gained an exit award. For the 2016-17 cohort, 62 per cent of eligible students have achieved their qualification so far

(110 of 178), although this is not a complete statistic as a number of programmes have not yet completed. It is too early to comment on achievement rates for 2017-18 cohorts.

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

15 The School has continued to demonstrate appropriate engagement with the Quality Code through the alignment of policies and procedures with the Code. The School regularly checks and updates policies and procedures with reference to the Code and where applicable uses it to inform changes. School staff made appropriate use of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and guidance on the preparation of programme and module specifications during the design, development and approval of the new validated courses with the University of Suffolk. Through the validation process staff also engaged with the Quality Code to inform processes including admissions, assessment, and learning and teaching.

5 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 Dr Colin Fryer, Reviewer, and Ms Julia Baylie, QAA Officer, on 11 October 2018.

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