BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

December 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd. The review took place on 11-14 November 2012 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Ann Holmes
- Dr Aulay MacKenzie
- Mr Geoffrey Janes (student reviewer)
- Ms Jenny Lyon (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme reviewed was Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement'.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

Key findings

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd.

QAA's judgements about BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd.

- Academic standards at the University College and the awards delivered on behalf of the University of Wales **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University College **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University College **requires improvement to meet UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University College **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd.

- The detailed process of planning, design and approval of new provision (paragraph 1.19).
- The thorough approach to supporting and developing staff (paragraph 2.5).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd.

- The University College should revise the 'overseas examinations request form' and guidance to align with the 'General Academic Regulations' by the end of March 2013 (paragraph 1.11).
- The University College should revise the policy on the timing and management of the withdrawal of student offers by the end of March 2013 (paragraph 2.19).
- The University College should design and implement a policy for collaborative provision and other partnership arrangements before the start of the 2013-14 academic year (paragraph 2.36).
- The University College should review and improve the accuracy and completeness of its public information by the end of March 2013 (paragraph 3.8).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The review team affirms the University College's actions to further embed the 'Guidance on Writing Learning Outcomes' into the programme design process (paragraph 1.7).
- The review team affirms the University College's commitment to monitor compliance with the new policy of feedback on assessments (paragraph 1.9).
- The review team affirms the implementation of the student engagement agenda (paragraphs 2.12 and 5.6).
- The review team affirms the University College's development of a fully robust management information system (paragraph 2.16).

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review of the University College used the thematic element of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, so details of this topic are included in section 5. The role of a Chief Executive of Students was created in 2010 and has enabled this area to be further developed in the last two years. Hence the student involvement is continuing to evolve and mature at this stage.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland.[4]

About BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd

The origins of BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd are identified as the establishment of the BPP Law School in 1992. BPP University College is currently positioned as a specialist provider of professional and business education, obtaining its degree-awarding powers in September 2007 and University College status in 2010. In the academic year 2011-12, the student population was 6,780 full time equivalent (FTE) students. This figure comprised 5,808 full-time and 1,944 part-time students, studying in two schools, BPP Law School and BPP Business School. This FTE figure also includes 1107 non-credit bearing awards.

BPP University College has a mission which states: 'Challenging the educational status quo to positively change lives through our passion for education'. Its five-year strategy in 2006 stated the institution would seek to use degree-awarding powers within two broad subject areas: Business and Administrative Studies, and Law.

In 2012-13 two additional Schools were created: BPP School of Health and BPP School of Foundation and English Language Studies. This wider range of provision has contributed to a 51 per cent increase in the student population between 2007-08 and 2011-12, accompanied by a 34 per cent increase in permanent faculty and overall increase in support staff of 568 per cent.

Additionally there were changes in the student engagement and representation including the creation of a Student Association, the appointment of a non-executive Chair for the Board of Directors, and the takeover of the management and operation of McTimoney College of Chiropractic. There were also investments in institution-wide teams to support areas such as learning and teaching, academic affairs, student services and the University College's international activities.

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

The University College processes have evolved from programme-level quality assurance mechanisms at the time of degree-awarding powers to an institutional-level approach based on General Academic Regulations and a Manual of Policies and Procedures, both of which are updated regularly.

BPP University College states the challenges it faces to be:

- adjusting to and meeting the needs of a more diverse student group
- adapting to the needs of international students
- matching support team growth with effective management information systems and processes
- integrating new Schools and staff.

The University College stated at the outset and maintained throughout the review period that it had no collaborative provision. As a result it had no collaborative policy, although the review team noted collaborative strategy documents had been under discussion for some time and was noted by review team as a discussion point during the establishment of the centre in the Netherlands.

The review team identified significant programme activity during the review week organised through the BPP School of Health which was reliant upon services and facilities at a college outwith the BPP organisation.

Explanation of the findings about BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd and the awards delivered on behalf of the University of Wales **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The review team found that programmes are allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and this is verified as part of the programme approval process and the external examining process. Staff whom the team met confirmed their understanding of the levels within the FHEQ and that induction included guidance on the FHEQ. Guidance is also provided to staff on learning hours.

Use of external examiners

1.2   The role, responsibilities and expectations of the external examiners are clearly defined and meet the expectations in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. For example, the procedures for the appointment of external examiners are clearly laid out and readily accessible. All external examiner appointments are approved by the Education and Training Committee and Academic Council, and the University College maintains a register of current external examiners. The external examiners receive a formal letter of appointment and are invited to attend an induction which is also available online. They are also provided with a comprehensive External Examiner Handbook.

1.3   There is a well structured and detailed template for the external examiner report and a thorough process for the scrutiny of external examiner reports. All reports are read by the Principal/Chief Executive. The Dean of Academic Affairs and Director of Quality also read all of the reports and a summary analysis is produced which includes recommendations and action points for consideration by the Education and Training Committee and Academic Council. A formal response is made to each external examiner report by the Director of Programmes.

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[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.
[7] See note 4.

1.4   Where external examiners have raised issues in their reports, there has been a timely response and appropriate action taken by the University College.

Assessment and standards

1.5   The University College has a set of principles and policies governing the design and delivery of assessment for all programmes, and these are embedded into the programme design and approval process. Guidelines on the amount and length of assessment are contained in the Manual of Policies and Procedures and considered as part of the programme approval and validation process.

1.6   A Strategy for Assessment Enhancement contains guiding principles and values for assessment development, supporting staff in ways in which they can deliver sound assessment strategies.

1.7   Each programme and module has defined learning outcomes. As part of the module approval process externals comment on the module proposal forms including learning outcomes and assessment methods. The programme approval process highlights any issues relating to assessment methods, and learning outcomes. The review team noted that the programme approval process has led to the identification of a staff development need in relation to learning outcomes, which has resulted in the introduction of guidance on writing learning outcomes. The team **affirms** this development as appropriate in strengthening the staff skills in drafting learning outcomes.

1.8   Summative assessments are produced by each module team for approval by the external examiners who are asked to confirm the integrity of the assessment process in their reports. A significant number of programmes are subject to professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) approval which may also determine the number and type of assessments. Any derogation from the academic regulations resulting from PSRB requirements has to be approved by Academic Council.

1.9   The University College has also recently introduced guidance on feedback to address issues relating to the timing and quality of feedback. Some students who met with the review team reported significant delays in receiving feedback on their work. However students seemed to be generally satisfied with the institution's attempts to improve the position. The review team **affirms** the approach taken by the University College to monitor compliance on the implementation of this new guidance on feedback policy.

1.10   The review team heard that the Learning and Teaching Team, led by the Dean of Learning and Teaching, provide appropriate guidance and staff development relating to learning, teaching and assessment, including staff development needs relating to the introduction of new policies or guidance. The University College has recently introduced a policy and practice for Marking and Moderating Assessments to ensure consistency of approach across all programmes.

1.11   Students are only permitted to sit examinations in the UK at a BPP centre. Students located overseas and unable to attend a BPP University College centre may, with prior agreement, sit the examinations at a venue approved by the University College. On the virtual learning environment of one School, students appeared to be invited to select their own venue, but the review team were advised that scrutiny of such applications is strictly within the institutional guidelines. Although the University College has a procedure and guidance for the approval of suitable locations, it is **recommended** that the University College should ensure that this is being followed across the institution and that the 'overseas examinations request form and guidance' align with the General Academic Regulations to ensure the security of the assessment process.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.12   The committee structure of the Education and Training Committee and Academic Council and their sub-committees maintain oversight of the validation, modification and monitoring process. Thus the University College has detailed processes and procedures for the approval of new programmes.

1.13   The University College provides standard templates for validation documentation including the initial programme proposal, programme handbook and module proposal form. A design team is established for each programme, and they produce the materials for approval and delivery by the teaching teams in the regional centres. This is designed to ensure consistency of approach.

1.14   Suitably experienced and/or qualified externals are used as panel members in the approval and validation process. Additional externals are appointed to scrutinise the module proposal forms and make a formal report as part of the validation process to the Education and Training Committee and Academic Council for approval.

1.15   Programme leaders complete a standard Annual Programme Monitoring Report template which reflects on and reviews the programme in the light of external examiner reports, student surveys, staff student liaison meetings, external agency reports and previous action plans as well as student performance data.

1.16   There is an approval procedure for modification to programmes and modules. Where any proposed changes are likely to have a major effect by reference to the definitive programme document, the prior approval of ETC is required and there will be a full programme validation and re-approval.

1.17   Programmes are initially validated for a five-year period, and are then subject to a critical review. If successful they are reapproved for a further period of five years.

1.18   The University College also has a thematic review process under which it reviews its provision at a centre or centres. This process is used to identify good practice and areas for consideration or enhancement.

1.19   The programme design, approval and validation process is well established, extremely thorough, fully understand by staff and is **evidence of good practice**.

Subject benchmarks

1.20   The FHEQ and subject benchmark statements are used in the design of undergraduate programmes and the review team noted that this was verified as part of the programme approval process. External examiners are also asked to comment on and confirm alignment with the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements in their annual reports, and the team saw evidence of confirmation from the external examiners that the subject benchmarks were appropriately used.

1.21   The requirements of the PSRBs in respect of programme curriculum, assessment and qualification also form part of the validation and approval process.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at BPP University College for Professional Studies Ltd **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University College's academic development plan has as a key underpinning principle the philosophy of 'professionals teaching professionals', with many teaching staff being current or former practitioners in the discipline areas in which they teach. The University College is engaged in embedding the Higher Education Academy (HEA) UK professional standards framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education.

2.2 The University College has a widespread process of mentoring and peer support in place. Peer observation is intended to support quality enhancement processes and is not part of any formal appraisal process.

2.3 All University College students on credit bearing courses are assigned a personal tutor, whose role is to provide the first line of enquiry and offer support to a student concerning any aspect of a student's academic experience and 'to review and encourage a student's academic progress'. The review team heard from some students that they had limited awareness and/or made limited use of their allocated tutor, possibly because their course leader or other immediately accessible academic staff fulfilled any needs in this area. It was noted by the team that in some cases the ratio of tutees to personal tutors was in excess of 60:1. While no students that the team spoke to reported any concerns in this area, it was not clear that the system was optimal. The University College may wish to review the operational effectiveness of the personal tutor arrangements.

2.4 The professional focus of the University College is reflected in 89 per cent of the teaching staff possessing a professional qualification. The Board of Directors and Academic Council set targets on staff qualification levels.

2.5 The review team considered the thorough approach to supporting and developing staff to be a **feature of good practice**.

Learning resources

2.6 For new programmes, learning resources, including the expertise of staff, are specified and reviewed as an integral part of the formal programme approval process and resource requirements are part of the business case approval at Board level.

2.7 Programmes have their continuing learning resource requirements identified as part of the Annual Programme Monitoring Report outcomes, as identified by external examiners and as identified by any accreditation processes.

2.8 The review team noted in several cases the effective responsiveness to identified weaknesses in learning resources which had been observed. It was also noted that one response was the installation of a 24/7 IT helpdesk. The team heard from students that there was some dissatisfaction with the quality of this helpdesk service, both in the time students were kept on hold and the quality of the advice offered. The University College may wish to review the effectiveness of helpdesk service.

Student voice

2.9   There has been recent and rapid activity in establishing a student representation framework, including the creation of an appointed Chief Executive of Students position, who has close contact with the Principal and other senior staff and attends all senior-level committees. This role is supplemented by 10 elected Student Association Branch Presidents, who represent on local learning centre-specific issues and 12 elected Student Voice representatives who sit on committees.

2.10   The student body has elected representatives (including the Chief Executive of Students) on all key University College committees. They have full voting rights and the committee agendas include 'Student Voice' as a standing item. There is a Staff Student Liaison Committee for each programme and student representatives are offered training by the Chief Executive of Students and the Director of Quality and Academic Policy.

2.11   Student representatives are invited to attend School Boards but the review team found and heard that on occasions there was no student attendance, that some Boards are scheduled outside periods of normal student attendance, and that student names are not routinely recorded in committee minutes. The review team noted that the institution makes financial provision for student representatives from centres away from London to attend committees and needs to continue developing strategies to ensure effective engagement in the formal deliberative processes.

2.12   The student representation system is not yet mature and places considerable reliance on a single, appointed individual, but there is a positive direction of travel in developing the student voice. The review team therefore **affirms** the implementation of the student engagement agenda.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.13   The University College will make its first returns of Key Information Sets, Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey and the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2012-13, so some data sources commonly used in the sector in benchmarking processes have hitherto been unavailable in this institution.

2.14   The review team noted that while management information was used to manage quality issues, there were some limitations to the detail and level of data available for the institution's deliberative committees to consider. The review team were told by senior staff that benchmarking at McTimoney College was achieved in its chiropractic programme by using comparative data obtained through an agreement with another university. The team later learnt that the correct position was that this benchmarking data was obtained through the General Chiropractic Council and not through an agreement.

2.15   The University College has reviewed its information management approaches and identified the need for a comprehensive single-point data management solution and a more sophisticated approach to the management of data. A procurement process has been undertaken and the implementation of a new student information system is underway. The opportunity for the new system to assist with enhancement and benchmarking processes has been identified.

2.16   The review team **affirms** the University College's development of a fully robust management information system.

Admission to the University College

2.17   The policies and procedures under which the University College admits students are laid out in the General Academic Regulations and the Manual of Policies and Procedures which clearly articulate the principles of selection according to merit and equality of opportunity. These policies and procedures are reviewed annually by the Education and Training Committee and Academic Council.

2.18   The admissions staff work with the Deans and Admissions Tutors to ensure alignment with regulations and expectations of the programmes. Information for applicants was found to have some shortcomings, and these are covered in section 3.

2.19   The review team noted that a number of applicants for a course at a newly established branch had received firm offers of acceptance for a programme which were reneged upon at very short notice. The students reported the handling of this situation by the admissions team did not provide an optimal service. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that University College should revise the policy on the timing and management of the withdrawal of student offers by the end of March 2013.

Complaints and appeals

2.20   The complaints and appeals procedures are clearly signalled within student handbooks and advice leaflets, in the College Handbook, in the virtual learning environment and in the published regulations. Guidance is provided to academic staff in the Personal Tutors Handbook and is available to students from a range of sources, including Personal Tutors, Student Advisors and the Office of Regulation and Compliance.

2.21   Appeals are addressed by an Academic Appeals Board and mitigating circumstances through Mitigating Circumstances Panel (renamed from 'Concessions Board' in 2012). Both of these bodies have external membership. There are annual summary reports on complaints, appeals and mitigating circumstances and these are reviewed by School Boards, the Education and Training Committee and Academic Council.

2.22   Regulations pertaining to appeals and complaints are reviewed as part of the annual review of General Academic Regulations and Manual of Policies and Procedures by Academic Council.

2.23   There is a clearly laid out process for students to progress appeals and complaints for review, ultimately to the University College's Independent Reviewer. The University College intends to join the Office of the Independent Adjudicator in 2013 at which point the process will be revised.

Career advice and guidance

2.24   The University College received accreditation by the Matrix Quality Standard for Information Advice and Guidance Services in May 2010. The Matrix report concluded that the 'Careers Service is evidently providing its clients with a quality Information Advice and Guidance service, a conclusion that was enthusiastically endorsed by the students and partners the Assessor spoke to'.

2.25   The employability agenda receives a strong focus at the University College, reflecting the professional focus of the institution, and this is evidenced in the College Handbook, the Academic Development Plan and the Employability Statement. A pilot for

new approaches to academic delivery and assessment processes with a particular focus on enhancing employability is currently being trialled.

2.26   The student written submission noted that some students at smaller branches did not have access to a full-time resident careers officer, but the review team heard that regular face-to-face sessions were available and could be booked by students, and that additionally there was remote support available.

Supporting disabled students

2.27   The University College has robust policies and procedures in place governing the admission of students. The University College has strategically identified the requirement to understand each student's learning profile as the basis of informing its approach to offering appropriate, individual support.

2.28   Learning support agreements are then put in place, which make it clear how the University College will support the student within their time of study. These agreements are circulated to programme tutors. Personal Tutor Handbooks also contain information on how students with disabilities can be supported further.

Supporting international students

2.29   The University College has a growing international student population, and has clearly identified international students as a potential growth area. To support this strategy the institution has specific areas on the virtual learning environment which are targeted at international students such as a dedicated area on visa compliance. Support staff also indicated that specialised International Student Advisers are available to assist with the pastoral care of students during their time with the University College.

2.30   Students indicated that the University College ensures international students are inducted into the institution appropriately, with their own events during 'head-start week'.

2.31   The University College is part of nine higher education institutions engaged with an internationalisation project with the Higher Education Academy. It is charged with promoting change at the institutional level 'by providing a toolkit to enable a consistent, supportive and transformative orientation to study, as a core provision for all students across all programmes of study'.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.32   There are no postgraduate research awards offered by the University College.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.33   The University College repeatedly stated that it does not at this time have collaborative provision, and there is no comprehensive collaborative provision policy in place. The review team noted that the University College has documented a collaboration strategy, which states the process of beginning a collaborative relationship.

2.34   The review team noted the process adopted of visits to sites which are not BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd centres aimed at approving them for programme delivery. In two cases this included provision for programme delivery at premises which are not part of the BPP group, and required contractual arrangements to be in place. One of these arrangements sets the expectations of each party in support of

facilities to deliver a programme awarded through the University of Wales at Warwickshire College. This programme is delivered by the University College as part of an agreement where the University College is responsible for the management and operation of McTimoney College provision.

2.35   The review team noted that discussion had taken place at Board of Director level to develop part of the McTimoney College programme provision at locations in Ireland and India, although that had not progressed to academic approval stage at this point in time.

2.36   The review team **recommends** that the University College should design and implement a policy for collaborative provision and other partnership arrangements within which the current discussions for future development and existing support arrangements can be located.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.37   The University College has a number of distance learners who rely mainly on the virtual learning environment to study. Students whom the review team met commented positively on improvements in the virtual learning environment since commenting on weaknesses in the student written submission. They commended the University College for the speed of improvements to the virtual learning environment to address their concerns.

2.38   The University College provides all core texts to students upon enrolment, which students see as a positive contribution towards their learning, especially those studying from a distance.

2.39   Technology Enhanced Learning Continuing Professional Development is in place to support staff in utilising the virtual learning environment as a student learning tool.

Work-based and placement learning

2.40   The University College does not have significant provision where placement and work-based learning takes place. Where there is employer involvement, the institution has a handbook in place which makes clear the responsibilities of the employer and the entitlements of students.

2.41   The MSc in Management has an additional, non-credit bearing, optional module which adds a paid work placement at the end of the course. This is a recent development and there is little evidence that reference has been made to the *Code of practice* for work-based and placement learning in the development of this provision.

Student charter

2.42   The Student Charter is available in the University College Handbook and is available on the virtual learning environment.

2.43   There is evidence that the Student Charter is discussed with student representatives each year through a standing item in the Education and Training Committee, but the students whom the review team met were not entirely aware of the Student Charter and broadly did not think it is meaningful.

2.44   The review team has concluded that the University College may wish to enhance the visibility of the Student Charter.

3 Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd **requires improvement to meet UK expectations.** The intended audience may not find the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and sufficiently clear or complete. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1 BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd operates as a subsidiary company of BPP Holdings, which also operates along with other companies under the BPP brand. Both in printed publications and on BPP and BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd webpages, it was found that there was a lack of clarity as to whether provision or activity was part of the University College operation or lay outside it. Some prospectuses included promotional material for professional qualifications that were not the responsibility of BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd but of other parts of BPP. There is a single BPP central website homepage (bpp.com) embracing both the University College and other non-University College subsidiaries. This lack of clear delineation offers potential confusion for potential students who may not readily be able to ascertain which provision falls under the University College responsibilities and which does not.

3.2 A further potential source of confusion is that BPP Learning Media, a separate part of the BPP group, supports and delivers online programmes on behalf of Anglia Ruskin University, noting that the Learning Media pages are also located on the bpp.com website.

3.3 The review team noted that some University College programmes were advertised as being available at regional branches of the University College which had not yet received approval for delivery of University College courses. These advertisements did not include any indication that such programmes were 'subject to validation' or a similar cautionary notice.

3.4 The review team heard and saw evidence that students admitted to some regional branches were not aware prior to arrival that the lectures would be delivered remotely and would not be face-to-face. The University College should ensure that all publicity material accurately reflected the learning that the student would experience.

3.5 The National Student Survey has to date not been available to the University College so this was not available as a benchmark for potential students. However, while the internal survey outcomes may suggest 'consistently outstanding student satisfaction', there was an absence of clear evidence from benchmarking of the comparability of this outcome and whether it was 'outstanding' in comparison to the rest of the sector. It could be argued that this language implies that the University College is consistently performing above other institutions and in the absence of clear underpinning data, this could be taken as misleading.

3.6 The review team noted that while programme specifications were available in course handbooks, there was no freely available source of detailed programme information for prospective students. Students received the course handbook during the induction period, so were aware of their programme detail from that moment onwards. Students also receive a detailed College Handbook which is clear and informative.

3.7 External examiner reports inform the annual monitoring process and are appended to the Annual Programme Monitoring Report for consideration by School Board. Student representatives see the full external examiner report at School Board as part of the Annual

Programme Monitoring Report. While all other students may see a copy of the individual report by request, all students have access to the summary of external examiner reports. Students, with whom the review team met, appeared to be satisfied with the current arrangements.

3.8   The review team **recommends** that the University College should review and improve the accuracy and completeness of its public information by the end of March 2013.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at BPP University College of Professional studies Ltd **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   The University College has a strategic approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities, as evidenced through the embedded enhancement functions in several of the committees and the various strategies established to promote this activity.

4.2   The review team established that staff were committed to the enhancement agenda and that staff valued the progress achieved over the recent years resulting from actively engaging in promoting enhancement. Students confirmed that they had witnessed real improvements resulting from their inputs through the Student Voice and so on. The strategies to promote enhancement are relatively new, and sustained efforts to continue to leverage benefits will be required in the future.

4.3   The Schools indicated that they use the staff conferences to promote enhancement and disseminate good practice. The extent to which this approach will sustain and maximise the dissemination of good practice has not yet been fully evidenced.

5   Thematic element

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for special attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there is a choice of two themes: First Year Student Experience or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review team investigated the student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at BPP University College for Professional Studies Ltd. The structures in place are relatively new and continue to evolve and mature, and the review team noted the developments to secure input from each of their distributed centres.

Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1   BPP University College introduced the role of the Chief Executive of Students in 2010 to strengthen the student involvement. This role is an individual drawn from the student body and employed on a fixed-term basis to act in a role 'akin to a student union president'. Over the course of the review there was some discussion around the independence of the role and whether an alternative model, whereby an individual elected from the student body and appointed as a sabbatical officer, might be preferable to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the role. The review team found no evidence that the independence of the role

had been compromised but further consideration might be given to this in further developing the institution's infrastructure for student representation.

5.2 Other key representative roles include elected Branch Presidents of the Student Association and Student Voice representatives who represent the student body on key committees. The 'Student Voice' is a standing item on key committees (for example the Education and Training Committee), and within committee minutes there was also evidence of specific issues being referred to student representatives and papers being prepared by Student Voice representatives for consideration and discussion. This representative structure allows for students across the distributed geographical locations to be represented on key institutional committees.

5.3 Students undertake module and programme survey evaluations that the review team were told are used to help inform staff development needs.

Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality

5.4 The Chief Executive of Students and other student representatives meet regularly with senior management, and student representatives confirmed that senior management is responsive to their views and suggestions. Senior management also confirmed the usefulness of the student representative system.

5.5 Induction for representative roles is via briefings provided by the Chief Executive of Students, the Director of Quality and Academic Policy and the Dean of Academic Affairs. It was difficult to ascertain the impact of student involvement in processes, such as the approval of new programmes, given that this has only been introduced recently.

5.6 There was evidence of the Chief Executive of Students working in collaboration with the Associate Dean Student Learning in relation to the development of new policy (for example Student Engagement Policy), conducting student focus groups and taking forward actions arising from the Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Enhancement Committee. The review team **affirms** this as a helpful enhancement to student engagement.

Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'

5.7 Each programme within each delivery centre has a Staff Student Liaison Committee. The notes from these meetings are appended to programme reviews and inform the Annual Programme Monitoring Report process, and student representatives are present at the discussions of the APMR reports at the School Board and the Education and Training Committee. The review team were provided with evidence of issues raised via this process having been addressed.

5.8 Students who met with the review team were not aware of the actions taken by the University College as a result of their module and programme survey evaluations nor did they receive feedback, although student representatives are present at discussions of the Annual Programme Monitoring Reports and these reports are informed by student survey data.

5.9 The University College has yet to engage with the National Student Survey (although some students will be surveyed from this current academic session) so there was no evidence to date as to how the survey might inform institutional enhancements.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.