



CECOS Computing International Ltd t/a CECOS London College

Review for Educational Oversight
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

January 2014

Key findings about CECOS Computing International t/a CECOS London College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in January 2014, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of Pearson.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of this awarding organisation.

The team considers that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice**:

- the comprehensive internal verification handbook (paragraph 1.6)
- the open and nurturing support for students (paragraph 2.6).

Recommendations

The team has also identified a number of **recommendations** for the enhancement of the higher education provision.

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- ensure the effectiveness of its new system of checking information about learning opportunities (paragraph 3.4)
- check the information on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 3.5).

The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the provider to:

- implement its plans to include student representatives on the Quality Assurance Team (paragraph 1.3)
- carry out formal staff development on the Quality Code (paragraph 1.5).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)¹ (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at CECOS Computing International Ltd t/a CECOS London College (the College), which is a privately funded provider of higher education. The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of Pearson. The review was carried out by Ms Michelle Callanan and Professor Christopher Gale (reviewers) and Mr Christopher Mabika (Coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).² Evidence in support of the review included College policies and documents demonstrating use of these policies, minutes of meetings, external verification reports from Pearson, meetings with staff and students and the 2012 inspection and 2013 annual monitoring reports by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- subject benchmark statements
- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)
- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)
- Pearson guidelines to providers.

Please note that if you are unfamiliar with any of the terms used in this report you can find them in the [Glossary](#).

The College was established in 1998 to offer professional training courses in information technology and management, based in Whitechapel, London. It relocated to Islington, its current location, in 2008. The College has been recruiting international students since 2003. The founder manages the College as the sole director and Principal.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes listed beneath the awarding organisation:

Pearson

- Level 7 Extended Diploma in Strategic Leadership and Management (15)
- Level 5 Higher National Diploma in Business (6).

The provider's stated responsibilities

The College delivers the programmes and sets and marks their assessments. It is responsible for quality assurance processes including internal verification of assessment scripts and student work, which Pearson monitors through external verification. The College manages all other student and staff matters.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight

² www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

Recent developments

Between March and August 2013, the number of students studying at the College fell from 308 to 21.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the College presented a submission to the review team with guidance and support from the College in the form of resources and advice given to the student representatives. Student representatives, some of whom were at the preparatory meeting, attended a meeting with the review team, during which they participated actively and positively.

Detailed findings about CECOS Computing International t/a CECOS London College

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the College fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The College effectively fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards, through clear management and committee structures. These structures operate within the guidelines of a number of policies and procedures the College has developed and compiled into the Quality Handbook, to fulfil its own requirements and those expected by the awarding organisation.

1.2 The Director has ultimate responsibility for the management of academic standards. The Programme Manager oversees quality assurance, maintains regular communication with the awarding organisation, and disseminates information obtained from Pearson to relevant staff through meetings and informal discussions.

1.3 Committees, namely the Quality Assurance Team, the Programme Committee and the Assessment Board, support the management of academic standards. The College has plans to involve student representatives on the Quality Assurance Team, in line with the expectation of *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code. The Director and Programme Manager sit on all the Committees. The Director chairs the monthly Quality Assurance Team meetings, which consider matters relating to the maintenance and improvement of academic standards. An external advisor sits on the Quality Assurance Team meetings. The Programme and Assessment committees meet each semester to consider programme related matters and to approve grades assigned to student work. The Management Team, staff and students concur that having student representatives on committee meetings will be valuable in harnessing the views of the student community at the College. It would be **desirable** for the College to implement its plans to include student representatives on the Quality Assurance Team.

1.4 Shortly before the review visit, the College changed the review of its policies from once to twice per year. It has an academic calendar and semester plan showing dates for key events for the management of academic standards. The Programme Manager coordinates management, academic and administrative teams to construct and implement the academic calendar and semester plan. The 2014 calendar clearly shows the review dates for the policies. The Pearson external examiner confirmed that the College has a wide range of robust and effective policies and procedures in place which underpin the quality processes and management of the programmes.

How effectively does the College make use of external reference points to manage academic standards?

1.5 The awarding organisation has embedded QAA guidance regarding subject benchmark statements and programme specifications within the provision, which the College follows. However, there is no formal staff development programme with respect to the Quality Code. The College develops the use of the Quality Code through briefings for staff. The College does not maintain its own formal process to ensure staff engage with subject-specific or scholarly development, treating each staff development case on its merit. Staff maintain sector and occupational credit through continued engagement within their own professional practice, and through attending training courses and completing continuing

professional development courses. The College employs part-time teaching staff who are employed in other higher education institutions. These in addition, apply practices and experiences they acquire from these other educational institutions to enhance the College's provision, and to augment its use of external reference points. It would be **desirable** that the College carry out formal staff development on the Quality Code.

How does the College use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?

1.6 The College has developed a comprehensive handbook articulating a robust internal verification process. This handbook contains all relevant information such as procedures for the production of assessment briefs, marking and giving feedback to students, and internal verification of the assessment briefs and student work. In the procedures unit tutors develop assessment briefs according to the criteria provided by the awarding organisation for each learning outcome, and assess student work. The Programme Manager, who has attended an internal verification course run by Pearson, internally verifies assessment scripts and student work, and confirms student results. The Assessment Board approves student results as stated in paragraph 1.3. The Programme Manager claims then certificates from the awarding organisation. The handbook also provides templates of all forms. Student work samples taken from a cross-section of the units taught on both programmes confirmed that the College follows its internal verification processes. The awarding organisation commends the robust systems in place for internal verification. The comprehensive internal verification handbook is **good practice**.

1.7 The College effectively applies external verification to assure academic standards. An external examiner moderates the assignments on behalf of the awarding organisation. When the College receives the external examiner's report, the Programme Manager and unit tutors meet to consider points of good practice and to address action plans in the report. The Quality Assurance Team attends to any serious issues in the report and develops an action plan. It convenes a follow-up meeting with the Programme Manager to ensure the implementation and completeness of these action plans by the time of the next report. The College places external verifier reports on its virtual learning environment for students to read. The reports affirm the effectiveness of the College's processes for responding to issues arising during external verification.

The review team has **confidence** the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the programmes it offers on behalf of its awarding organisation.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the College fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 The College has effective arrangements for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The Programme Manager monitors and updates the academic progress of each student using a tracking sheet for both formative and summative assessments. In its monthly meetings referred to in paragraph 1.3, the Quality Assurance Team, reviews of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, considering student feedback, classroom observations, annual monitoring reports and learning resources. The small team of full and part-time academic and administrative staff facilitates informal deliberations on teaching and learning with the Programme Manager, which teaching staff consider valuable. The Programme Committee assumes overall management of the quality

of teaching and learning on each programme. Students highly rate the variety of teaching and learning methods that the College employs. External examiners' reports and student work samples attest to the quality of assessment feedback the College provides to students.

How effectively does the College make use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities?

2.2 As stated in paragraph 1.5, the College makes good use of Pearson protocols and has procedures in place to ensure future engagement with the Quality Code.

How does the College assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.3 The College has effective policies and procedures to ensure the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. It disseminates these policies to staff and students using the induction processes. An example of these policies is the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment strategy, which encourages a wide range of effective teaching and learning methods that develop the creative thinking of students. Members of staff articulated a number of examples on how they engage all students within sessions, and, for example, make use of local companies as case studies to support student learning. External examiners' reports stated that staff successfully employ a variety of stimulating learning and assessment methods, drawing effectively on such links to provide students with 'live' research opportunities. Students confirmed that staff apply a variety of teaching methods in both their teaching and assessments.

2.4 The College has a clear commitment to employ appropriately qualified staff with a range of teaching and industry experience. The College regularly monitors teaching and encourages peer observations. The Quality Assurance Team and Programme Committee review these observations, and integrate the results into the staff appraisal system. Staff gave examples of areas for development that they had identified through peer observations. These related to the engagement of students within sessions. Staff stated that they discussed these development needs among themselves and successfully applied them in their teaching.

How does the College assure itself that students are supported effectively?

2.5 The College provides effective support to its students. Students receive a comprehensive and informative induction programme, which includes a weeklong general and programme-specific induction, followed by a two-week academic skills programme. Students find these programmes to be valuable. The College assesses the quality of its support to students through the feedback they give on questionnaires distributed at the end of each unit. The Quality Assurance Team collates the feedback and both the Quality Assurance Team and Programme Committee discuss at meetings the issues raised. The student feedback is generally positive. Students confirmed that the College acts in a timely manner to address any issues.

2.6 The College has set up a Student Council, which is yet to become functional, to provide a more formal platform for students to engage in the overall management of their learning experience. The Student Welfare Officer plays a pivotal role by being the first point of contact in whenever students require both academic and pastoral guidance. Students commented favourably on the role of the Student Welfare Officer. Students also value the accessibility of senior management, and praise their tutors for their enthusiasm in providing guidance and support in their subject areas, mostly outside teaching time. Students drew favourable comparisons for the support they get from the College, from their experiences at

other institutions. The open and nurturing support for students is **good practice**.

How effectively does the College develop its staff in order to improve student learning opportunities?

2.7 The College is committed to offering opportunities for development to its academic staff. It provides an in-house development programme on themes relating to teaching and assessment, including updates on assessment and marking, providing student feedback, plagiarism and the virtual learning environment. The College also engages tutors in Quality Assurance Team meetings. Tutors value these events. Where possible the College funds part of any external training that staff receives. For example, the College funded a tutor's attendance on a training event with an awarding organisation. The College considers the overall management of staff development within the appraisal process, which the Quality Assurance Team and Programme Committee monitor.

How effectively does the College ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes?

2.8 Students have access to a range of resources to support their learning needs. The College provides a library, online educational resources, information technology suites and internet access. A recent review by management identified gaps within the College's resource base including the need to improve internet access and library resources, which the College addressed immediately. Students confirmed that they are satisfied with the level of resources the College offers them.

2.9 The College is committed to expanding its online resources to enhance the overall learning experience for its students. The College's virtual learning environment (VLE) is a central element in supporting students. Students use it to obtain programme, module and College information. The IT Manager ensures that all the programme and module information meets the required specification and is current and accessible.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

3 Information about learning opportunities

How effectively does the College communicate information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders?

3.1 The College effectively communicates information about learning opportunities to students and other stakeholders. Under its agreement with Pearson, it is responsible for developing its own publicity materials in consultation with the awarding organisation on content where necessary. It uses its website as the principal method of communication. It also publishes a brochure in hard copy, which provides specific information on course content, fees, accreditations, admissions policy and procedures, and terms and conditions. However, since the brochure is out-of-date; it plans to update and distribute it when it can confirm which courses it will offer and when it is able to offer them.

3.2 The College makes effective use of the VLE, where it publishes student and staff handbooks, comprehensive information on the curriculum and assessments, and College

policies and procedures. However, although the VLE has established interactive tools, students tend not to make use of them, but use external social media tools to engage in discussions. The College also has a presence on various social media platforms. The IT Manager regularly monitors the content of these social media platforms.

How effective are the College's arrangements for assuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.3 The College has recently implemented a new system for reviewing information on learning opportunities after identifying gaps in the previous system. At the time of the review, information on learning opportunities was accurate and consistent. The College demonstrated that a robust system was in place for checking the information. However, it was still too early in the cycle to make an overall judgement of the effectiveness of the new system. Under the old system, the College reviewed its information annually. The timing of the last review in spring using the old system meant that the College published some out-of-date information at the start of the academic year in September 2013. The College now reviews its information twice a year.

3.4 The Quality Assurance Team conducts a monthly review of the website and maintains a version control system of all the policies and procedures to ensure accuracy and currency. The new system involves a three-level approach for recording and signing off all updates using a public information update form at each stage. Academic and administrative staff make changes, which are authorised by the Director, and the IT Manager publishes the new information. The College introduced the new system shortly before the review. It is **advisable** for the College to ensure the effectiveness of its new system of checking information about learning opportunities.

3.5 The College has no quality assurance processes to ensure that materials its staff upload to the VLE are complete, accurate and conform to copyright legislation. The College requires the academic staff develop and upload their own teaching and assessment materials to the VLE. The IT Manager checks this information for conformity to the appropriate style. The College makes no other checks to address explicitly any potential copyright legislation. It is **advisable** for the College to check the information on the virtual learning environment.

The team concludes that reliance **can** be placed on the information that the provider produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Action plan³

CECOS Computing International t/a CECOS London College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight, January 2014						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive internal verification handbook (paragraph 1.6) 	<p>The internal verification handbook is current and appropriate</p> <p>All tutors are fully aware of the internal verification process and how they can work with it for the benefit of students</p>	<p>Regular review of the internal verification handbook to keep it up to date and aligned with Pearson's requirements</p> <p>Regular briefing/ discussion sessions with tutors</p>	September 2014 (and whenever updates are received from Pearson)	Programme Manager	Quality Assurance Team	Review of continuing utility of handbook by the Quality Assurance Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the open and nurturing support for students (paragraph 2.6). 	Evaluation of student feedback demonstrates the continuing overall satisfaction of students	Continue providing support to the students and address any issues raised in the feedback	November 2014 and annually thereafter	Student Welfare Officer	Quality Assurance Team	Quality Assurance Team review on annual basis

³ The College has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the College's awarding organisation.

Advisable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The team considers that it is advisable for the College to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure the effectiveness of its new system of checking information about learning opportunities (paragraph 3.4) 	Public information is kept accurate and up to date and senior management reviews demonstrate that the system is working effectively	The website is reviewed and the Public Information Update forms are discussed at monthly Quality Assurance Team meetings	Monthly Quality Assurance Team meetings starting July 2014	Information Technology Manager	Quality Assurance Team	Public Information Update forms formally reviewed by Quality Assurance Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> check the information on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 3.5). 	The material on the virtual learning environment is complete, accurate and conforms to copyright legislation	<p>The Information Technology Manager will review the material on virtual learning environment to ensure it is complete, accurate and conforms to copyright legislation</p> <p>Quality Assurance Team will review the information</p> <p>Teaching staff will be briefed about their responsibility to ensure the teaching materials conform to copyright legislation</p>	<p>Monthly Quality Assurance Team meetings starting September 2014</p> <p>At induction for new staff and immediately for existing staff</p>	<p>Information Technology Manager</p> <p>Programme Manager</p>	Quality Assurance Team	<p>Quality Assurance Team meeting minutes</p> <p>Formal review of virtual learning environment</p> <p>Evaluation of staff induction process</p>

		New staff will be briefed at their induction				
Desirable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date/s	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The team considers that it would be desirable for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement its plans to include student representatives on the Quality Assurance Team (paragraph 1.3) 	A student representative sitting on the Quality Assurance Team and the Programme Committee	<p>Arrangements are made for a student representative to be part of the Quality Assurance Team and the Programme Committee</p> <p>Students are formally briefed about their membership of the College's committees</p>	October 2014	Student Welfare Officer	Quality Assurance Team	<p>Terms of reference of committees</p> <p>Meeting minutes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> carry out formal staff development on the Quality Code (paragraph 1.5). 	A formal staff development programme with respect to the Quality Code is in place	Formalise the staff development on the Quality Code by organising short participative workshops focusing upon each Chapter	November 2014	Office Manager	Quality Assurance Team	Staff development programme on Quality Code completed with positive evaluation results

About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/educational-oversight.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#).⁴

academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standards**.

awarding body A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA .

awarding organisation An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

designated body An organisation that has been formally appointed or recognised to perform a particular function. QAA has been recognised by UKBA as a designated body for the purpose of providing educational oversight.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

enhancement The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

external examiner An independent expert appointed by an institution to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.

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*.

good practice A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

highly trusted sponsor An organisation that the UK Government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/REO-designated-providers-handbook-13.aspx

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

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

programme (of study) An approved course of study that 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.

provider (s) (of higher education) Organisations that deliver higher education. In the UK they may be a degree-awarding body or another organisation that offers programmes of higher education on behalf of degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisations. In the context of Review for Specific Course Designation the term means an independent college.

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

quality See **academic quality**.

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

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 standards The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks for higher education qualifications** and **subject benchmark statements**. See also **academic standards**.

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