

## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The University of Law, October 2015

### Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that The University of Law has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2011 [Institutional Audit](#).

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA audit

2 The College of Law changed its name to The University of Law (the University) at the same time that it gained University status in November 2012. The University introduced a new LLB (Hons) programme in September 2012 and intended to introduce three new undergraduate Business degrees for the academic year 2015-16, through its newly established De Broc Business School at its sites in Bloomsbury, Manchester and Leeds, deferred to 2016-17 to ensure viable cohorts. It also conducted a series of periodic reviews, which culminated in the revalidations of its major programmes, in March and April 2015. The University delivers its provision at eight centres: Birmingham; Bristol; Chester; Guildford; Leeds; Manchester; and two locations in London, Bloomsbury and Moorgate. It currently works with two external partners to deliver provision: a dual award of an LLB (Hons) Civil and English Law with IE University in Spain; and an LLM in Legal Practice Management, delivered with Irwin Mitchell. It also delivered its Legal Practice Course (LPC) for the Solicitors Regulation Authority at Oxford Brookes University site during 2013-14. The University began delivering its Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) at the University of Exeter from September 2015, managed by the Bristol centre, and will deliver its LPC there from September 2016.

3 The University has changed ownership twice since May 2011, initially to Montagu Private Equity in 2012, and then to Global University Systems in June 2015. There have, accordingly, been considerable changes in management and academic governance since its last audit, including: a University Board; an Executive Management Board; the appointment of a Provost; the formation of an Academic Executive; and the appointment of a Student Officer. There is a new committee structure, which includes a new Academic Enhancement Committee, and Academic Standards and Quality Committee, both of which are subcommittees of the Academic Board. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 5,784 students enrolled at the University, a decrease of 1,604 on the 7,388 student enrolment at the time of the 2011 Institutional Audit.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The University created its own comprehensive action plan from the 2011 QAA Institutional Audit report, which goes well beyond its features of good practice and recommendations. The University also continues to maintain its action plan on a yearly basis. Two major activities, the Policy Review Project 2012-14 and the Policy Compliance Project 2014-15, demonstrate thorough institutional monitoring and enhancement. A rigorous institutional framework for assessment is evident in a number of comprehensive policies, including Assessment, Marking and Accreditation of Prior Learning - all of which are published on the website. Assessment regulations are also contained within programme handbooks. All external examiners' reports are shared with students, except those from

examiners appointed by the Bar Standards Board for the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). Overall, there is a demonstrable culture of self-reflection and continuous improvement.

5 Students value highly the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) and careers support. The VLE, reconfigured for 2015-16, continues to provide an integrated and comprehensive resource for all members of the University. Online formative assessment enables students to measure their own progress and receive extra support when staff identify the need. Students on the online programmes stated that the streamed live lectures were particularly useful and enabled them to interact with tutors and each other in real time during the lecture. The University has developed a website to assist students in career development. Monitoring visit reports from the Bar Standards Board commend the quality of the careers service and the success of pupillage interview workshops.

6 Externality is a central part of the University's Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy, which ensures the currency and relevance of courses. Membership of validation panels includes external examiners; consultants; or professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) members. As from 2013, student representatives also sit on validation panels.

7 At the point of entry to individual programmes the University ensures students have sufficient English language competence to complete their programme of study by requiring the appropriate score on an English language test from an approved testing institution as listed on their website. When the level of the student's use of English is called into question during a programme of study, the University requires evidence for the demonstration of appropriate English language competence through internal tests that identify failings in proficiency. The University always follows 'Tier 4 of the Points Based System - Policy Guidance'.

8 The University assesses applicants' prior qualifications and their suitability to study at the academic level for which they are applying, in addition to their genuine intention to study. This is achieved through checks made by the admissions teams and, for overseas students, the International Visa Office (IVO). For domestic students, applications are predominantly based on evidence of strength of application and academic achievement at the appropriate previous stage of study. The University uses the National Recognition Information Centre, the British Council, and their own databases to determine the equivalence of international qualifications with its standard entry requirements. The IVO assesses students who need visas, checking that they meet the academic requirements of the course as well as Home Office requirements. The University also uses interviews in order to screen applicants for the BPTC programme and to assess the quality of non-standard applicants for undergraduate programmes.

9 The University systematically draws upon qualitative and quantitative information in programme monitoring and review to maintain strategic oversight of student programme performance, and takes deliberate steps to enhance its provision in a number of ways. It conducts a cycle of in-year, annual and periodic monitoring and review, planned on the basis of clear principles, using a wide range of information. The information includes comprehensive student surveys, Teaching Quality Evaluations, focus group outcomes, external examiners' reports, Student Staff Liaison Committee summaries, and annual reports by non-academic functions or departments. All programmes use a standard annual monitoring report template, which requires the inclusion of 'detailed statistics on student enrolment, progression and achievement'. In addition, the University conducts an annual review of all course statistics.

10 The review team noted the rigorous oversight of annual review. This includes Academic Board operations, which review annual reports for all programmes and functions. The Academic Board also considers new programme interim reports, in addition to exception reports, when there are specific problems with programmes. The work of the Academic Board is monitored and assured by the Academic Standards Committee. The Executive Management Board monitors Key Performance Indicators from all areas of the University on a monthly basis. Responsibility for implementing and reporting on action points lies with the management team developing the action plan.

11 The University has taken deliberate steps to engage its students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. It published a Student Engagement Policy (December 2013, updated November 2014) and Protocols (October 2014), which, alongside the Student Charter, are due for review in late 2015. The University appointed its first Student Officer in 2013, a pivotal role for student engagement across the spread of campuses, who served for two years. It recently developed a Student Association for launch in late 2015, which will, in part, replace the Student Officer with a Student Association Administrator and a President of the Association. Students provide feedback in a number of ways, including the use of over 340 student class representatives, the Student Staff Liaison Committee, focus groups, online discussion groups and surveys. The surveys include Teaching Quality Evaluation forms, course surveys, targeted questionnaires and consultations. A particularly useful management tool is the yearly Student Surveys Action Plan, which gathers and monitors all action points, including the dissemination of outcomes. Students are represented on the Academic Board and Academic Standards Committee. The University provides training for student engagement and for student representatives. There is currently an ongoing implementation of an external student experience audit action plan. The University and students recognise limited difficulties with ensuring attendance at training events and with informing students about survey and initiative outcomes. Both anticipate that the new Student Association will improve matters.

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

12 The University has aligned successfully all of its academic related policies and supporting protocols to the relevant chapters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in its comprehensive 2013 policy review, as summarised in its Policy Hierarchy document. Of particular note are the 12 externally facilitated Challenge Seminars, each focusing on a chapter of the Quality Code. In May and June of 2013, the Vice President Academic Governance, Quality and Standards, and the Academic Registrar, visited each centre to deliver training to over 400 staff to enhance their familiarity with the Quality Code, and the Academic Board-actioned feedback. When developing and designing programmes, the University also uses the national frameworks, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*; the QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Draft for Consultation December 2014; and the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. For its BPTC provision, the University uses PSRB requirements in its accreditation agreement and the BPTC Handbook. It also submits an annual reflective review to the Bar Standards Board, with published reports available on its website for BPTC courses at the London Bloomsbury and Birmingham centres

13 Programme requirements in terms of knowledge and skills for the LLB and GDL are set out in the Joint Statement by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Bar Standards Board. The University submits an annual monitoring report, and enrolment, completion and results data, to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for both the GDL and LPC programmes. It also uses a larger pool of external examiners as compared with the last audit in 2011; 90 per cent of staff are currently Higher Education Academy fellows.

## Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

14 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.

15 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Edward Esche (Coordinator) and Mr Peter Hymans (Reviewer) on 8 October 2015.

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