

Summary of the Annual Quality Monitoring Report (AQMR)

2019-20 Academic Year

1. Purpose

Annual quality monitoring is an important part of the academic cycle and ensures that GBS maintains oversight of its higher education provision both in terms of academic standards and quality perspectives. This document is a summary of the main Annual Quality Monitoring Report (AQMR).

2. Summary overview of the academic year

2.1. Summary overview

The 2019-20 academic year has been a highly significant one for the development of GBS as a higher education provider. The following summarise the key developments and growth of GBS's higher education provision:

- Successfully registering with the Office for Students (OfS) in July 2019.
- New partnerships with Leeds Trinity University and the University of Suffolk with successful validation events for undergraduate programmes (Foundation Year and three-year honours degree programmes); top up degrees at Level 6; approval to offer accelerated two-year honours degrees; and a new Masters-level course.
- GBS Pearson HNC/HND in Business commenced operation in September 2019 with recruitment of students to London (Bow Road), Birmingham, and Manchester campuses.
- Approval by Pearson as an approved centre to offer the **GBS HNC/HND in Healthcare Practice for England (Healthcare Management)** programme at three campuses – London (Bow Road), Birmingham, and Manchester – from the start of the 2020-21 academic year.
- Opening three new campuses: Import Building (London), Fazeley Studios (Birmingham), and Universal Square (Manchester).
- Successful recruitment to Leeds Trinity University and University of Suffolk Foundation Year programmes at three campuses; started new Masters course approved by Leeds Trinity University and University of Suffolk; awarded top-up degree at Level 6.
- Grew student numbers from 613 in 2018-19 to 2,580 in 2019-20.
- Highly positive External Examiner reports for University of Suffolk and Buckinghamshire New University; HNDs in partnership with Leicester College; GBS HND Business programme (Level 5).

To support this significant growth in partnerships, courses, and campuses, we have this year made several major personnel and structural changes. These include the following appointments:

- Dean (newly created post)
- Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning
- Associate Dean for University of Suffolk courses
- Associate Dean for Leeds Trinity University courses
- Two new Quality Managers
- Admissions Manager, Operations Manager, IT Manager
- Appointments to various teaching positions to support the growth in student numbers

And the establishment of a new department:

- The Quality team

The academic governance structure, approved by the OfS as part of the registration process, was fully implemented and all committees and boards operated according to their terms of reference and constitution. Programme Performance Reports (PPRs) were enhanced with a new template and support was given to Programme Leaders to produce detailed and critical reports by the Quality Managers.

2.2. Progress on action identified in the previous AQMR

The AQMR contains detailed updates on the action plan from the previous year. All actions have made considerable progress, including improved consistency in marking, enhanced communication with partners, improved student progression rates, and increased student engagement across programmes. The annual monitoring process has also been enhanced as a result.

3. GBS partnerships and monitoring

3.1. GBS Pearson HN programmes

GBS successfully enrolled 760 students onto the HN Pearson Programme during the 2019-2020 academic year. This was the first year the HN Pearson Programme was offered and managed solely by GBS.

The PPR and the External Examiner reports indicate that the Programme has been managed satisfactorily in its inception year, and while there is scope for improvement, student satisfaction with the Programme is high. The External Examiner noted areas of strength and the response to the Covid-19 pandemic is commendable.

The areas that need to be strengthened during the next academic year include improving marking standardisation, reinforcing the academic misconduct process, and formalising the annual monitoring process.

3.2. University of Suffolk (UoS)

The partnership between GBS and UoS was formed in 2019 and since then 1,010 students have enrolled onto the Programmes offered jointly. The first Annual Monitoring Report will be submitted to UoS on 2 November 2020 and the actions will be detailed in the next version.

The partnership has been characterised by closer collaboration between UoS and GBS with a focus on support and allied aims. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated changes in processes, and a smooth transition to online provision of teaching was enabled by GBS's infrastructure and through constant dialogue and communication between UoS and GBS.

The External Examiner reports were largely positive, with recommendations for more time to be allocated to the external moderation process and for improvements to the feedforward process. During the next academic year, module standardisation meetings will be held to ensure greater standardisation across the board. Also, several marking, moderation and teaching workshops have been planned to support and enhance staff development.

3.3. Leeds Trinity University (LTU)

The 2019-20 academic year marked the launch of the following courses:

- **BA (Hons) Business and Enterprise with Foundation Year in Business**
- **BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care with Foundation Year in Health and Care** (from September 2019)
- **MA International Business** (from January 2020)

The approval event for these LTU programmes took place in April 2019. The event considered the appropriateness of GBS as a partner to deliver both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes awarded by LTU.

Applications were healthy across all three campuses:

- **BA (Hons) Business and Enterprise with Foundation Year in Business** (134 students enrolled)
- **BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care with Foundation Year in Health and Care** (172 students enrolled)
- **MA International Business** (10 students enrolled)

This academic year saw the introduction of detailed Assessment Briefs to enhance the student experience and student performance. Online quizzes were also introduced to help improve students' referencing skills using the Harvard Referencing style. Both these initiatives proved popular with students and we have seen a notable improvement in referencing skills, although this initiative needs to be sustained through to the next academic year and applied to Level 4 students as well.

In order to sustain our provision during the Covid-19 lockdown (from 16 March 2020), GBS switched to online provision of teaching. A full timetable was sustained, and the switch does not appear to have impacted student outcomes or progression. The combined pass and progression rates were above 70% on the BSc Foundation Year programme and above 80% on the BA programme. Even though some of the campuses achieved slightly lower overall pass rates (the BA in Birmingham and the BSc in London) we believe that going forward into the upcoming semester (September 2020), as we are implementing block delivery, our pass and progression rates on LTU programmes will improve.

Students on LTU programmes regularly participated in student engagement activities during this academic year, with over 26 student representatives elected across the three programmes. In general, attendance was good at the LTU Student Representative Committee meetings this year, with an overall average attendance rate of 75%. Action points arising from these meetings were addressed throughout the academic year to improve the overall student experience (access to online LTU resources, academic skills, and IT training).

Students also participated in both programme-level and module-level surveys this year, although the number of students participating in the Student Experience Survey (organised by LTU) was slightly below anticipated projections. Both qualitative and quantitative data from the surveys were analysed and action plans were created to ensure that concerns and issues raised by students were addressed in a timely manner. It is encouraging to note that the overall student satisfaction levels were high across these programmes, and improvements and actions were implemented to address concerns (academic support, learning resources) raised by the students.

3.4. Bucks New University (BNU)

There were no enrolments on BNU programmes for the 2019-20 academic year due to the previously agreed teach-out arrangements.

BNU conducted three Partnership Management Group meetings and two Programme Committee Meetings during the academic year. It was noted at the May 2020 BNU Programme Committee Meeting that the 2019-20 academic year proved challenging due to the Covid-19 lockdown. It was suggested by the Programme Committee Meeting that pastoral care should be GBS's main priority during the lockdown. Therefore, we implemented a series of actions to fulfil these expectations (a Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy, increasing the support offered to the Student Welfare team).

During this academic year, students at Level 4 on the BA (Hons) Business and Management programme learned the fundamentals that would provide a sound basis for their study of business management. During Year 2 (Level 5), students gained a more strategic understanding of business issues. In their final year, students were expected to integrate, apply, and evaluate the knowledge they gained through independent study on their dissertation or consultancy project.

As with previous years, a number of different learning and teaching methods were utilised, including lectures and classroom-based activities. However, from March 2020 (when the lockdown began) all learning and teaching activities were moved online.

GBS received the annual External Examiner Report for BNU programmes in May 2020. The Report confirmed that the assignments set by GBS's Programme team were appropriate to the intended outcomes of the modules and it was apparent that students were able to demonstrate achievement of those outcomes. The External Examiner outlined examples of good practice areas in the Report, confirming there was good evidence of consistent marking across the programmes within modules and that the marking criteria for each assessment had been consistently and appropriately applied within and across each module.

This year's student performance and retention levels at both module and programme levels were slightly below the BNU benchmarks at pre-resit stage. Therefore, the Annual Monitoring activity at BNU noted action points to improve these progression results for the coming academic year.

The resubmission rates were healthy in August and it was confirmed following the summer Assessment Board that the retention and progression levels were either above or close to BNU benchmarks post-resit.

Students on BNU programmes remained active and vocal, with high attendance rates at the Student Representative Committee Meetings. The concerns raised by students during the year (access to Zoom, online class behaviour concerns) were quickly addressed and actions were taken to improve the overall student experience.

3.5. Leicester College

The Leicester College HNC and HND programmes in Business and Healthcare were regularly monitored and evaluated throughout the academic year both by Leicester College and GBS.

This year, due to the exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic, the key aspects of teaching, learning, assessment and grading on the HN programmes had to be adapted accordingly. It was advised following the publication of Pearson's 'Teaching and Assessment Guidance – Coronavirus (COVID-19)' that GBS should adapt delivery of its Leicester College HN qualifications where necessary to ensure that standards were maintained during the lockdown period. At the same time, GBS was encouraged to review the HN programmes' Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria carefully to determine whether and how these changes could be made.

Leicester College also asked GBS to review its teaching and assessment plans on the HN programmes and offer alternative assessment methods that could be completed remotely (online). Where it was thought that a unit or work placement was unsuitable for online delivery it was suggested that GBS could consider delivering alternative units or delay the unit until it could be delivered and assessed in a more robust way.

One programme was particularly affected: the GBS HNC/HND in Healthcare Practice for England (Healthcare Management). This was due to the placement element on the programme: Some students were unable to access and attend placements from March 2020 due to the Covid-19 outbreak. To mitigate against this, the GBS Placement Team prioritised finding students alternative placement opportunities (e.g., providing befriending support to older people or some similar volunteer work with a local support group).

Sampling of assessments across all programmes took place in July 2020 by Pearson External Examiners as their activities at Pearson resumed from early June. All External Examiners on the Leicester College programmes confirmed that assessment decisions were consistent and fair, and this was also supported by a robust internal verification system both at GBS and at Leicester College. The recommendations the External Examiners highlighted noted that some improvements were needed with regards to the feedback presented to students. It was suggested that while the feedback sheets were clear and consistent and the layout enabled students to link Learning Outcomes to Assessment Criteria, the feedback should be more contextualised and personalised, and include feedforward elements.

There was a good level of student engagement on the Leicester College HN programmes during this academic year. Student representatives attended the Student Representative Committee meetings in high numbers. At the May 2020 Committee meeting students praised GBS for its swift move to online teaching and for the support they had received from lecturers and programme administrators during the lockdown.

During this academic year, three Programme Management Boards (PMBs) were held by Leicester College. Annual recruitment targets were published through the PMB cycle. It was noted at the Spring PMB meeting that the overall retention was high and the number of withdrawals was low.

Following the Summer PMB, it was communicated that Leicester College's Board of Governors drew back from the Leicester College–GBS partnership. Therefore, in line with the decision, the Leicester College HN programmes would be in teach-out from September 2020. Leicester College highlighted that they would be honouring the progression routes from HNCs to HNDs to ensure that students' best interests were met.

4. Areas of good practice and areas for enhancement

Note that areas for enhancement have been developed into an action plan which can be found in the AQMR. These actions will be monitored throughout the next academic year and will be detailed in our next AQMR.

4.1. Areas of good practice

- i. Responding quickly to changing circumstances (Covid-19); being adaptable while ensuring that standards are met (no detriment policies).
- ii. Offering pastoral care and support.
- iii. Ensuring marking and internal verification processes are thorough and rigorous across programmes.
- iv. Selecting programme offerings to enable widening participation and access.
- v. Structuring timetables to enable students to fit their other responsibilities around their studies.
- vi. Holding regular informal meetings with partner management teams to help iron out issues on a regular and timely basis.

4.2. Areas for Enhancement

Teaching and Learning:

- i. Monitor impact and progress of block teaching.
- ii. Continue applying academic misconduct policies consistently across all programmes.
- iii. Continue peer observations to share good practice and enhance support across teaching staff.
- iv. Further CPD sessions to be organised by the Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching for lecturers on assessment, teaching methods, standardisation, marking and internal verification.
- v. Prepare LTU lecturers for Level 5 delivery.
- vi. Improve progression rates at Levels 4 and 5 to achieve the minimum benchmark as set by the BNU Annual Monitoring Policy.
- vii. Lecturers to consider mechanisms for greater student involvement during online lessons.

Assessment:

- viii. Markers to provide more personalised feedback to students, with feedforward elements.

- ix. Internal Verifier to provide reasons for specific actions taken to provide developmental support to the marker.
- x. Ensure that accurate records of extenuating circumstances and actions decided are maintained.

Quality and standards:

- xi. A programme design and approval process to be formally documented and approved to ensure consistency.
- xii. Training to be provided for senior academics on programme approval processes and built into the process for continuity and professional development purposes.
- xiii. Curriculum approval and changes to be tracked via a central repository and database.

Enabling student development and achievement:

- xiv. Increase pastoral support services and academic skills development sessions.

Recruitment and admissions:

- xv. GBS will need to both grow its market share in established markets and identify and realise opportunities in new ones.
- xvi. Review marketing and recruitment strategy to investigate how GBS can increase conversion rates (offers to enrolments) on LTU programmes.
- xvii. Review the application process to assess candidates' language skills more accurately to ensure they can cope with the demands of their chosen programmes.

Partnerships and monitoring:

- xviii. Continue to meet awarding bodies' expectations and standards; ensure Annual Monitoring Reports are of appropriate quality.
- xix. Develop an annual monitoring template for GBS HNDs (Business and Healthcare).