

## Regulatory case report for Anglo Skills College Limited – specific ongoing condition BA

### Summary

This case report explains why we have decided to impose a specific condition of registration on Anglo Skills College Limited.

Anglo Skills College Limited has satisfied the initial conditions of registration with the OfS.

However, a Quality and Standards Review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has identified the following concerns, which could pose risks to quality for students. A summary of the concerns identified is that the college does not:

1. Provide transparent information for applicants regarding the resources available to them or demonstrate an understanding of the risks of using recruitment agents in the admissions process.
2. Have a robust approach to recruiting, inducting, developing, appraising or retaining appropriately qualified staff.
3. Have a credible formal resources strategy to enable it to maintain quality if it grows its student numbers.
4. Operate a fair and transparent complaints procedure.

We have imposed a specific ongoing condition of registration that requires the college to have a future assessment of quality. This will include, but is not limited to, consideration of its compliance with conditions B1 and B2 of registration, and testing the credibility and impact of the actions the provider has taken to address these concerns, in the context of the provider's student numbers.

### Reasons for the specific condition of registration

In a December 2021 Quality and Standards Review (QSR), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), in its role as the Designated Quality Body (DQB) assessed the college against twelve core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The QAA concluded that nine of these core practices were 'met' and that the following four core practices were 'not met':

- Core practice Q1: The provider has a reliable, fair, and inclusive admissions system.
- Core practice Q3: The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

- Core practice Q4: The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.
- Core practice Q6: The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

The concerns set out in the QSR included the following:

In relation to the provider's admissions system:

'... There are no definitive plans for staff training, including for those involved in interviewing applicants or in equality, diversity and inclusivity. Some of the information for applicants is not transparent and may mislead students as to the resources available to them at the College and the nature of opportunities to progress to universities. Staff did not demonstrate an understanding of the risks involved when using agents in recruitment.'

In relation to the provider having sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high quality academic experience:

'...The current and planned staff development opportunities were vaguely outlined and not suitable to the needs of delivery of higher education. The approach to staff appraisal was also difficult to determine and inconsistent. The team also concluded that the future plans in respect of these areas had not been adequately established. Additionally, the regulations or policies for the recruitment, appointment, induction and support for staff do not ensure that staff are appropriately qualified and skilled, and the governance process that underpins the development of staffing policies is unclear. The team was unable to establish adequately that all staff had been recruited, appointed, inducted and supported according to the College's regulations or policies, for example in terms of the requirement that academic staff should have a teaching qualification (or be supported to achieve one). The team was also concerned about some issues identified with contracts and the policy on staff retirement, which suggest that the College's staffing processes are not informed by good human resource practice and a full understanding of current legislation. The flexible nature of the staff contracts currently in use is such that the approach to staffing may lead to lack of continuity in providing sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff. The team found that senior management were unclear of any risks inherent in their staffing model and how any changes in the staffing base would be effectively managed.'

In relation to the provider having sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high quality academic experience:

'...Although the College articulated an in-prospect resource strategy, it does not have a credible formal resources strategy for the further development and maintenance of facilities and was unable to provide credible plans to develop its learning resources and student support services. The student support arrangements are not adequate for the size of the planned higher education provision and although the College indicated plans to recruit additional staff, the documented staffing plans provide no information on proposed new staff roles for student support. There was some lack of clarity regarding staff roles and responsibilities in supporting students. Staff do not hold specific qualifications relating to aspects of student support, and there was limited evidence that support staff have appropriate qualifications and training; however, it was confirmed that suitable arrangements can be made, where necessary, for the

referral of students to specialist external support services and that the College intends to recruit additional staff to support these processes in future. These plans are, however, not documented. The team's assessment of facilities, learning resources and support services confirms that the College cannot offer a high-quality academic experience for its planned student numbers because of limited provision of library facilities and learning resources and lack of a defined strategy to expand facilities and provide the full range of support mechanisms for students. The assessment team found that although the College has sufficient resources to support its current small student numbers, it did not demonstrate that it will have sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience for its planned growth in student numbers.'

In relation to the provider having fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students:

'...There are no current arrangements for recording and monitoring the outcomes of informal complaints processes and although plans to do so were articulated in response to a meeting question at the visit no documentary evidence of such plans was provided. Given that the College has received no formal complaints or appeals, it was not possible to view examples that would enable the team to assess how the College implements its procedures and whether they enable fair outcomes. The team identified some issues with the clarity and completeness of the procedures, including errors and discrepancies, a lack of clarity about how the complaints procedure is applied to different aspects of the student experience, incomplete detail in the appeals procedure regarding timescales, and a lack of clarity on the arrangements for escalation, with neither policy referring to Pearson and the OIAHE being referred to only in the appeals procedure. The team also noted some lack of independence in the procedures in terms of the role of the Principal. The team also identified issues relating to document version control, with the version of the complaints procedure on the website differing from the version presented to the team as the definitive current procedure. Staff and student handbooks contain limited information, the staff handbook including information only on complaints and the student handbooks having a very brief cross-reference to the appeals procedure but no reference to complaints. Students were aware of the complaints and appeals procedures and confirmed that they are discussed at induction, although none had used the formal procedures. Although the team recognises that at the College's current stage in its development, complaints and appeals are likely to be successfully resolved through informal mechanisms and that the formal procedures therefore do not feature prominently in the College's current practices, the College was not able to provide any evidence of monitoring and reflecting on informal complaints. The combination of issues highlighted has resulted in the assessment team concluding that the College does not have sufficiently robust and credible plans for developing and operating fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals that are clear and accessible to students.'

## **Relevant OfS conditions of registration**

Revised ongoing conditions of registration B1, B2, B4 and B5 came into effect on 1 May 2022. While the provider's registration application has been assessed against the original initial conditions B1, B2, B4 and B5 which were in force at the time it submitted its registration application, the revised conditions apply to the provider once registered. It is therefore our view that the concerns raised in the QSR report pose risks of a future breach that are relevant to revised ongoing conditions B1 and B2, as follows:

## Condition B1

This condition requires a provider to 'ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience'.

The QAA's concerns in relation to core practice Q3 indicate that the college is failing to demonstrate an appropriate staffing model to ensure continuity in providing sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high quality academic experience.

This could undermine the quality of students' academic experience.

## Condition B2

This condition requires a provider to 'take all reasonable steps to ensure that each cohort of students registered on each higher education course receives resources and support which are sufficient for the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience for those students; and those students succeed in and beyond higher education'.

The QAA's concerns in relation to core practices Q1, Q4 and Q6 indicate that the college is failing to:

- operate a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions process, specifically to understand the risks associated with using recruitment agencies, provide adequate staff training and offer transparent information to prospective students. This increases the risk that the provider will not provide sufficient support for students, because students may not have accurate information about the resources and progression opportunities which will be available to them when they are enrolled on a course and because a failure by the provider to manage the risks associated with the use of recruitment agencies may lead to some students being recruited to a course which is unsuited to their needs and capabilities
- have sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high quality academic experience for its planned growth in student numbers
- operate a fair and transparent complaints procedure. This increases the risk that the provider will not provide sufficient support for students because students may lack awareness of how to report academic or other misconduct or may be deterred from doing so because of a lack of impartiality in the complaints procedure.

This could undermine the support the college provides to students. It could also have an impact on students' learning experience, their ability to complete the course, and the outcomes they achieve from their course.

## Decision

We require Anglo Skills College Limited to:

- a. take action to address the concerns set out in the QSR and provide to the OfS evidence of the actions it has taken and;

- b. provide evidence in the form of a Student Support Plan to the OfS of how it will maintain quality as it increases student numbers and;
- c. publish a statement about the Student Support Plan on the home page of its website which draws attention to the specific condition and;
- d. undergo a future assessment of quality by the OfS. The OfS's assessment will focus on, but not be limited to, the concerns identified in the QSR and as part of its assessment it will test the credibility and impact of the actions the provider has taken to address the concerns and the provider's compliance with ongoing conditions B1 and B2.

The provider's planned student number growth is a key factor in this specific ongoing condition because many of the concerns raised in the QSR report relate to growth, and more specifically there being a lack of definitive, credible and robust planning for growth. The OfS is therefore seeking to reduce the risk to students in the event that the provider significantly increases its student numbers after it is registered, by ensuring that the provider has suitably planned for growth, so that it can be managed effectively and does not lead to quality risks for students, or to a potential breach of conditions B1 and B2.

The text set out below constitutes the specific ongoing condition imposed on Anglo Skills College Limited, pursuant to section 6(1) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, and is referred to as 'Specific Ongoing Condition BA (Anglo Skills College Limited)'.

## **Specific Ongoing Condition BA (Anglo Skills College Limited)**

### **Requirement to take action to address the concerns raised in the Quality and Standards Review ('QSR') conducted in December 2021 and to co-operate with an assessment of quality by the Office for Students**

BA.1 The Provider must take all reasonable steps to address all of the concerns raised by the Designated Quality Body in its assessment of the Provider conducted in December 2021 and set out in a report dated 29 April 2022 (hereafter 'Concerns') in relation to the following matters:

- (a) The reliability, fairness and inclusivity of the Provider's admissions system
- (b) The qualifications and skills of the Provider's staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience
- (c) The sufficiency and appropriateness of the Provider's facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high quality academic experience
- (d) The fairness and transparency and accessibility to students of the Provider's procedures for handling complaints and appeals.

BA.2 The Provider must provide to the OfS in the Specified Manner and at the Specified Time:

- (a) A written commentary that sets out for each of the Concerns:
  - i. The steps the Provider has already taken to address the Concerns;
  - ii. The steps the Provider proposes to take to address the Concerns;

- iii. A timeline for all steps set out at i. and ii.;
- iv. A breakdown of resources allocated to achieve the steps set out at i. and ii.

(b) Any supporting evidence it considers relevant to verify the steps it has taken or proposes to take set out in BA.2 (a) i. and ii.

(c) A Student Support Plan which describes the steps it has already taken and the steps it proposes to take to ensure that it can deliver a high-quality academic experience and has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience as it scales up its provision.

BA.3 Within five working days of the date of Registration with the OfS, the Provider must publish (and, thereafter, maintain the publication of) a statement on the home page of the Provider's website drafted precisely as follows:

"The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education in England. It has imposed a regulatory requirement called a specific ongoing condition of registration on Anglo Skills College to provide to the OfS a Student Support Plan which describes how it will maintain quality as it increases student numbers. More information about specific ongoing conditions imposed on higher education providers is available on the OfS Register."

BA.4 The Provider must comply with any written directions issued by the OfS (from time to time) in connection with its co-operation with an assessment of quality which will include but not be limited to its compliance with conditions B1 and B2, undertaken by the OfS

BA.5 For the purposes of paragraph BA.4, directions issued by the OfS may cover (but are not limited to) the following subject matter:

- (a) the timing and scope of the quality assessment;
- (b) descriptions of information and documents that must be made available to the OfS; and
- (c) any other specified actions the Provider must take or refrain from taking which the OfS reasonably considers are necessary or appropriate for ensuring that the assessment can be conducted effectively.

BA.6 This condition will cease to have effect on 21 July 2026.

BA.7 Where this condition ceases to have effect, that cessation does not in any way affect the ability of the OfS to investigate and/or take any form of regulatory or enforcement action in respect of any non-compliance (whether or not it remains ongoing in nature) which took place during the period that this condition was in effect.

## **Definitions**

BA.8 For the purposes of this condition:

"Designated Quality Body" means the body designated under Schedule 4 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to perform the assessment functions under section 23 of that Act, which until 31 March 2023 was the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education;

“OfS” means Office for Students;

“Provider” means Anglo Skills College Limited

“Specified Manner” means in relation to the requirement in paragraph BA.2 above, submitted via the ‘OfS Regulation - Submissions’ section of the OfS portal.

“Specified Time” means in relation to the requirement in paragraph BA.2 above no later than **1700 on Friday 20 October 2023**.

“Student numbers” means the number of full-time equivalent students who are either registered on a higher education course at the Provider or is on a higher education course that is being delivered by the Provider.

“Student Support Plan” means a document that sets out:

(a) the steps that the Provider will undertake, is undertaking or has undertaken, to ensure that, as its Student numbers increase:

- i. Student support functions will be maintained and developed; and
- ii. all Students will be adequately supported and have access to a high-quality academic experience; and
- iii. Students are adequately supported to succeed in and beyond higher education.

(b). how the Governing Body will monitor its Student support functions to ensure that all Students receive a high-quality academic experience and are adequately supported to succeed in and benefit from higher education