INTO Stirling LLP

Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements

May 2023

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at INTO Stirling LLP. The review took place on 11 May 2023 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Ms Amy Gallacher
- Dr Steven Proud.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner
- make judgements on the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

The review meetings were held virtually rather than onsite because travel to the provider's premises was prevented as a result of industrial action by rail workers.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.[1] More information about this review method can be found in the [Handbook for Providers](#).[2]

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/eo-ea-handbook-for-providers.pdf

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at INTO Stirling LLP, both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the review visit. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgement about INTO Stirling LLP.

- **Confidence** can be placed in INTO Stirling LLP's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.
- **Confidence** can be placed in INTO Stirling LLP's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at INTO Stirling LLP.

- The robust construction of the framework for the joint venture between INTO Stirling LLP and the University of Stirling which underpins the management and enhancement of the student learning experience.
- The strong focus on student transitions, one of the Scottish Enhancement Themes, which underpins the stated aims of the joint venture.

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to INTO Stirling LLP.

It is **desirable** for the provider to:

- work with the University of Stirling's partners to ensure the effective implementation of the agreed job description for the Link Tutor role, with particular reference to the nature, frequency and consistency of link tutor engagement with students
- strengthen staff development to facilitate a greater understanding of external reference points and their utilisation by both academic and professional support staff.

About INTO Stirling LLP

The University of Stirling (the University) and INTO University Partnerships (IUP) formed a Joint Venture company in 2014. The aim was to combine the internationalisation experience, resources and assets of both the University and IUP to create a study centre on the University campus. INTO Stirling LLP (the Centre) was first located in Airthrey Castle on campus, moving into a custom-designed building on the campus in 2017.

In 2022-23, there were 195 students at the Centre on a mix of Academic English Language programmes and academic programmes. There are 13 full-time teaching staff and 11 part-time teaching staff, making a total full-time equivalent of 19.55.

The Centre, the University and IUP share educational responsibilities for standards and quality. The University approves programmes and is responsible for overseeing academic standards. The Centre is responsible for setting assignments, internal moderation, assessment feedback, recruiting staff, student engagement, annual monitoring and producing programme specifications. IUP is responsible for providing a range of operational support and shares responsibility for recruitment. The University is the awarding body. There is a written contract between the three parties.

The programmes are guided by the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

The key change to occur since the 2021-22 annual monitoring by QAA is the appointment of a new Centre Director.

The University last conducted a review of the Centre in 2019, as a result of which it concluded that the Centre was fulfilling its responsibilities under the agreement.

Detailed findings about INTO Stirling LLP

1 Academic standards

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

1.1   INTO Stirling LLP (the Centre) is a limited company established through a Joint Venture and owned equally between the University of Stirling (the University) and INTO University Partnerships UK (IUP). Led by the Joint Venture agreement, the Centre, the University and IUP share the roles and responsibilities to ensure that academic standards are managed appropriately in order to deliver high-quality learning opportunities for all students. The University and IUP maintain oversight of all the Centre processes in relation to the management of academic standards.

1.2   The Joint Venture is a legal subsidiary of the University, and, as such, the Joint Venture becomes an item at the University Court, the Academic Council, the Joint Policy, Planning and Resources Committee, and the University Strategy and Policy Group. The Centre is represented on key university committees. The Joint Venture Management Committee meets five times per year and has power to make all decisions and is the governing body of the Joint Venture. The Committee has delegated authority and responsibility for the supervision and management of the Joint Venture. Membership is split equally between the University and IUP. The Chair of the Committee rotates biennially between the University Secretary and the Chief Operating Officer of IUP, the latter being the current Chair. The review team, assessing the effectiveness of the various elements that together make up the Joint Venture, consider the robust construction of the framework for the Joint Venture between the Centre and University which underpins the management and enhancement of the student learning experience to be **good practice**.

1.3   The Centre operates within the University's governance and regulatory frameworks, which ensures that the responsibilities for academic standards and quality are appropriately discharged. This is evidenced through the Joint Venture's Quality Assurance Agreement, which sets out the responsibilities of the University and the Centre in relation to the management of academic standards and quality. The University is responsible for the setting and management of academic standards and regulations. Successful students studying on Foundation, Diploma and Graduate Diploma programmes receive awards of the University.

1.4   The University is responsible for oversight of setting and maintaining academic standards through validation and examination board processes, periodic review, and referral through its deliberative committee structures. All academic programmes delivered by the Joint Venture are approved by the University. The Centre's programmes are validated on a five-yearly basis, with the most recent revalidation process taking place in 2019.

1.5   Although the University has ultimate responsibility for the management of academic standards, within the Centre, the Centre Director has overall responsibility to ensure that the organisation fulfils its delegated responsibilities for the management of academic standards. The Centre Director is responsible for all operational aspects of the Centre, including standards and quality, and reports to the IUP University Joint Venture Management Committee. The Academic Director is responsible for academic quality, and manages the programme managers and professional development. The Centre Director and the Academic Director are also members of the Joint Venture Academic Management Group which is responsible for the academic regulatory framework of the Centre. The Management Group is chaired by the Deputy Principal (Education and Students) at the University and is the forum which oversees the process of maintaining and disseminating university regulations for the Centre.

1.6   The Centre delivers a range of pathway programmes at SQCF Levels 7 to 10 and an International Foundation programme at SCQF Level 7 focused on the academic skills and knowledge required for progression in specific subject clusters, including business, finance, economics and marketing; media, humanities and social sciences; science; sport; computing; and engineering. All programmes support students in improving their English language skills for further university study in the UK. Whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level, all academic programmes provided by the Centre provide students with the opportunity to progress onto a named degree programme at the University of Stirling.

1.7   The Centre provides standalone programme options, which enable students to apply to UK universities other than Stirling. The Centre has partnership agreements with other Scottish universities which accept students under the INTO Scotland Education Centre sub-brand onto their degree programmes, based on mapping against both institutions' programmes.

1.8   A number of English language programmes for international students are also delivered by the Centre, but as they do not have an SCQF or RQF equivalent level, they remain out of scope for this review.

1.9   While all partners share responsibility for developing new programmes, the University retains ultimate responsibility for programme approval. All new academic pathway programmes are approved formally through the standard curriculum development process of the University. Major modifications to programmes are treated similarly. The Learning and Teaching Committee has delegated authority to approve minor amendments to programmes.

1.10   Proposals for new programmes may be generated by the Centre or IUP. All new programmes and major amendments are the responsibility of the Centre Directors, and the process supports the realisation of each centre's three-year strategic action plan. Proposals are discussed initially at the Academic Management Group, and subsequently submitted to the Education and Student Experience Committee Curriculum Management Sub-Committee. New programme proposals are presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee, Academic Management Group and then the Curriculum Management Sub-Committee.

1.11   The programme approval process is outlined in the Centre Quality Handbook and Programme Board remit. Programme and module specifications are approved in line with the University's regulations, and specify the levels and credits associated with each award. These align with the SQCF, and the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme learning outcomes are mapped against modules within the programme specification. The Centre is responsible for producing programme information to the University's specification.

1.12   The combination of a robust quality assurance governance structure and processes at the University, with appropriate management oversight within the College, ensures that academic standards are effectively maintained and monitored.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.13   The Centre makes appropriate use of external reference points to support the management of academic standards. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is the key external reference point for the Centre. The Centre Quality Handbook maps the Quality Code to key policies and procedures around the 12 themes of the Quality Code. The Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) is also embedded into the Quality Handbook for the Centre. The Quality Handbook was reviewed, and minor updates made in 2022. Staff training events are held periodically around key issues identified through, for example, monitoring, reporting, and staff appraisal and review.

1.14   The alignment of the Centre's programmes, modules and awards is mapped to the FHEQ and SCQF frameworks through the University's programme approval and modification processes. The learning outcomes of all programmes and modules are aligned to the relevant SCQF descriptors. The learning outcomes are outlined in the programme specifications and module descriptors, as well as the corresponding SCQF levels and credits and the methods of assessment.

1.15   The Centre also aligns with the Scottish Enhancement Framework and a number of enhancement themes are embedded into the work of the Centre. These include the themes on transitions, academic integrity and hybrid learning. Key external reference points are embedded fully within the University's policies and procedures, and have been adopted by the Centre's processes and integrated into practice. However, staff knowledge of how the key reference points are used in practice was limited.

1.16   These processes ensure that external reference points are used effectively to support the management of academic standards at the Centre.

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

1.17   The Centre uses external examiners, verification and assessment effectively to assure academic standards. The Centre is responsible for setting assessments, standardisation, marking including sampled double-marking, internal moderation, and providing feedback to students. All academic subjects are marked using the University's Common Marking Scheme to ensure consistency of approach and adherence to the University's Academic Standards. Assessment marks are formally considered and approved at module and programme assessment boards constituted by the University.

1.18   Programmes delivered by the Centre are subject to oversight and scrutiny by external examiners. External examiners are appointed by the University for a four-year term of office. The role of the external examiners includes oversight of the setting of assessments, assessment methodologies, and identifying areas of good practice. External examiners liaise with teaching staff and programme managers. Reports are compiled for each of the two major exam boards, in June and August. Programme managers respond formally to external examiner reports and reflect on the reports within the Annual Programme Monitoring Reports. The reports are considered at the Centre Learning and Teaching Committee as part of the annual programme monitoring process. External examiner reports are shared with students on the Centre SharePoint site, but the students met by the team were aware of the role of the external examiner but not the location of the reports.

1.19   All the Centre programmes are subject to periodic revalidation by the University, most recently in 2019. The University produces a report, including recommendations for improvement, enhancement and development. These actions are discussed within sub-group meetings and taken forward through the Centre action plans.

1.20   Although they do not have a specified oversight role, another useful source of advice is provided by university link tutors, many of whom are Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching or Internationalisation. Link tutors meet quarterly and act as the formal link between the Centre and the faculties at the University. They may be involved in discussions on potential module and programme changes, as well as assessment, and a range of more general topics. Link tutors may also meet with students and arrange access to university seminars, and taster and academic transition events.

1.21   Through the use of internal and external moderation, external examiner oversight, and university linkage, monitoring and review processes, the Centre is able to assure the maintenance and management of academic standards effectively.

The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in INTO Stirling LLP's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1   The arrangements for the management of the quality of learning opportunities mirror those set out in section 1 - Academic Standards, above. Quality assurance processes are overseen by the University, with oversight provided by the University's Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC), and Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC). Robust quality assurance arrangements are detailed in the Quality Assurance Agreement and are set out in the Quality Handbook. The Centre provides a clear structure that links with key university committees, including the Student Experience Committee, ULTQC. Overall oversight of the centre is through the Joint Venture Management Committee.

2.2   The academic partnership is exemplified by the overall structure of the Academic Management Group, comprising the University's Academic Registrar, Dean for Teaching Quality Enhancement, five Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching, the Academic Quality and Governance Manager, and the Director of Recruitment. The INTO Centre Director, Academic Director and Programme Managers are also represented in the structure of the committee.

2.3   The Centre is currently introducing a new version of its learning and teaching policy, which at the time of the review was still in draft format. The draft policy is clear and sets out overall roles and responsibilities. The draft policy recognises that students must develop the skills to become independent learners who are resilient and able to cope with the challenges of an increasingly technology-led and hybrid study environment. The implementation of the policy will herald a significant shift in the model of support, both academic and pastoral, that is provided by the Centre to students, with greater emphasis placed on preparing students for university study. The review team supports these developments in the model of support, which are evidence of the Centre taking measures to review and enhance its provision.

2.4   The University Link Tutor role provides the opportunity to share key information and advice to students on the Centre programmes and relevant university programmes, and to escalate issues relevant to Centre students. The Link Tutor is visible to academic staff within the Centre, but the review team found, in their meeting with students, that they were less familiar with the role. A series of post-transition forums held by the Centre with students in May 2022, indicated a need for improved and more consistent link tutor arrangements (see also the recommendation in paragraph 2.48). Students also report some difficulties with feeling integrated within the University when transitioning from the Centre to the University.

2.5   The infrastructure for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities is strong and provides appropriate systems for management oversight. There is evidence that deliberate steps are being taken to continually improve and enhance provision and that the Centre is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

2.6   The Centre has a robust frame of reference for developing new programmes and modules which is clearly set out in the Quality Handbook. The quality framework links clearly with Subject Benchmark Statements and the SCQF. Clear guidance is provided to inform the process for making both minor and major changes to programmes. However, the review team found that while senior staff were knowledgeable about the quality framework, teaching staff were less so and were able to demonstrate only a limited understanding of the external reference points that underpinned the programmes on which they were engaged. While being satisfied that the Quality Handbook sets out processes clearly and would act as an effective point of reference for staff involved in programme development, monitoring and review, the review team **recommends** that the Centre strengthens staff development to facilitate a greater understanding of external reference points and their utilisation by both academic and professional support staff.

2.7   Centre awards are made by the University, with overall accountability for quality and standards lying with the University. The Centre works with appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements and the SCQF, with the Centre programmes mapped to the university statement of graduate outcomes. In addition, the Centre maps its English-Language pathways modules to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), with units designed to bring students up to the equivalent of IELTS 6.0 (or other entry requirement) to support progression into both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

2.8   Subjects are marked using a common marking scheme and internal moderation takes place to ensure consistency; external examiners confirm alignment with learning outcomes and grade descriptors.

2.9   Admissions are a shared responsibility with the University, but the majority of standard decisions are made by IUP. IUP considers applications alongside published university entry requirements based upon academic and English language grades. The Centre programmes form a gateway to the Centre undergraduate / postgraduate programmes, with progression dependent on performance against pre-set progression criteria.

2.10   Students on the Centre programmes have full access to the university complaints and appeals processes. Appeals follow the university appeals process. In respect of complaints, there are two key points of contact - one within the University and one at the Centre. Students are informed of the complaints and appeals process, but in discussing this with students, it was apparent that they had little understanding of the process but would be directed to the procedures by any member of staff with whom they had contact (see also paragraph 2.26).

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

2.11   The Centre has clear and robust policies for annual reviews of their programmes through their annual programme review process. The resulting annual monitoring reports draw upon external examiners' recommendations and document the responses made to the external examiner reports. Mechanisms exist for the student voice to feed into the annual reviews, and these are reported as part of the programme review.

2.12   The student voice is important for shaping programme structures, with personal tutoring feedback obtained through reflective diaries. The Annual Student Experience Survey indicates generally positive student feedback. Evidence from focus groups conducted with students progressing from Centre programmes, shows student preparation for

undergraduate studies, but with students reporting a drop in grades from those achieved while studying at the Centre to those in first-year undergraduate study.

2.13 The Centre follows a clear and transparent approach to internal and external moderation, which is carefully documented. External examiners are used to provide input about both the learning design and assessment. External examiner comments and recommendations are considered, and responded to, as part of the annual programme review.

2.14 Student representatives are members of the Learning and Teaching Committee. Minutes of the committee meetings demonstrate that the student voice directly contributes to decisions. Recent examples being a reduction in the number of assignments required and a review of dates when assignments are released to students.

2.15 Teaching observations are conducted by programme managers and enhanced by an optional peer observation process, whereby a teacher from another discipline completes a teaching observation and provides constructive feedback. Such observations contribute to management oversight of the quality of teaching but also provide opportunities for identifying development and enhancement needs (see also paragraph 2.19).

How effective are the provider's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.16 Following the 2019 QAA review, the Centre created a Staff Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy, which explicitly outlines its commitment to providing all staff with CPD opportunities and details the key activities and mechanisms used to promote professional development, disseminate best practice across all teams, and the internal processes used to measure the impact of training and development opportunities. The Staff CPD Policy states that CPD activities are designed to ensure that students receive a high-quality learning experience and outlines the provider's expectations that: new staff complete a formal induction process; that all staff complete 40 hours of mandatory CPD per annum; and that academic, management and support staff receive role-specific training. The Centre's Planning Calendar for 2022-23 provides a monthly breakdown of key activities, including providing a formal induction to newly-recruited academic staff and supporting training and CPD activities. These expectations are confirmed and expanded upon in the Centre's Quality Handbook, which describes the processes in place to monitor the effectiveness of staff development arrangements.

2.17 Induction and probation activities are staggered over a three-month period during which new staff meet with their line manager to reflect on their competencies and to set training objectives. To ensure that the probationary period effectively supports all newly-recruited staff, the Centre provides guidance to staff with line management responsibilities which outlines key stages of induction and probation processes, and explicitly states the expectation that line managers co-create development objectives and identify additional training opportunities to support newly-recruited staff members.

2.18 The Centre has adopted the IUP's Performance Coaching process and developed guidance for all staff which sets out the expectations associated with key activities - in particular, the Mid-Year and End-of-Year Reviews and associated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Programme managers provide oversight of this process, maintaining a record of completed staff mentoring, training and CPD activities to ensure that staff engagement fulfils mandatory CPD and training requirements expected by the Staff CPD Policy. As part of the Performance Coaching Process, staff are required to complete annual self-evaluations, during which they critically evaluate their own performance and identify development objectives, ahead of a one-to-one discussion with their line manager. The

Performance Coaching process is managed electronically through Workday, where programme managers can monitor completion of staff development activities through digital dashboards.

2.19 Teaching observations are conducted annually by programme managers, and enhanced by the optional peer observation process, whereby a teacher from another discipline completes a teaching observation and provides constructive feedback as requested. Both the formal teaching observations and optional peer observation process enable the identification of emerging CPD requirements with the records of completed activities utilised during the Mid-Year and End-Of-Year reviews.

2.20 Centre staff can access the University of Stirling's Framework for Evidencing Learning and Teaching Enhancement route to a Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy or to a Postgraduate (PG) Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. The Centre's staff participation to date has resulted in five Associate Fellows, six Fellows, one Senior Fellow and three PG Certificate holders; a subset of which could be verified through Fellowship, Associate Fellowship and Senior Fellowship certificates awarded to academic staff. The Centre staff can also access 'teaching bites' training sessions delivered by the University of Stirling's Academic Development team and have themselves delivered focused teaching bite sessions to partner staff on hidden barriers for international learners. The review team learned that the Centre staff will participate in 'First Responder' training delivered by the University in May 2023 which will address preventing and tackling gender-based violence.

2.21 All staff with management responsibilities receive in-house training to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities and can undertake external training, such as the ILM Level 5 Leadership and Management qualification and participate in the IUP's Manager Development Programme; the latter currently with two programme managers enrolled.

2.22 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IUP appointed a Learning Technologist to deliver intensive staff training on digital technologies, supporting the provision of a fulfilling online learning experience and effective staff-student communication links - both of which required staff to utilise digital solutions and enhancements. Staff highly endorsed the quality of support provided by the IUP's Learning Technologist and stated that their support was pivotal in enabling them to identify and capitalise upon digital opportunities. To retain the lessons learnt from the pandemic, the Centre staff continue to receive Technology Enhanced Learning training from the Learning Technologist, enhancing staff digital literacy and ensuring that intended learning outcomes are appropriately supported through the use of digital technologies embedded within the curriculum. All of this aligns with the Centre's Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching Policy expectations, which state that staff receive training, ensuring that the student learning experience makes appropriate use of relevant digital technologies and that students are effectively prepared through the curriculum for a technology-enhanced workplace.

2.23 Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) activities use student feedback to identify themes across all academic programmes with summary reports presented at meetings of the Learning and Teaching Committee to stimulate discussion and inform self-evaluation. APM Summary Reports document training delivered to academic staff to enhance hybrid delivery of teaching and the use of digital solutions, such as Canvas and Microsoft Teams; and subsequent positive student feedback on staff adoption and the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.24 Alongside formal monitoring processes, the Centre engages with student representative feedback and student surveys to monitor the student learning experience and quality of learning opportunities provided by academic staff, and to identify and address staff

underperformance. Minutes from a recent Student-Staff Liaison Committee Feedback Session support that students are satisfied with the quality of teaching, including the range of classroom activities and engagement with academic staff. The review team learnt that students are satisfied with the opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of teaching and use of digital technologies, but that students are not generally aware of any action taken by the Centre in response to the feedback they provide. Annual Student Experience Survey results broadly support that students are satisfied with the staff response to programme-level feedback, believing their feedback is acted upon, given that only 6.5% of students disagree with the statement. However, given there is some indication of student dissatisfaction in this area, the review team encourages the provider to reflect on the effectiveness of existing arrangements for monitoring the implementation of agreed actions in response to student feedback and to ensure that students understand how their feedback is used to enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

2.25   The systemic approach to identifying and monitoring staff development, the range of available CPD activities, the clear structure supporting staff to identify and engage with relevant training opportunities, and student endorsement of staff competencies with digital technologies, demonstrate that effective arrangements are in place to maintain and enhance the quality of the learning opportunities.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that students are appropriately and effectively supported?

2.26   The Centre's induction process introduces students to all relevant policies, including attendance, assessment, complaints and appeals; key academic and professional support staff; the range of support services available to them during their studies; and has specific orientation events designed to support students in adjusting to live in the UK and settle into their new accommodation. Relevant information on all policies is contained and highlighted in the Student Handbook, which is hosted online to enhance accessibility. The Student Arrivals Survey provides support for the effectiveness of the induction process. However, when the review team met with students, they were unfamiliar with the Centre complaints and appeals processes and were unable to identify where they might find information to support their own understanding. The review team encourages the provider to reflect on whether existing arrangements, such as the induction process or the inclusion of links to relevant policies on the VLE assignment submission portal, are sufficient to support student awareness and understanding of relevant institutional policies.

2.27   The Centre has a dedicated Student Services team which provides a range of services including admissions, accommodation, welfare, finance, support completing visa and immigration checks, and a dedicated 24-hour emergency helpline telephone number. IUP's Student Services staff work closely with partner staff to ensure students receive timely access to the University of Stirling's student support services, such as the counselling service. The Head of Student Services is IUP's nominated safeguarding lead and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Centre's extremely thorough safeguarding procedures and policies with support from Student Services team members who also perform safeguarding duties. The Centre Director is a member of the IUP's Safeguarding Committee, which ensures that the Centre's approach to safeguarding and student support is aligned with the University's expectations. Professional support staff confirmed that they complete daily attendance monitoring for all students under the age of 18 and that they provide students who are under 18 with relevant information about living in the UK upon arrival, including highlighting that under UK law it is illegal for them to drink alcohol.

2.28   All staff have completed mandatory mental health training and safeguarding training to Level 1, with some staff completing training to Levels 2 and 3. Clear guidance for supporting students with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) is also provided. Academic

staff commented that the IUP had recently delivered training on staff mental health which had been well-received and helpful in supporting them to maintain a healthy relationship with work. The virtual tour of the IUP Intranet allowed the review team to confirm that staff mental health training sessions had recently been delivered and to additionally confirm plans to deliver further Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training to all staff.

2.29   Each student is assigned a Personal Tutor who acts as a first point of contact for advice, signposting students to appropriate academic or pastoral support services, and enhances personal and academic development by identifying relevant training activities. The Quality Handbook states that students should expect to meet their personal tutor weekly in semester one and fortnightly in semester two, and that they will submit reflective and self-evaluative text to information discussion and identify personal development goals. These sessions are utilised by staff to identify trends likely to result in non-achievement or non-progression, monitor concerns and success of intervention strategies, and to inform Student Services of support arrangements when specific welfare concerns are identified. Students endorsed that the personal tutor arrangements are effective in supporting their academic development and that the role provided pastoral support. A small number of students met by the review team expressed that the weekly sessions with their personal tutor often felt too brief but noted that they were able to contact them at other times if required.

2.30   Any teacher can make referrals for an assessment of needs if particular concerns are identified. If students choose to study at another provider, the review team learnt that the Centre is unable to provide a record of their SEND assessment or the details of any support arrangements implemented during their studies to other universities. The Centre may wish to reflect on whether records of completed assessments and associated support arrangements could be provided to other universities, with the student's permission, to ensure that all students receive access to equivalent support.

2.31   The Centre hosts weekly 'Students of Concern' meetings to facilitate communication between academic and professional support staff, enabling student concerns to be flagged, monitored and supported through identification of relevant support resources. Academic staff are responsible for flagging student concerns early, given the frequency of contact and maintain strong links with IUP's Student Services staff. Academic staff confirmed that they received student mental health training which covered how to identify signs and risk factors which could indicate a student may be experiencing mental health difficulties. Agreed actions are recorded through a live spreadsheet, which is reviewed and updated weekly to ensure the relevancy of support arrangements and that actions are resolved in a timely manner by programme managers. Senior staff confirmed that student attendance and engagement data, including submission of assignments, is used by staff to support the identification of risk factors towards non-progression. IUP's Student Services staff confirmed they can refer students directly onto University Support Services which ensures students receive timely access to relevant support service appointments.

2.32   The review team learnt that if a student fails to progress on their first attempt, programme managers will directly contact students and invite them to meet, during which they consider the feedback provided to the student across prior coursework submissions, identify appropriate support arrangements, and co-create a study plan to ensure that their progress towards module and programme learning outcomes is achievable and supported. Programme managers confirmed that students are encouraged to contact academic staff directly for subject-specific support.

2.33   The Centre uses student feedback, collected through the Annual Student Experience and Arrivals Surveys and by student representatives for the Student-Staff Liaison Committee, to evaluate the effectiveness of student support arrangements. Minutes of the

Student-Staff Liaison Student Feedback Group document positive student feedback regarding the communications, advice, guidance and mental health support from IUP's Student Services staff. Annual Student Experience Survey results broadly support that students are satisfied with the range of support offered by IUP's Student Services team.

2.34   The Centre engages with university link tutors to ensure that students are appropriately supported to develop the necessary academic and digital skills to support the transition to university study. Minutes from link tutor meetings confirm that this relationship is effective as the documentation evidences consideration of identified progression challenges, particularly around the ability of individual students to self-direct learning and the ongoing redevelopment of curriculum assessments and module intended learning outcomes to encourage academic independence. Curriculum modifications include diversifying the range of assessments methods across all academic pathways to ensure students gain experience with all methods of assessments used within university modules and provision of asynchronous assignments which necessitate the development of independent learning and effective time management skills.

2.35   The Centre staff work closely with partner staff in the University Employability Team and the IUP's Careers First Team to ensure students capitalise upon the range of careers and employability events and services available to them during their studies. Annual Student Experience Survey results support that students value advice provided to them by Centre staff on their university progression options with 81.8% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

2.36   The Centre has a Welfare and Student Engagement Officer who promotes student community, inclusion and wellbeing, and works closely with partner staff in the University Events team to organise a programme of social events - informed by student demographics and understanding of cultural needs - to integrate students in the wider university community. The effectiveness of these activities in ensuring entrants are integrated into the broader student community, giving them the opportunity to make friends and foster a sense of belonging, is monitored through the Annual Student Experience Survey, which indicates positive student feedback from the majority of students. Students confirmed that they receive access to all of the University of Stirling's clubs, societies and Sport Centre facilities at no additional cost. The Centre has also established an Alumni Club and runs termly events enabling students to chat with alumni about the transition to university study. Taking into account the design of the Joint Venture; the obvious partnership culture between the Centre and the University of Stirling; through to operational aspects - including the Link Tutor role, joint working between staff and the University Employability Team and University Events Team - the review team concluded that the strong focus on student transitions, one of the Scottish Enhancement Themes which underpins the stated aims of the joint venture, is an example of **good** practice.

2.37   To strengthen student engagement with feedback mechanisms, the Centre has replaced end-of-module evaluation questionnaires, which often saw poor engagement and limited actionable feedback, with an end-of-academic year, programme-level approach consisting of student focus groups and focused questionnaire to be completed following the discussion. The review team learnt that the initial stage of the new approach - the preliminary student focus groups - would be conducted during the Study Skills sessions where students would receive information about the new process from staff. The review team confirmed with senior staff that students would have the opportunity to complete the focused questionnaire independent of the Study Skills sessions, having reflected upon the focus group discussion with their peers. Given that this revised approach is a recent introduction, its effectiveness cannot yet be assessed.

2.38 The Centre plans to continue using student reflective diaries and personal tutor submissions alongside this new model to identify themes impacting the student experience, which could not be identified through traditional survey formats, and to strengthen understanding of programme-level and module-specific feedback. When the review team enquired as to whether students are aware that the Centre utilises their reflective submissions in this manner, senior staff explained that students are encouraged to honestly and critically reflect on their experience, and indicated that students should be aware that their submissions will be anonymously considered by the Personal Tutor Lead to inform actions, typically around training for academic staff, and that summary reports will be used by relevant Centre committees. When the review team discussed reflective journals with students, they expressed that they were not aware that their reflections, anonymised or otherwise, were being used to identify themes impacting the student experience. Students did confirm that they felt comfortable providing honest reflections and that they had done so in all previous submissions.

2.39 The student induction programme, personal tutor system, tailored study skills support, variety of social activities, engagement with student representatives, and commitment from staff to address student feedback, alongside the awareness of the broader student journey and progression requirements collectively, provide assurance that students are appropriately and effectively supported throughout their study.

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

2.40 The Centre is based in a purpose-built centre, centrally located on the University of Stirling's main campus, enhancing integration of the broader student journey, and learning experience, and student access to the full range of university services - including the library, information centre, Students' Union, Sports Centre, and campus accommodation. Students confirmed that they received access to the University of Stirling's facilities, commenting that Centre staff have actively encouraged them to make full use of the resources and to engage with supplementary texts available to them through the University's library.

2.41 All classrooms in the Centre are fitted with interactive whiteboards, enabling staff usage of digital enhancements in lectures, and appropriate hardware to support Lecture Capture, which was used during the pandemic to deliver online classes and continues to be used to enable students to review lecture materials. Students endorsed staff use of digital technologies in the classroom setting. Annual Student Experience Survey results show that students highly regard the Centre's facilities and learning resources available to them through their studies. The relocation additionally enhances access to the University of Stirling's laboratory facilities, which students of the Centre use to perform experiments and produce laboratory reports.

2.42 As part of its commitment to embed technology-enhanced learning, the Centre hosts course materials, assignments and interactive multimedia materials centrally on its online learning environment. Student assignment submissions, marks and feedback from staff is provided through Canvas, which has Turnitin embedded to deter potential academic misconduct and used as a tool alongside student academic misconduct training to develop good academic practice. This ensures that students are familiar with both digital tools prior to progressing into the University. Canvas is also used to host Academic English resources and subject-specific vocabulary quizzes to support independent study and improvement of English language skills. Annual Student Experience Survey results demonstrate that students highly regard the online learning environment and staff use of interactive digital technologies to support online delivery.

2.43 The University of Stirling's Graduate Attributes are embedded in all the Centre programmes through module intended learning outcomes, which require students to develop and demonstrate each attribute, supporting them towards securing successful academic and professional outcomes. Students build a portfolio of transferable skills through the use of digital tools, such as using Canvas, to create an e-portfolio, assignment briefs which provide students with the flexibility to identify relevant local businesses or community projects, and in modules where mock interview panels are delivered by industry-experienced staff. Students were not immediately familiar with how module learning outcomes supported them to develop transferable skills; however, one graduate reflected positively on the providers' use of Digi-Essay as a novel assessment method.

2.44 The Centre engages with university partner staff to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary skills to successfully progress to university study. Consideration of partner feedback resulted in the redevelopment of the Study Skills modules under four key headings, each targeting and addressing an area identified as challenging during the student transitionary period including: academic English and referencing; diversity of assessment methods; critical thinking and debating skills; understanding of academic misconduct; and formal report writing. To ensure students understood the importance of engaging with the Study Skills modules, the University approved the proposal that students must score at least 50% in all Study Skills modules to progress into the University of Stirling, which has seen increased student engagement and resulted in the pass rate for those modules rising from 71% in 2019-20 to 80.3% in 2021-22. Alumni and students confirmed that they found the Study Skills modules helpful in developing essential academic skills.

2.45 In the 2019-20 academic year, the Centre completed a digital accessibility review of their practice which included considering whether the format of their online learning resources aligned with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Having completed the formal review, the review team learnt that the Centre now utilises the expertise of the IUP's Learning Technologist to monitor digital accessibility, including their approach to reviewing accessibility of materials, on an ongoing basis. Academic staff are provided with a Canvas Accessibility Overview and Instructional Guide which provides comprehensive guidance on in-built accessibility checking features, enabling the identification and resolution of accessibility issues when creating new VLE resources, rather than relying on student feedback to retrospectively identify issues.

2.46 In the 2021-22 academic year, the Centre identified that a significant portion of their student body had poor IT literacy skills as a result of experiencing digital poverty and invested to provide students with access to a suite of digital literacy training through GMetrix. This resource was embedded in the curriculum within Study Skills modules where students are guided to engage with GMetrix modules, developing essential digital skills, and are encouraged by staff to pursue the advanced digital skills certifications available to them. Student reception to the GMetrix digital literacy training varied significantly with some students commenting that engagement should not be compulsory as the resource was not relevant; and other students endorsing the resource, expressing that it had been helpful in supporting their engagement with digital technologies used in the curriculum. There was a tentative consensus from students that this divide could be accounted for by considering on which programme students were enrolled; with one student suggesting that students on the Science, Computing and Engineering programme may not get anything from engagement with the basic GMetrix modules, having already developed basic digital literacy skills. The Learning Technologist acknowledged the feedback provided by students and explained that IUP is currently developing a bespoke digital skills module in line with the Jisc digital framework to ensure that digital literacy training is appropriately tailored to the specific needs of their student body. Alongside provision of training, the Centre has invested in short-term loan laptops and ensures students experiencing digital poverty receive access to its partner's long-term loan laptop scheme.

2.47   The Centre conducts focus groups with alumni to identify any difficulties they have encountered having progressed into full-time university-level study and to evaluate how effectively its learning environment is in preparing students for this transition. Alumni feedback collected in May 2022 prompted a report by the Academic Director - 'INTO Student University Transition Activities' - which notes the provision of the opportunity to attend a 'taster lecture' and to participate in a university seminar as if they were a university student in that seminar group. In semester one, 93 Centre students attended the first taster lecture opportunity, with 63 submitting reflective analysis of the experience, and were offered the opportunity to participate in a university seminar in semester two. When the review team tried to explore the student reception of the most recent transition activities, students were unfamiliar with the concept of a taster lecture and tentatively indicated they must not have participated in the previous semester; however, some of the students confirmed that they had recently participated in a university seminar. Of the students that had participated in a seminar, they commented that the expectation to prepare in advance and to fully participate as if they were part of the seminar group was extremely helpful in developing their understanding of the expectations associated with university-level study. The success of the transition activity initiative relies on the ability of Centre staff and university link tutors to coordinate and overcome logistical challenges involved in delivering the activities, which must accommodate the staggered student intake, centre and university timetabling, and university lecture and seminar capacity. Given the early stage of implementation, it is not possible to assess the sustainability of the transition activity initiative, especially when considering the coordinating role link tutors have alongside existing teaching commitments, but preliminary student feedback supports that these opportunities are highly valued and that participation enhances student academic transition preparedness. Additionally, the reflective feedback provided by students following each of the transition activities further supports the identification of transition and progression themes potentially impacting students achieving learning outcomes at the Centre and after progressing onto further study.

2.48   The review team learnt that the Centre plans to strengthen existing link tutor arrangements through the creation of semesterly, faculty-specific working groups. Senior staff explained that the decision to adopt this new model had been taken to facilitate faculty-specific, module-specific and student-specific discussions, which would provide assurance that each student's transition experience was mapped out and supported irrespective of to which faculty a student progressed, and to address disparities in time commitment between link tutors resulting from the significant variation in student numbers progressing into university faculties. Given the essential role of link tutors in ensuring Centre learning resources appropriately support student progression, that students feel a sense of belonging, both within the Centre and the University of Stirling, and in delivering the new transition activities which support students towards achieving successful academic outcomes, the review team **recommends** the Centre to work with university partners to ensure the effective implementation of the agreed job description for the link tutor role, with particular reference to the nature, frequency and consistency of link tutor engagement with students.

2.49   The consideration of student feedback, collected through annual surveys and focus groups, during internal reviews ensures that the extensive range of resources available are accessible and sufficient; and engagement with its partner institution ensures that continued development of learning practice and exploitation of technology-enhanced teaching effectively enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

> The review team concludes that **confidence** can be placed in INTO Stirling LLP's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.