

## **Subject review report**

November 2001 Q460/2001

# **Stranmillis University College: A College of The Queen's University of Belfast**

Education

## Reviewing the Quality of Education

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997. It has responsibility for assessing the quality of higher education (HE) in England and Northern Ireland from 1 October 1997 under the terms of a contract with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The purposes of subject review are: to ensure that the public funding provided is supporting education of an acceptable quality, to provide public information on that education through the publication of reports such as this one, and to provide information and insights to encourage improvements in education.

The main features of the subject review method are:

### Review against Aims and Objectives

The HE sector in England and Northern Ireland is diverse. The HEFCE funds education in over 140 institutions of HE and 75 further education (FE) colleges. These institutions vary greatly in size, subject provision, history and statement of purpose. Each has autonomy to determine its institutional mission, and its specific aims and objectives at subject level.

Subject review is carried out in relation to the subject aims and objectives set by each provider. It measures the extent to which each subject provider is successful in achieving its aims and objectives.

Readers should be cautious in making comparisons of subject providers solely on the basis of subject review outcomes. Comparisons between providers with substantively different aims and objectives would have little validity.

### Review of the Student Learning Experience and Student Achievement

Subject review examines the wide range of influences that shape the learning experiences and achievements of students. It covers the full breadth of teaching and learning activities, including: direct observation of classroom/seminar/workshop/ laboratory situations, the methods of reviewing students' work, students' work and achievements, the curriculum, staff and staff development, the application of resources (library, information technology, equipment), and student support and guidance. This range of activities is captured within a core set of six aspects of provision, each of which is graded on a four-point scale (1 to 4), in ascending order of merit.

The aspects of provision are:

- Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Student Progression and Achievement
- Student Support and Guidance
- Learning Resources
- Quality Management and Enhancement.

### Peer Review

Reviewers are academic and professional peers in the subject. Most are members of the academic staff of UK HE institutions. Others are drawn from industry, commerce, private practice and the professions.

### Combination of Internal and External Processes

The review method has two main processes:

- Preparation by the subject provider of a self-assessment in the subject, based on the provider's own aims and objectives, and set out in the structure provided by the core set of aspects of provision.
- A three-day review visit carried out by a team of reviewers. The review team grades each of the aspects of provision to make a graded profile of the provision, and derives from that profile an overall judgement. Provided that each aspect is graded 2 or better, the quality of the education is approved.

### Published Reports

In addition to individual review reports, the QAA will publish subject overview reports at the conclusion of reviews in a subject. The subject overview reports are distributed widely to schools and FE colleges, public libraries and careers services. Both the review reports and the subject overview reports are available in hard copy and are also on the world-wide web (see back cover for details).

## Introduction

1. This Report presents the findings of a review in November 2001 of the quality of provision in education provided by Stranmillis University College: A College of The Queen's University of Belfast.
2. The University College has had an academic relationship with The Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) since 1922. It has been providing taught courses leading to degrees and other awards of the University since it became a recognised college of the University in 1968. From 1922 until 1995 the College was a monotechnic institution offering a range of courses in teacher education. In 1999, with Privy Council approval, it adopted a new title - Stranmillis University College: A College of QUB. The University College integrates academically with QUB, although still retains its financial and organisational autonomy. The University College began to diversify in 1995 and now offers teacher education courses, undergraduate degrees in Early Childhood Studies and Health and Leisure Studies, and masters courses in community arts and education. The BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies is delivered at the University College in full and part-time modes and also at Omagh College of Further and Higher Education in part-time mode. The MEd programme is offered in conjunction with St Mary's University College, which is also an academically integrated college of QUB. Students may access modules offered by either University College when constructing their programme.
3. Currently, the provision under review has 252 full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate students, comprising 129 full-time and 183 part-time. A further 181 part-time students (63 FTEs) are on the postgraduate programmes. There are 24 academic and six administrative and technical staff to support the provision.
4. The following provision forms the basis of the review:
  - BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies (BAECS)
  - MEd with options in: Early Years Education; Educational Management and School Organisation; English and Literacy in the Curriculum; Expert Teaching; Physical Education; Religious Studies; Special Education
  - MSc Educational Technology.
5. The statistical data in this Introduction are provided by the institution itself. The aims and objectives are presented overleaf. These also are provided by the institution.

## The Aims and Objectives for Education

### Aims

*The Education Department aims to:*

- enable students to develop and extend their capacity to learn by engaging them in the process of learning;
- develop intellectual, methodological and professional skills for both undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- address the varied aspirations of students within the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes;
- encourage the development of key transferable skills throughout all of its programmes;
- provide an appropriate level of understanding of education in Northern Ireland and further afield and inform students' career decisions as part of their professional development;
- develop in students the capacity to manage their own learning;
- encourage students to address global issues by providing a range of optional international study contexts;
- encourage students to value diversity and to make a contribution to the controlled, integrated, maintained and voluntary education sectors in Northern Ireland.

*In the following programmes we aim to:*

#### **BA Early Childhood Studies**

- engage with a wide range of students from non-traditional backgrounds and with a variety of entrance qualifications and professional experience;
- respond to the local and national requirement for a course which will meet the need for high-quality training to graduate level for a range of professionals in the field of educate;
- capitalise on the experience which exists within the body of professionals working in the fields of education, welfare and health;
- encourage each student to be an advocate for children;

#### **M-Level Programme**

- engage in informed debate within a critical community about issues of professional relevance;
- extend professional knowledge and practice across a range of specialisms.

### Objectives

*The aims of the Education Department are realised through the following objectives. On completion of their courses students will have:*

- participated in a critical community of learning;
- engaged in investigation and sought to gain knowledge and understanding of the processes of education from a variety of perspectives;
- exercised analytical, critical and problem-solving skills in the context of educational theory, methods of enquiry, applications and interventions;
- developed research skills and engaged with information retrieval, small-scale research design, data collection and analysis;
- displayed the capacity to communicate information in an accessible and understandable manner through both the written and spoken word, to different audiences and for different purposes;
- directed their own learning and thinking and developed the capacity to think independently and to collaborate within a critical community of learning;
- acquired key transferable skills.

*In addition, in relation to the **BA programme**, the specific objectives of the BA Early Childhood Studies are to provide professionals with the opportunity to:*

- engage in a multiprofessional approach as they understand and respond to the issues central to working with young children and their families in a variety of contexts;
- liaise competently with a wide variety of agencies in the fields of education, social welfare and health, and thereby effectively apply childcare policies and respond to legislative demands.

*In addition, in relation to the **M-Level programmes**, the specific objectives of the masters-level programmes in education are to provide teachers and education-related professionals with the opportunity to:*

- reflect on the relationship between theory and practice in their professional context;
- develop further competence within their specialist option;
- be aware of contemporary research and development in education;
- design, conduct and critically appraise research in education;

The specific objectives of the MSc route in the masters-level programme are to provide teachers and education-related professionals with the opportunity to:

- promote investigation, reflection and critical insight in relation to the management of media resources in education;
- improve participants' knowledge and awareness of information and communication technologies (ICT) and audiovisual (AV) media in support of the learning process;
- improve participants' ability to examine critically and objectively management, teaching and learning issues, and to enable them to make informed recommendations for the deployment of ICT and AV facilities in schools and colleges;
- research and evaluate the use of ICT in schools and subject disciplines;
- develop skills central to the production of software for training purposes.

## Summary of the Review

6. The graded profile in paragraph 7 indicates the extent to which the student learning experience and achievement demonstrate that the aims and objectives set by the subject provider are being met. The tests and the criteria applied by the reviewers are these:

### Aspects of provision

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
3. Student Progression and Achievement
4. Student Support and Guidance
5. Learning Resources
6. Quality Management and Enhancement.

### Tests to be applied

To what extent do the student learning experience and student achievement, within this aspect of provision, contribute to meeting the objectives set by the subject provider?

Do the objectives set, and the level of attainment of those objectives, allow the aims set by the subject provider to be met?

### Scale points

**1**

The aims and/or objectives set by the subject provider are not met; there are major shortcomings that must be rectified.

**2**

This aspect makes an acceptable contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives, but significant improvement could be made.

The aims set by the subject provider are broadly met.

**3**

This aspect makes a substantial contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives; however, there is scope for improvement.

The aims set by the subject provider are substantially met.

**4**

This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives.

The aims set by the subject provider are met.

7. The grades awarded as a result of the review are:

Aspects of provision	Grade
Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation	<b>4</b>
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	<b>4</b>
Student Progression and Achievement	<b>4</b>
Student Support and Guidance	<b>4</b>
Learning Resources	<b>4</b>
Quality Management and Enhancement	<b>4</b>

8. The quality of provision in education at Stranmillis University College: A College of The Queen's University of Belfast is **approved**.

## The Quality of Education

### Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation

9. The BA ECS programme caters for students who vary widely in terms of employment backgrounds and previous experience of academic study. It seeks to develop a shared understanding for its participants, enabling the course to make a specific contribution to early years provision in Northern Ireland. The modes of study of the provision are highly appropriate given the backgrounds of the participants on each course. The BA ECS is offered in both full and part-time modes at the University College and part-time only at Omagh College. Students follow a common programme with no optional modules. However, the personal professional development portfolio, together with the dissertation in the final year, allows students to develop personal interests within the common provision.

10. The M-Level programme, taught jointly with St Mary's College, comprises a modular provision incorporating named options with core modules and a choice of others. The programme culminates in a dissertation of up to 20,000 words. In preparation for this, students must undertake dissertation support training or successfully complete a research methods module, or both. The M-Level programmes offer the flexibility for students to exit with an Advanced Certificate in Education, a Diploma in the Advanced Study of Education (DASE) or the full masters degree, and students can exercise some choice over the timing of their studies.

11. Both programmes build on participants' professional experience. The BA ECS personal professional development portfolio allows students to record, analyse and reflect on aspects of their practice, and is a particularly valuable element of the course. A variety of relevant early-years placements with well-structured student tasks is integrated appropriately within the undergraduate provision.

12. Each programme explicitly fosters transferable skills. The BA ECS programme team has done an audit of such skills and can map their development through the modules. In particular, independent learning is developed within the placements, the personal professional development portfolio and the dissertation, while M-Level modules emphasise a critical dimension, especially at the dissertation stage.

13. Staff research and scholarship inform the design and content of both the BA ECS and M-Level courses. For example, BA ECS staff are involved in a government

funded project evaluating the effectiveness of early childhood provision in Northern Ireland. This parallels, and is linked with, a similar study in England and Wales. They have written about the concept of 'educare', the integration of education and care in the context of preschool education, which is at the centre of the undergraduate programme. Relevant BA ECS modules are supported by published research on the role of play. A number of M-Level modules are also appropriately informed by recent research. Examples include: a study of the effectiveness of secondary, non-grammar schools in Northern Ireland; tutors contributions to studies of transfer between primary and secondary education; and publications on the teaching of values in schools.

14. The BA ECS programme's contribution to the promotion of the status and career prospects of a range of early-years professionals is recognised and supported by their Early Years Consultative Committee. The members of this committee include potential employers, education advisers and social services professionals. The M-Level courses offer inclusivity in the form of joint teaching between the University College and St Mary's, an important feature in the Northern Ireland context. M-Level developments are informed by the views of the education and library boards.

15. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

### Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation: Grade 4.

### Teaching, Learning and Assessment

16. The principles of teaching and learning are clearly articulated and documented by the Education Department. The emphasis is jointly on reading and reflection to enable deeper understanding and development of professional practice, and to provide the framework for small-scale investigative projects of direct educational relevance. This is the key strategy for integrating intellectual and professional learning, and for enabling career enhancement. The active involvement of students in the process of learning is seen as central to this provision. These principles were evident throughout the observed teaching sessions and in the reviewers' scrutiny of student work.

17. The reviewers observed nine teaching and learning sessions covering all programmes, and a range of approaches, including lectures, demonstrations, group discussions and workshop activities. Linked sessions with Omagh were observed using video-conferencing, which forms a regular part of the BA ECS programme. A wide range of teaching and learning activities characterised

both programmes. This range reflected full and well-focused attention to the specific learning outcomes of different modules and their distinctive contribution to the overall learning experience in each programme. There was also an excellent balance of activities within sessions, creating a stimulating and facilitative learning environment with high levels of student participation. The range of professional experience and wider knowledge within the groups was effectively shared and extended. In all the observed sessions there was well-planned, sensitive and responsive integration of different activities, such as presentation, discussion and workshop activities including, where appropriate, a range of audiovisual and computer-based materials. Comprehensive handouts were used to consolidate the learning.

18. There are particularly innovative teaching and learning strategies within the BA ECS, appropriate to the profile of the student group and supportive of students with non-traditional routes of entry. Very close working relations among the BA ECS team enable the development of clear and responsive teaching principles and practice. The Omagh and the University College video-conferencing practices contribute to the consistency of experience across the two colleges and widens the field of experience that students can share. Such sharing is also reflected in strategies to enable full and part-time students to work closely together. There is a strong emphasis on developing students' confidence and independence within a supportive and collaborative framework, and this is realised, for example, through student group presentations. The teaching and learning on this programme are modelled on good early-years practice while being entirely supportive and appropriate for mature learners. There are very positive student evaluations of teaching and learning.

19. Assessment strategies are suitably varied to match the specific learning outcomes of modules. There are some innovative assessment activities, for example, peer assessment of presentations on the BA ECS. This strategy is well supported in terms of shared preparation, and tutors moderate the process. It represents good practice in engaging students in the processes of learning.

20. Marking and feedback to students, along with second-marking and moderation, are conscientious and thorough. The M-Level feedback has become more fully developed and consistent in style, building on advice from external examiners. Many important areas of feedback, particularly those most closely related to the specific learning outcomes of modules, are achieved through tutoring, both during the preparation of coursework and in guidance or comment after its examination.

21. The moderation of levels across sites - the University College, St Mary's and Omagh - is seriously regarded by both programme teams. It has a significant staff development role, alongside the important considerations of fairness and consistency for students.

22. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

#### **Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Grade 4.**

#### **Student Progression and Achievement**

23. The BA ECS degree enjoys a growing reputation for producing appropriately skilled, employable graduates, and recruitment is buoyant. In 2000-01, applications for each place for the full-time course were 6.1:1, and 2.7:1 for the part-time course. Applications for the part-time course understandably show a drop as a result of the introduction of the full-time course in 1999. The profile of admissions and progression for the BA ECS course matches the programme's aim to engage with a wide variety of students from non-traditional backgrounds. It recruits students, all of the current intake are female, with a broad range of non-traditional entry qualifications. The offer of both full and part-time courses affords a flexible approach to study.

24. Recruitment to the M-Level course, normally graduate teachers in full-time employment, reflects the University College's mission to play a key role in the provision of opportunities for 'educational-related professionals' and teachers to develop their professional competences. The gender balance for this course is consistent with other part-time postgraduate courses in Northern Ireland, with the female to male ratio at around 3:1. Over the last three years, enrolment of new students to the M-Level programmes has declined from 46 in 1998-99 to 34 in 2001-02. However, levels of participation in modules at M-Level remain consistent. Students have reported opportunities for promotion resulting directly from their attendance.

25. Students who undertook modules within the DASE course, offered jointly with QUB, (pre-1997 regulations) are entitled to convert these to 80 credits on the M-Level programme. There is no close correlation of curricular content between the former, jointly-offered DASE course and the masters award now offered at the University College. Staff at the University College recognise the potential difficulties posed by this arrangement, and have confirmed that it will cease to exist from July 2003. The reviewers welcome this development.

26. Student progression is not easily tracked on the M-Level programme. The flexible design allows students to register for a five-year period and progress at rates appropriate to their individual circumstances. This level of flexibility means that normal indicators of retention and progression are difficult to apply. Robust systems of data collection exist at individual module level, and efforts are made to confirm the intentions of students who fail to register for modules in each year. Despite this, the figures available include a high number of students who remain enrolled but whose continuance is not confirmed. For 2000-01, the success rate across all M-Level modules was 91.5 per cent.

27. The BA ECS programme features structured learning experiences at Level 1 through to independent study at Level 3. This contributes to high progression and completion rates. For the academic year 2000-01, just 1 per cent of students withdrew, the remaining cohort achieving progression through to the following year. Some 67 per cent of students completed the part-time degree in 2000-01. Of the completing students, 7 per cent were awarded a First class degree, 45 per cent an Upper Second, 45 per cent a Lower Second and 2 per cent a Third. This represents a high level of achievement for the varied entry profile.

28. External examiners for the BA ECS highlight some high-quality work. The external examiners for the M-Level programme confirm that students generally have an appropriate level of achievement in relation to the stated aims and objectives of the courses. External examiners confirm that quality is comparable with that at other universities. The work seen by the reviewers showed that both courses promote the development of students' key skills.

29. Evidence suggests that there is an effectively implemented system of accreditation of prior learning in operation for the undergraduate programmes, and 85 per cent of BA ECS students who are over 21 years of age have taken advantage of it. Their profile of results indicates that these students achieve degree classifications commensurate with those with typical entry profiles.

30. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

#### **Student Progression and Achievement: Grade 4.**

#### **Student Support and Guidance**

31. Information on support is available to applicants and students through well-presented prospectuses and course handbooks. Points of contact are clearly indicated in the handbooks. Comprehensive support is available at

QUB and the University College and Omagh Colleges, including medical, welfare and counselling support. The level of support is comparable across sites and integrated where possible. The overall range of support available to students is enlarged by virtue of the relationships between the institutions. The student support team provides a clearly identified group of staff with particular responsibility for BA ECS students. On both programmes the close-working relations and culture of support provide the most important means for identifying and assisting students with academic or personal difficulties.

32. Induction arrangements are continuously reviewed within the programmes. Full-time BA ECS students have a comprehensive programme which is replicated for part-time students. M-Level induction is provided each semester, and needs analysis provides feedback for initial tutors about support issues, as well as giving the programme leader information on development needs across modules and among students.

33. Arrangements for tutorial support are highly collaborative and collegial. While there are programme and option leaders and advisers of studies, with overall responsibility for student progress, other tutors are accessible and share responsibility for counselling, guidance and support. Students and external examiners confirm the approachability of staff. The arrangements for support, although partly informal, are effective and responsive to needs.

34. There are close-working relations within student groups, among staff, including those responsible for central provision, and between staff and students. These ensure that, where necessary, problems can be pro-actively identified and addressed. Case-study evidence of student monitoring and support gives a strong indication of successful outcomes from such intervention. Student mentoring arrangements are now established within the BA ECS. These are supported by documentary and group guidance, and are also well integrated with the general aims of collaborative professional learning within this programme. Preparation and support for Erasmus placements are thorough, and facilitate the particular kinds of benefits that overseas placements can have within this qualification.

35. Careers guidance is offered through QUB, as well as being integrated within the programmes. The BA ECS programme has a clear career development orientation providing a new level of qualification within the field of early-years education. Presentations given by BA ECS students as an integral part of their course are seen as developing relevant career-related skills and experience.

36. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

**Student Support and Guidance:**  
**Grade 4.**

**Learning Resources**

37. The learning resources strategy aims to enhance and support the education of students by providing a high-quality learning environment, and succeeds in facilitating the programmes' aims of enhancing key skills.

38. The library, information and communication technologies (ICT) and learning support services are located conveniently close to each other on the top two floors of the Central Building. All are wheelchair accessible except for the top floor of the library. A book fetching/finding service is available for those with mobility difficulties. At the University College, full-time BA ECS students receive induction to the learning support services as an integral feature of their first week's programme at the University College. Part-time BA ECS and M-Level students benefit from sessions delivered in the evenings. Students are content with the opening times and borrowing rights.

39. Students praised the University College library staff for the friendly and helpful way in which they respond to their needs. The library carries over 80,000 volumes, holds subscriptions to approximately 400 periodicals, and also provides students with access to non-book form materials which support professional practice. Library stock, access to word-processing facilities and information retrieval systems are available to students at the University College and QUB sites. Students on the jointly delivered M-Level course may also access the library provision at St Mary's. Omagh College students are happy to make regular visits to the University College to make use of the library and, in particular, to access the larger journal provision held there.

40. Students on both courses have expressed some concern about pressure on key texts, particularly for modules with large enrolments. The course teams have responded to this concern by implementing a number of strategies to accommodate acknowledged pressure points, including providing packs of learning resources at the Omagh and the University College sites.

41. The ICT provision is benefiting from substantial investment of additional funding at the University College and Omagh. The ratio of students to PCs stands at 7:1 at the University College. This may be further enhanced within the four-year rolling programme of renewal. Students have good access to PCs located in

rooms with bookable and open access. The provision is well supported by technical staff and a help-desk which is open from 0845 to 1630 hours on weekdays. A new, well-equipped ICT centre has recently opened at Omagh. The BA ECS team liaise with the ICT service to provide accessible programmes of workshops for part and full-time students. Information technology (IT) courses are supplemented by self-tuition materials available on the University College's intranet.

42. The University College has an attractive learning environment. The general teaching rooms have data-projector, video and portable IT facilities and provide a high-quality learning environment for students. The 100-seat conference theatre allows the transmission and receipt of remote lectures through video-conferencing. The use of this facility for the BA ECS course has been very highly praised by external examiners as innovative and effective.

43. The course teams acknowledge that arrangements for refreshments for students attending in the evenings have not been ideal. However, in consultation with students, changes to provision have been made and the arrangements are being carefully monitored.

44. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

**Learning Resources:**  
**Grade 4.**

**Quality Management and Enhancement**

45. The University College's Academic Management Committee (AMC) oversees all internal quality matters. Course teams co-ordinate planning and pathway review for their programmes. Annual reports are made to the Director of Academic Affairs who, in turn, makes formal reports to the AMC. Each programme has a staff-student consultative committee (SSC) that meets each semester. Following SSC meetings, a Pathway Review Committee considers module evaluations. Resulting feedback to students is provided at SSCs, at the University College Board and at pathway review meetings. Students are represented on the AMC. The joint M-Level Management Group co-ordinates the programme and effectively addresses the challenge of joint teaching with St Mary's College. An important part of the Management Group's role is to scrutinise the proposals of new modules. These structures are clearly laid out and operate effectively.

46. External examiners' reports are carefully considered and acted upon with considerable professionalism. Examples of issues handled in this way include the

improvement of ICT elements on the BA ECS course, development of the second-marking process in the M-Level programmes, and progression towards contextualising feedback for students, linked to generic criteria for assignment grading.

47. In the majority of cases, students feel that their suggestions are taken seriously and acted upon where possible and appropriate. In addition to written student evaluations, M-Level modules are reviewed each time they are taught and students participate directly in this. Examples of responses to students' views include provision of research training for M-Level dissertation students, and ensuring that QUB's on-line learning environment offers external access to teaching materials. Students on both courses were involved in the creation of the self-assessment document.

48. Staff development needs are identified in a number of ways, including data from the peer review of teaching and the results of biennial staff appraisal. Information is passed to the staff development officer. The resulting provision of development opportunities includes targeted ICT courses. Staff development programmes are provided, including on-going support in ICT and research seminars. Fees are paid for all those who wish to become members of the Institute of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Financial support for teaching and non-teaching staff taking additional qualifications is also available.

49. There is evidence that the development needs of Omagh College staff are appropriately addressed, including higher degree study with financial support, and conferences and workshops to maintain the currency of their expertise. An induction programme for new staff is followed up with further support. M-Level dissertation supervisors have workshops whose themes include research methodologies, supervisory roles and ethical issues in school-based research.

50. The self-assessment document provided a detailed and constructive starting point for the review, but does not do full justice to the quality of the provision.

51. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

#### **Quality Management and Enhancement: Grade 4.**

### **Conclusions**

52. The quality of provision in education at Stranmillis University College: A College of The Queen's University of Belfast is approved. All aspects make a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives and the aims are met. The reviewers come to this conclusion, based upon the review visit together with an analysis of the self-assessment and additional data provided.

53. The positive features of education in relation to the aspects of provision include the following:

- a. The significant contribution made by the BA Early Childhood Studies (BA ECS) to early-years provision in Northern Ireland and to the status and career prospects of a range of early-years professionals (paragraphs 9; 11).
- b. Innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment on the BA ECS, using the personal professional development portfolio as a framework (paragraph 11).
- c. Research and scholarship appropriately informing the design and content of each programme (paragraph 13).
- d. Well-planned teaching sessions which create a stimulating, facilitative learning environment and encourage full student participation (paragraph 17).
- e. The student profile, which demonstrates admission of students with a range of entry qualifications, including some recruited through accreditation of prior learning (paragraphs 23; 29).
- f. Excellent progression and completion rates on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies course (paragraph 27).
- g. Students' work demonstrates good achievement of the stated outcomes, which is supported by external examiners' reports (paragraph 28).
- h. Good provision across the sites for guidance, counselling and welfare, with sound and evolving arrangements for student induction (paragraphs 31; 32).
- i. A strong emphasis on the availability and approachability of tutors, with a commitment to teamwork for student support (paragraphs 33; 34).
- j. Good information and communication technology provision at the University College and Omagh, as well as specialist video-conferencing facilities (paragraphs 41; 42).
- k. An attractive learning environment and campus with good-quality general teaching accommodation (paragraph 42).
- l. The responsiveness to external examiners' reports and students' views, which enhances the quality of the programmes and demonstrates a culture of critical review among staff (paragraphs 46; 47).
- m. Effective identification of staff development needs, with appropriate financial and professional support (paragraphs 48; 49).