



This review method
is ESG-compliant

Educational Oversight Review

QA Higher Education (Ulster)
Limited

July 2025

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About this review

This is a report of an Educational Oversight Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at QA Higher Education (Ulster) Limited.

EOR consists of a number of components. The Full component is a review of a provider's arrangements for maintaining the academic standards and quality of the courses it offers against the 12 Sector-Agreed Principles contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024) (the UK Quality Code). A Full component review will assess a provider against the core requirements of the Home Office in relation to educational oversight and the UK Quality Code as common UK framework. Further information about the Full component of EOR can be found in the [Educational Oversight Review Guidance for Providers](#).

The review took place from 7 – 9 July 2025 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Barbara Howell (reviewer)
- Matthew Leeke (reviewer)
- Kikelomo Ladipo (student reviewer)

The QAA Officer for this review was Monika Ruthe.

In Educational Oversight Review (Full component), the QAA review team:

- determines an outcome against each of the Sector-Agreed Principles outlined in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- identifies areas of enhancement activity
- determines an overall judgement as to whether the provider is fully aligned with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for [Educational Oversight Review](#) and has links to other informative documents. QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. Review judgements result from the documents review teams see, the meetings they hold, and drawing upon their experience as peer reviewers and student reviewers.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are [compliant with these standards](#), as are the [reports we publish](#). More information is available on our [website](#).

This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Executive summary

QA Higher Education (Ulster) Limited forms part of QA Higher Education (QAHE). QAHE offers a wide range of pathway, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in conjunction with seven university partners, one of which is Ulster University. The partnership with Ulster University was established in 2011 and is delivered through franchised provision at three campuses in London, Birmingham and Manchester. Over time, QAHE (Ulster) has increased the number of Ulster University courses which led to an increase in student numbers and intakes. At the time of the review the partnership delivered three undergraduate programmes in business, management and computing, a graduate certificate and four integrated pre-masters programmes in international business and marketing as well as 9 masters programmes in: international business; marketing; MBA; human resource management; computer science and technology; and health promotion and public health.

The overall number of staff at QAHE currently is 1,171 with 133 academic staff delivering Ulster University programmes. Student numbers in the academic year 2024-25 for the Ulster University provision are 6,138.

QAHE's mission is to widen access to high-quality higher education that improves career prospects for a diverse range of international and domestic students. QAHE delivers on its mission through the provision of multiple entry routes and intakes, study times that include daytime, evening and weekend learning and flexible teaching incorporating blended learning. QAHE has five strategic priorities: to transform outcomes, i.e. students should graduate with good degrees and access great job opportunities; grow its existing partnerships and develop new ones; differentiate the portfolio and innovate in digital delivery to enhance employability outcomes; and to diversify recruitment through opening new markets and to scale its operations to enhance the student experience. The challenges and opportunities faced by QAHE are in part generated by its strategic priorities but also by the changing regulatory environment in both its UK and international markets.

Since the last QAA review in 2021 there have been changes to the senior team at QAHE with the addition of a Chief Strategy Officer, a Chief Operating Officer and a Chief Technology Officer. This means that the QAHE Chief Executive Officer is now supported by six senior managers who collectively form the Executive Team. Another major new development was the approval of the Manchester campus for Ulster University programme delivery in 2024 following a substantial upgrade of the Manchester campus facilities.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which QA Higher Education (Ulster) Limited meets the Sector-Agreed Principles, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the guidance for Educational Oversight Review (July 2024). QA Higher Education (Ulster) provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit, which took place from 7 July to 9 July 2025, the review team held a total of six meetings with the senior management team and awarding body representatives, academic staff, professional support staff, and students.

In summary, the team found three examples of good practice and identified five recommendations for enhancement.

Conclusions

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at QA Higher Education (Ulster).

The QAA review team determines that QA Higher Education (Ulster):

- **is fully aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**:

- The introduction of the QR code for anonymous student feedback, which enables an inclusive approach to the provision of feedback. (Principle 2)
- The embedding of digital innovation in delivery, including the use of cloud-based computing labs, which supports flexible modes of delivery and equitable access to software. (Principle 3)
- The embedding of equality, diversity, and inclusion considerations in monitoring, with disaggregated data informing targeted interventions like the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) which supports underperforming or at-risk student groups. (Principle 5)

Recommendations

For recommendations that relate to areas for development and enhancement that do not impact on the Sector-Agreed Principle being met, the QAA review team makes the following recommendations:

- Develop a formal process for the approval and modification of QAHE academic policies through the internal committee structure (Principle 1)
- Consider engaging students in the management of their learning experience through senior deliberative committees (Principle 2)
- Consider further strengthening the quality monitoring framework (Principle 5)
- Strengthen the monitoring of feedback impact on student learning (Principle 11)
- Provide greater clarity to students and staff on which complaints policy applies for Ulster University students (Principle 12)

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) check has been satisfactorily completed. The outcome of the FSMG check for the institution is that no

Explanation of the findings – Sector-Agreed Principles

Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards

Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.

Findings

1 The QAHE approach to strategic management of quality and standards is based on two forms of committee structure. For managing quality and standards of Ulster University programmes QAHE places a strong emphasis and heavy reliance on the first approach, which comprises Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCC), Course Committees, Department Boards, the Affiliated College Executive Board (ACEB), and the Joint Board of Governance (JBoG). All have clearly articulated terms of reference and membership. Through meetings during the visit the team confirmed that this approach is embedded across QAHE and involves close collaboration between the QAHE and Ulster University at programme and institutional level and the sharing of responsibility for the assurance and management of quality and standards.

2 There is evidence of SSCCs providing a clear channel of communication for students to raise issues for discussion with staff at the course level via student representatives. The review team confirmed that issues not resolved at SSCC would be referred to the Department Board. Students and staff also have a voice on the Course Committees, which advise and report to Ulster University Faculty Board(s) on all matters relating to the organisation of teaching, including curricula and examinations, of the franchised programmes. From the terms of reference and minutes of meetings, the review team considers the Department Board to be effective in keeping under review, advising and making recommendations to the Faculty Board of the Ulster University Business School (UUBS) on matters relating to quality assurance and enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment and the planning, design, approval, periodic review and revision of courses offered by QAHE. The ACEB, which meets three times a year, advises and makes recommendations to Ulster University's Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) and reports to the JBoG which sets and oversees the strategic direction and development of the partnership, and ensures alignment between the parties is maintained.

3 These joint committees are complemented by a non-hierarchical internal committee structure that comprises the Retention Committee, Course Schedule Committee, and the Performance and Enhancement Committee (PEC) to address issues that may impact some or all of QAHE's university partnerships. These committees operate independently of each other and are used as an internal mechanism to bring key colleagues together to discuss the respective committees' agendas. For example, the Retention Committee considers updates from the Registry, learning and teaching, and student support teams and the Course Schedule Committee determines which courses will be offered for each intake and agrees on all relevant dates and deadlines for admissions, registration, and finance including course cancellation and launch deadlines. PEC meets three times per year to review each university partner's portfolio of programmes for a specific cohort of students as 'year-end results'. The evidence demonstrates that this approach is effective.

4 Course management teams (CMT) hold weekly meetings as a mechanism for maintaining academic standards across programmes with membership comprising Deans,

Deputy Deans, Associate Deans, Course Directors, the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team, programme administrators and the Quality Assurance team. The evidence shows that CMT provides a structured forum for academic and professional service teams to coordinate, review, and enhance course delivery within the faculty, ensuring alignment with organisational priorities for academic quality, student satisfaction, and continuous improvement. By embedding the structure across departments, an environment has been created to monitor faculty performance and identify areas for improvement, support cross-team collaboration by providing a platform for problem-solving and issue escalation and deliver professional development (CPD) for academic staff.

5 As QAHE delivers Ulster University programmes on a franchise basis it has largely adopted the university's policies regarding regulations and quality management. However, the review team also learnt that QAHE has started to introduce its own policies or make amendments to existing policies, for example, Student Complaints and Late Class policies. The team were advised that the amendment and approval of these policies is currently through informal processes. In the case of amendments to the Complaints Policy, this involved a discussion at the Dean's meetings, and for the Late to Class Policy, a conversation with staff and students, before the Quality Assurance Team passed both policies to the Provost for approval. As such decisions are made outside the formal committee structure, the team was unable to find a record of approvals. However, it is clear that there is central overview of policy development through the Quality Assurance Team and policy approval through the Provost. While the number of policies developed and approved this way is still small, this may change in future. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that QAHE develop a formal process for the approval and modification of its academic policies through the internal committee to support a more robust approach.

6 Overall, the review team concluded that the QAHE's approach to managing quality and standards, although complex, is effective, and governance mechanisms are in place to ensure effective operations, thereby providing a suitable learning experience for students. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 2: Engaging students as partners

Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Engagement happens individually and collectively to influence all levels of study and decision making. Enhancements identified through student engagement activities are implemented, where appropriate, and communicated to staff and students.

Findings

7 QAHE provides opportunities for students on Ulster University programmes to engage collectively through representation at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and has a diverse student representative body. Student representatives are appointed from each programme cohort. Support for student representatives is in place to enable meaningful engagement with student representatives taken through an induction and training sessions once appointed. Studies Advisers assist the Quality Assurance Team with their selection and training. In meetings with the review team, undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives reported being confident that they can represent students effectively. In their view QAHE listens to the student voice and responds to student feedback with action usually taken promptly.

8 The Course Committees and SSCCs provide an opportunity for dialogue between staff and students at programme level. They include student representatives from each programme cohort and are held every semester. Sample minutes of the SSCC meetings provide evidence of good student engagement and representation at programme level with actions taken on each student concern raised. However, students are currently not represented at senior level committees or boards. To encourage broader collective student engagement the review team, therefore, **recommends** that QAHE consider engaging students in the management of their learning experience through senior deliberative committees.

9 Students have various mechanisms available to share their views individually on the quality of their learning experience and learning environment. In addition to the collective feedback provided through student representatives at programme level committees, students on Ulster University programmes provide feedback on learning, teaching and support services through module surveys which take place three times a year. There is also a dedicated feedback email and for safeguarding concerns in person or email feedback can be provided to the Safeguarding Team. Final year undergraduate students have the opportunity to complete the National Student Survey (NSS) and postgraduate students complete the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). Students have found these feedback mechanisms valuable. The 'You Said – We Did' boards placed across the campuses, update students on the actions that have been taken in response to their feedback.

10 A recent initiative was the introduction of a QR code across the campuses, which enables students to provide anonymous feedback on support services. Responses are monitored by the Quality Assurance Team who passes the feedback to the relevant support department for action. Students feel this has been effective and helpful especially for those who feel less confident in providing honest feedback through other mechanisms. This also enables international students who may have come from hierarchical cultures that do not value or recognise the student voice, to express their views. The introduction of the QR code for anonymous student feedback, which enables an inclusive approach to the provision of feedback, is a feature of **good practice**.

11 Overall, the review team concluded that there are clear mechanisms available to students through student representation and student feedback surveys, that provide opportunities for individual and collective feedback. While students are not represented at senior committees and boards, they are able to provide feedback that is evaluated and considered within formal processes. Students feel that the formal and informal mechanisms available to them ensure that they are able to work in partnership with staff and that their voice is heard and valued. Enhancements made as a result of student engagement are communicated to students and implemented appropriately. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience

Providers plan, secure and maintain resources relating to learning, technology, facilities and staffing to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.

Findings

12 QAHE takes a deliberate and strategic approach to resourcing the delivery of a high quality learning experience. This is evident in the alignment of infrastructure, staffing, and digital tools with the operational context of its provision and the needs of its student body. QAHE has invested in expanding and upgrading its estate, including the enhancement of teaching and learning facilities across sites such as Louisa Ryland House in Birmingham and the Manchester campus. These investments have resulted in improved access to quiet study spaces, breakout areas, and kitchen facilities, supporting academic and personal aspects of student life.

13 In addition to physical infrastructure, QAHE has embedded digital innovation as part of its education delivery. The implementation of cloud-based computing labs provides students, particularly those in computing-related disciplines, with access to industry-standard software remotely. This supports flexible modes of delivery and ensures parity of access across physical and virtual learning environments. The review team considers the embedding of digital innovation in delivery, including the use of cloud-based computing labs, which supports flexible modes of delivery and equitable access to software to be **good practice**. The adoption of new customer management software for the student records system has further enhanced operational efficiency and enabled more coherent management of student data and support.

14 QAHE has also shown a clear commitment to inclusivity in its learning environments. Physical campuses incorporate features to support accessibility and sustainability, including the repurposing of materials in campus renovations and the donation of surplus equipment to local schools and charities. Although challenges remain, particularly in ensuring consistency of access and experience across sites, QAHE's systems of internal review and governance, for example, PEC, offer a structured means of monitoring resourcing effectiveness.

15 Library provision includes both physical and digital resources, and students additionally benefit from access to Ulster University library systems. Teaching staff are similarly supported through access to partner resources, which aids the delivery of research informed teaching and aligns with QAHE's strategic goals.

16 Staff development is a core component of QAHE's resourcing strategy. A wide range of opportunities are available, including support for HEA Fellowship, mentoring, and continuous professional development (CPD) events. Staff are also encouraged to undertake advanced qualifications, with the aim of fostering professional growth and maintaining high standards of academic delivery. Induction processes are formalised, and resource review is built into the annual programme review cycle, providing a mechanism through which student and staff feedback can inform investment decisions.

17 Students who met the review team reported a high level of satisfaction with the accessibility, availability, and suitability of facilities and resources, albeit noting minor

challenges around the availability of study and social spaces on the London campus. Formal channels such as the SSCC and student surveys, alongside informal feedback, offer multiple routes through which resourcing issues are surfaced and addressed.

18 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE's strategic and operational approach to resourcing is robust, proportionate, and responsive to the needs of its staff and students. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality

Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels. These analyses inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.

Findings

19 QAHE gathers data for the evaluation of quality at module, programme and institution level through a variety of means. These include end of module surveys run every semester, the NSS and PTES, progression and performance data from the student record system, student engagement data from the VLE and complaints and concerns data from the complaints log.

20 End of module survey results are analysed by QAHE. These provide insights into the performance of academic teams and enable the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, thus supporting the enhancement of the overall quality of education delivered. The analysed data is shared with Ulster University through discussion at Course Committee meetings. Evidence available to the review team demonstrates that Retention Committee meetings and the Quality Team also provide relevant insights to the professional services.

21 Ulster University collects PTES and NSS survey results, with NSS results compared against Office for Students (OfS) benchmarks. The review team noted that QAHE's results for 2024 exceeded the OfS university benchmark for Ulster University. The review team confirmed that NSS and PTES results were a standard agenda item at Department Board meetings and that a discussion about the surveys had taken place.

22 The review team found that comprehensive performance and progression reports were considered at Course Committees (course level), Department Board meetings (faculty level) and ACEB for institution-wide discussions. Documentary evidence assured the team that the data used from those reports had led to action plans to improve exit rates, resit rates, and early leavers statistics for one of the programmes.

23 Data is further collected by QAHE from the VLE on student performance and the level of engagement students have with their modules to identify areas for improvement, culminating in an action plan for improvement across the programme. An example was provided of how VLE analytics were used to track and enhance student engagement, academic performance, and assessment outcomes within one module across two academic years. It provided data-driven insights to improve assessment design for students who experienced challenges due to the nature of a module's assessment format. Analysing student engagement and performance data also informed course redesign in another case when it became clear that students found a particular module very challenging. In a further example QAHE was able to link poor student engagement with poor performance, and action was taken to provide mid-semester assessment support to students by examining sample pass and fail submissions. While the review team learnt that such advanced usage of analytics is still in its infancy, the practice is expected to be rolled out across all programmes soon. To support the sharing of lessons learnt on the use of VLE analytics, discussions are held at Course Director and module leader weekly meetings, and formalised training sessions are to be introduced.

24 QAHE also monitors and documents complaints or concerns from students on an issue log. The log is reviewed quarterly, with a formal report produced for the Senior Leadership Team and the Department Board receives data on

complaints to determine common themes that may need to be addressed. An example was provided of the steps taken in response to a complaint regarding concerns related to the interpretation of an assignment brief. The Course Director, module leader, and lecturers, collectively helped ensure that all students received a consistent and accurate understanding of their assignment brief.

25 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE's approach to the use of data to inform and evaluate quality is robust. Data analysis is systematic and from a variety of sources and has been used to enhance practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

Providers regularly monitor and review their provision to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.

Findings

26 QAHE has a structured approach to monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing its academic provision. The provider demonstrates alignment with sector-agreed practices by embedding responsibility for these activities at multiple levels of governance, supporting a culture of continuous reflection and improvement. The systematic collection and analysis of data, particularly through the PEC, forms a key mechanism through which performance trends, risks, and enhancement opportunities are identified and acted upon.

27 QAHE's strategic principles for monitoring are articulated through its governance structures, notably the PEC, ACEB, and the Department Board. These bodies meet regularly to review student outcomes, retention, satisfaction data, and enhancement initiatives. The PEC, in particular, provides a central point for performance review across the portfolio and ensures that enhancements are evaluated for impact over time. For example, in reviewing the performance of the BSc Accounting with Management and MSc Marketing programmes, the PEC identified areas for targeted improvement, which were subsequently addressed through documented programme-level action plans.

28 Monitoring and evaluation processes are well-documented and designed to support both academic standards and quality enhancement. Course Committees and the SSCCs provide formal opportunities for staff and students to contribute to programme-level monitoring. Feedback from these bodies is collated and considered by the relevant governance committees. Unit-level data is synthesised through annual programme reviews (APRs), ensuring a coherent view of programme performance and student experience.

29 Action planning is a prominent feature of QAHE's approach. The review team saw clear examples of detailed plans outlining objectives, timelines, and measures of success. These plans are developed collaboratively and feed into the annual Faculty Planning Days, which serve as a structured opportunity for cross-programme reflection and institutional learning.

30 Students are actively involved in quality enhancement processes through structured mechanisms such as representation at Course Committees and feedback through SSCCs. Outcomes of evaluation activities are made transparent through 'You Said – We Did' communication boards and digital channels. The review team saw examples of student feedback directly informing changes to teaching delivery, support services, and assessment feedback practice.

31 QAHE demonstrates a strong commitment to using data to inform decision-making. Quantitative and qualitative data sets are triangulated at multiple levels - module, programme, and institutional - allowing for a comprehensive view of academic health. The use of a new student data management system supports consistency and accessibility of information across academic and support teams. Performance indicators are benchmarked internally and, where appropriate, externally through partnerships with awarding bodies such as Ulster University.

32 Monitoring extends to considerations of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Disaggregated data is reviewed by the PEC to identify performance trends by student demographic. This has informed the development of targeted support services, such as the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE), which offers tailored academic skills support to students at risk of underperformance. The review team considers the embedding of equality, diversity, and inclusion considerations in monitoring, with disaggregated data informing targeted interventions like the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) which supports underperforming or at-risk student groups to be **good practice**. QAHE is also working to ensure consistency of enhancement impact across different student groups, including international students.

33 Enhancement activity is further supported by regular internal and external peer review. Programmes benefit from external examiner oversight and periodic review, while internal evaluations are supported by teaching observations and peer review processes. The effectiveness of enhancements is monitored through ongoing review and formal documentation of outcomes, feeding back into the programme lifecycle. The provider's enhancement culture is evident not only in its use of data and formal monitoring processes but also in its willingness to pilot and refine new approaches. The ACE service, for example, emerged in response to identified student needs and has since become a key feature of the academic support landscape. Staff and students confirmed that enhancements, once implemented, are subject to further evaluation to ensure they are delivering the intended benefits.

34 Despite this strong alignment with the Principle, the review team **recommends** that QAHE consider further strengthening its quality monitoring framework. This includes ensuring consistent engagement from all student groups, developing mechanisms to systematically evaluate the impact of enhancement activities on outcomes, and formalizing the monitoring of action plan implementation to secure delivery. Addressing these areas would further reinforce the provider's capacity for evidence-based enhancement and inclusive academic governance.

35 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE has a robust and well-embedded approach to monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing its provision. The systems in place support both the assurance of academic standards and the continuous enhancement of quality. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 6: Engaging in external review and accreditation

Providers engage with external reviews to give assurance about the effectiveness of their approach to managing quality and standards. External reviews offer insights about the comparability of providers' approaches and generate outcomes that providers can use to enhance their policies and practices. Reviews may be commissioned by providers, form part of a national quality framework or linked to professional recognition and actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by representative organisations, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.

Findings

36 QAHE engages in a range of external reviews and accreditations from professional and statutory bodies (PSRB), accrediting bodies and other external organisations. QAHE participated with Ulster University in PSRB accreditation events of the British Computing Society which included both staff and students from QAHE. It is the awarding body that is responsible for ensuring the requirements of the PSRB are met. The BSc Computing Systems programme received a number of commendations and one recommendation which has been met.

37 The British Accreditation Council (BAC) inspected QAHE in 2024 resulting in reaccreditation for the whole four-year period. An action plan arising from the BAC visit contained two action points. Meetings with staff and students, along with documentation reviewed by the team, indicated that both actions had been completed or were in progress. The review team also noted that several recommendations had also been made and while it was clear that the majority had been considered, it was less clear that 'making the complaints procedure more apparent on each campus' had been fully addressed (see recommendation Principle 12).

38 The British Council reviewed QAHE in 2023 and its report concluded that all standards concerning management, premises and resources, teaching and learning, welfare and student services, and safeguarding under-18s had been met.

39 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE was actively engaging in reviews by external bodies and the professional accreditations of its university partner, giving assurance about the effectiveness of its approach to managing quality and standards. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes and modules to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant Qualifications Framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area.

Findings

40 Overall responsibility for designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes delivered by QAHE in this partnership rests with Ulster University. It has well-established policies and procedures for this and there is convincing evidence that QAHE follows them as outlined below.

41 The first stage in programme development and design, following an initial internal QAHE assessment of the outline proposal, involves internal planning with the QAHE development team on the new programme, followed by a joint discussion between QAHE and the relevant Ulster University faculty. Following Ulster University's approval procedures, the new programme proposal is then taken to the Ulster University Academic Planning Advisory Group (APAG) for approval. If approved to proceed is granted, academic staff at QAHE are then responsible for producing an evaluation document which incorporates key content from the University's evaluation document such as the programme specification, module descriptors and programme regulations but also includes additional information such as the availability of resources, both physical and staffing, student support and the arrangements for student engagement.

42 In most cases the programme has already been approved to run at Ulster University and the approval event is for the University to be assured that QAHE has an adequate understanding of the programme, levels to be delivered and the assessment strategy, as well as having sufficient resources of the correct type available to provide the programme at the same standard as Ulster University. However, in some cases, QAHE does create additional modules tailored to its students and markets, and these are then subject to additional scrutiny during the approval event to ensure they are at the correct academic standard. This extends to the assurance that standards are consistent with national qualification and credit frameworks, and that programmes have been designed with cognisance of the appropriate subject benchmark statements. For the most recent approval event for a new programme, the approval panel made several commendations about collaborative efforts to make adaptations to the full-time version of the provision at QAHE which, in the redesign, took into consideration the needs of the anticipated students. The panel further commended the exceptionally strong collaborative working relationship between Ulster University and QAHE for this provision, and the integration of the well developed central support teams at QAHE into the course teams.

43 Programme handbooks confirm programme structures accord with the requirements of the national qualifications framework, and all awards conform to the approved structure with criteria defined in the qualification and credit framework. The handbooks further assure students that standards are regularly reviewed, externally benchmarked, and validated through various means, including the input of external examiners and statutory and professional bodies, as well as by reference to relevant subject benchmarks. Module handbooks clearly outline the aims and learning outcomes of the module, what is required to demonstrate achievement of those learning outcomes, a list of learning resources, and the organisation and management of the module.

44 With regard to programme modifications, proposals from Ulster University to amend the content, structure, or regulations of a programme are submitted through the associated University faculty for consideration and approval with notice given to QAHE. Proposed changes to QAHE resources (both human and physical) also require approval. In the case of staff, the University will consider the CVs of staff who are to take on responsibilities. Changes to the title, location, mode of attendance, and intake size are considered by APAG with a recommendation to ASQEC before final approval is given. For any changes proposed, the review team confirmed that QAHE staff and students are consulted.

45 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE rigorously follows the awarding body's policies and procedures for the approval and modification of programmes, ensuring the quality of provision and the academic standards of the awards are consistent with relevant Qualifications Frameworks. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 8: Operating partnerships with other organisations

Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.

Findings

46 QAHE operates its partnership with Ulster University in a manner that reflects sector agreed expectations for transparency, governance, and shared responsibility for quality and academic standards. QAHE has implemented a well-defined governance framework that sets out roles, responsibilities, and oversight arrangements across the partnership's lifecycle. The governance structure for the QAHE–Ulster University partnership includes JBoG, ACEB, and the UUBS Department Board. These boards have terms of reference and defined remits to ensure accountability and effective decision-making. The review team confirmed that they meet regularly to review programme performance, student outcomes, and areas for enhancement, enabling QAHE and Ulster University to jointly manage academic quality and risk.

47 Risk management processes are embedded into the partnership's governance structure. Due diligence is undertaken prior to forming partnerships and remains an ongoing feature of the relationship. Risks are monitored through the ACEB and Department Boards, where compliance with regulatory and legislative requirements is considered. This includes review of student performance and quality assurance processes that inform enhancement activity.

48 Written agreements are in place and have been reviewed and updated to ensure fitness for purpose. These documents include a detailed partnership agreement and an exit management plan, which together outline the responsibilities of both partners across all phases of the partnership. The partnership handbook and course documentation further support this transparency by making the respective roles of each institution clear to staff and students. Students who met the review team confirmed that they were informed of the collaborative nature of their programme and understood the relationship between QAHE and Ulster University. Information is provided during induction and through course handbooks, with students able to access support from both partners as appropriate. The clarity of these arrangements enhances the student experience and ensures that expectations are effectively managed.

49 QAHE maintains accurate records of the partnership and ensures that governance documentation, such as board minutes and policy agreements, are securely stored and regularly reviewed. This underpins its ability to respond proactively to developments in the external environment, such as regulatory change or student need.

50 QAHE's approach is also characterised by a strong commitment to enhancement within the partnership. The review team found that meetings between QAHE and Ulster University are used not only to ensure standards but also to review and approve enhancement initiatives. Engagement with external examiners offers further opportunities to benchmark practice and reflect on improvement priorities.

51 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE has developed and sustained a partnership with Ulster University that is well-governed, transparent, and enhancement focused. QAHE is committed to ongoing review and operates proportionate arrangements

that protect academic standards and promote student success. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Findings

52 QAHE has a clearly defined process for the management of applications that ensure applicants are treated fairly and in a consistent manner. These are outlined in the Admissions Policy Framework document. Applicants for Ulster University programmes may apply for a course through several routes - via UCAS for undergraduate degrees, through online application links via the partner institution, or educational agents.

53 In 2024 QAHE launched a new application management system to provide a self service portal for applicants and agents to manage applications. The Ulster University branch campus website provides clear information about the courses offered and how to apply. This includes entry requirements, fees and scholarships, dates, and deadlines. Some students may require an interview by QAHE to determine their suitability for the chosen course and study route. A separate welfare assessment is carried out for applicants with declared needs or disabilities. These applicants are required to complete a self-assessment form. The Welfare Team uses this information to put in place appropriate support before arrival. Admitted students are also encouraged to declare special needs for appropriate support if they haven't previously done so.

54 QAHE has a comprehensive Admissions Policy framework and a Higher Education Student Recruitment Policy which cover admission principles to provision of all of its partner universities. Admissions criteria for Ulster programmes are defined in collaboration with Ulster University. Evidence seen by the review team confirmed that entry requirements are clearly outlined in the home and international entry requirements documents used by recruitment and admissions staff. These are generally reviewed every six months to ensure accuracy and updates are provided by Ulster University to QAHE. The Admissions Policy framework includes clear processes as to what needs to happen in case of changes to the programme or cancellation.

55 Ulster University has delegated authority to QAHE for the processing of conditional and unconditional offers but maintains significant oversight of the application process for the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) issuance and makes the final decision on whether an international student receives a CAS, subject to detailed admissions and compliance work undertaken by QAHE. The QAHE Admissions team receive training on the processes and procedures for recruitment and admissions to create a shared understanding of process from start to finish. The CAS shield, launched in 2020 in collaboration with Ulster University to improve compliance checks, allows direct communication with students to support them through their CAS request process and provides all immigration requirements needed as part of that process. While some students who met the review team were satisfied with the admissions process, others described delays CAS issuance which took 10 weeks for some and 6 weeks for others, although the review team recognise this is not within QAHE's control.

56 QAHE applies strict due diligence as part of the agent onboarding process before contracts are issued. The agent onboarding process is conducted through a risk management system of which the review team was given a demonstration. The agent contract, approved by QAHE's legal counsel, covers the obligations of agents to be transparent in providing students with all the information required to be able to make an

informed choice of the programmes offered. QAHE strongly recommend all agents to be British Council trained to ensure best practices in student recruitment. New agents are required to attend a mandatory agent training as an introduction to QAHE. Additionally, agents attend ongoing product specific training with their recruitment manager. Student surveys are conducted three times a year to obtain feedback from students on the support they have received from their agents. Agent reviews are conducted on the agent management system to allow ongoing due diligence of QAHE's agent network. Students are generally satisfied with the service received from agents.

57 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE operates recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Relevant and accessible information about the Ulster provision is published and its accuracy maintained thus enabling students to make informed choices about their studies. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

Findings

58 QAHE has a robust framework for supporting students. The Student Advice and Support Centre (SASC) was launched in late 2024 to improve the student support experience by providing students with a one stop shop for student support queries and an enhanced triage service.

59 Students receive support at key stages of their journey: before arrival, upon arrival, and throughout their studies. Students are supported with accurate information prior to arrival. Upon arrival, they attend a programme induction session to introduce them to the programme and the support services available to them. Post-induction students can find more information on the range of support services available to them via VLE. For example, the ACE Team has a page with various resources. The ACE Team and the Student Futures and Careers Team promote their activities via newsletters sent to students by email. Service use is monitored with the ACE and Library Teams providing a report on the usage of their services at the Course Committees meetings. Additionally, support services are a standing item on the agenda for the SSCCs. This is another way of discovering whether students, through the student representative system, are aware of the availability of the support services and make use of them.

60 Throughout their studies students receive comprehensive academic support via two major sources, Studies Advisers and the ACE Team. Studies Advisers serve as personal tutors to support and enhance the delivery of the programmes. Each student group is assigned a dedicated member of academic staff to offer support outside the traditional classroom environment. Additionally, Studies Advisers support and mentor student representatives to ensure that they can engage in decision-making processes related to their courses for improved academic quality and an inclusive learning environment. Studies Advisers are allocated per group instead of individual students and up to two groups (of approximately 30 students per group) are allocated to each Studies Adviser. In limited cases, some staff are allocated more than two groups. The Studies Advisers allocations made in the Spring Semester 2024-25 reveals a staff to student ratio of 1:65 for this semester. Students met by the team are generally satisfied with the service received from the Studies Advisers.

61 The ACE Team provides extensive support to students throughout their studies through online or in-person sessions, including evenings and Saturdays. Following feedback from students, ACE have now created a video guide and step by step poster on how to book an appointment and/or workshops. ACE staff visit every classroom on Monday mornings to give information of each week's activities to academic staff with the aim to promote their services. In addition, a monthly email is sent to them with updates, initiatives and activities. In 2024, the ACE Team introduced Clubs which run weekly over 6- or 8-weeks and an intensive three-hour learning sprints for those students with limited availability in response to feedback from students requesting longer workshops for more depth and flexible learning opportunities. For example, the Academic Communications Club was designed to boost presentation skills, especially for international students and foster an inclusive environment where domestic and international students build confidence and public speaking abilities together. To further their own professional development, the ACE Team holds regular

internal CPD days to promote discussion, collaboration and standardisation across all areas covered by ACE, programmes and campuses. The Team has developed a Code of Conduct for tutorials to promote consistency of approach and an intermittent ACE CPD Bulletin is published to ensure team members are aware of external development opportunities. Student feedback available to the review team confirmed that students are generally satisfied with the service received from the ACE Team.

62 The Safeguarding, Student Life and Wellbeing Team provides appropriate pastoral support and QAHE has adopted a holistic approach to student wellbeing and mental health. Advice and support are offered on a confidential or non-confidential basis as appropriate. The team works closely with ACE, Academic Teams, Student Services and Registry Teams to ensure that all aspects of the student experience are considered and support is tailored to individual student needs. The recent appointment of a Sexual Violence Support Officer enables them to support students who have experienced sexual violence. To keep their professional knowledge and skills current the team undertake CPD that focuses on wellbeing and particular trends that have been identified through student feedback as well as legal duties around safeguarding and prevention. For academic staff, the team offers online lunch and learn sessions for staff on topics such as neurodiversity autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) awareness, understanding the Prevent duty, spotting the signs and how to refer, compassionate communications.

63 To support students in their professional development the Student Futures and Careers team delivers a wide-ranging programme of employability support that includes access to Careers Advisors, employability events, skills development workshops such career essentials, employability bootcamps and CV drop-in days, as well as online resources. Additionally, students have access to the job boards, located on each campus, which are updated on a biweekly basis. Students also receive a monthly newsletter signposting them to current external job opportunities, on-campus workshops and external events in the local area. Additionally, the QAHE's alumni social network keeps in touch with graduates. Students welcome and are appreciative of the support provided and were able to demonstrate how it has assisted them in their individual circumstances.

64 The Student Relations Team provides various social activities on and off campus to help promote students' sense of belonging. Weekly events and activities are promoted through posters and screens on campus as well as a bi-weekly newsletter. Students who met the review team were familiar with the offering but also expressed a wish to be invited to participate in Ulster University events and activities.

65 Overall, the review team concluded that the student support framework effectively supports the provision of a high-quality learning experience. The support structure enables students to develop academically, personally and professionally during their learning journey. Students welcome and appreciative of the support provided and were able to demonstrate how it has assisted them in their individual circumstances. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessment

Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Findings

66 QAHE demonstrates a strategic and inclusive approach to teaching, learning, and assessment that aligns with sector-agreed expectations for student engagement, academic integrity, and skills development. Teaching is informed by scholarship, delivered by appropriately qualified staff, and supported by infrastructure designed to enable progression, innovation, and continuous enhancement. QAHE's pedagogical approach is underpinned by a commitment to research-informed teaching. Staff are supported to engage in scholarly activity and are encouraged to integrate current research into their teaching practice. QAHE has established a research department and supports participation in its annual research conference and research clusters across disciplines such as business, computing, and education. These structures contribute to a learning environment in which teaching is supported to be both academically rigorous and professionally relevant.

67 Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are articulated to students through programme handbooks, module handbooks, and assessment briefs. Students who met the review team confirmed that assessment expectations are communicated and that feedback is timely and constructive. Assessment feedback is supplemented by academic support from ACE Team, which offers guidance on using feedback to inform learning and development.

68 Staff qualifications and support for staff are a key strength. All teaching staff are required to meet Ulster University's recognised teacher status (RTS) requirements, and this is formally reviewed by the awarding body. Staff are supported through a range of professional development opportunities including CPD events, mentoring for Advance HE fellowship, and postgraduate study. External examining and engagement in academic networks are also encouraged, enhancing staff exposure to wider sector practice.

69 QAHE fosters a culture of student responsibility and engagement. Through the ACE Team, students are equipped with skills for independent study and critical thinking. Workshops, one-to-one tutorials, and digital resources are made available to support students in developing academic competencies. The review team heard that students value these services and consider them instrumental in enabling progression.

70 The review team found that academic integrity is embedded within the academic culture. Students receive training on referencing, plagiarism avoidance, and the appropriate use of digital tools including generative artificial intelligence (AI). Guidance is available through induction, VLE resources, and individual support via ACE. Staff are also supported through training in assessment design, marking, and academic integrity policy.

71 QAHE has designed its assessment processes to be inclusive, reliable, and fair. In partnership arrangements such as that with Ulster University, assessment briefs and grading criteria are typically provided by the awarding body. QAHE adopts and delivers these locally, ensuring consistency with academic standards while aligning delivery to the needs of its student body. A variety of assessment methods are used, including essays, reports, presentations, case studies, and online assessments, ensuring students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning outcomes. Where appropriate, formative assessments

are used to provide developmental feedback prior to summative evaluation. Students confirmed that assessments are relevant and appropriately challenging, and that support is available where needed.

72 Support for student progression is embedded into academic and pastoral systems. The ACE Team delivers study skills support, while the Careers Team provides employability advice, including CV clinics, interview preparation, and careers bootcamps. Information on progression requirements is provided at key points in the academic cycle, and students who met the review team reported that they felt well-supported in understanding how to achieve their goals.

73 The use of technology supports coherence across teaching, learning, and assessment. The VLE is used consistently to provide learning materials, track assessment submissions, and return feedback. Computing students also benefit from access to cloud-based computing labs, allowing them to use specialist software regardless of location. These resources support hybrid and remote learning and ensure that students across sites have access to the tools needed for success.

74 QAHE has also responded proactively to sector developments concerning AI. It has developed guidance for students and staff on the ethical use of generative AI tools, which is embedded within academic skills resources and staff training sessions. Students confirmed that expectations around the use of AI were explained and aligned with academic integrity principles.

75 The review team noted that QAHE's systems for monitoring teaching quality are consistent and robust. Student feedback is collected through module surveys and SSCCs, and staff engage in peer observation and internal review processes. These mechanisms feed into annual monitoring and programme review, enabling reflection on teaching effectiveness and assessment design. However, the review identified gaps in how the impact of student feedback on learning is tracked and communicated. There are committees focusing on these matters, but it appears that the impact of student feedback on learning is not always consistently and systematically considered. To enhance the monitoring mechanisms the review team **recommends** that QAHE strengthen the monitoring of feedback impact on student learning.

76 Overall, the review team concluded that QAHE adopts a well-structured, inclusive, and enhancement-oriented approach to teaching, learning, and assessment. Its methods promote progression, academic integrity, and professional development, and it demonstrates a clear commitment to continuous improvement. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

Findings

77 Responsibility for complaints and appeals are split between QAHE and Ulster University with QAHE having responsibility for dealing with complaints and the awarding body being responsible for academic appeals. Information for students on the appeals process together with the relevant forms and submission deadlines are accessible to students on the Ulster University website and is also signposted in programme handbooks. Students are given an overview of the appeals guidance during induction and Course Directors are available to give advice when needed.

78 QAHE's Complaints Policy, which covers all its provision is robust and clearly articulates formal and informal stages. The policy enables early resolution because the informal stage encourages students to report concerns informally to the staff or the department concerned in the first instance. They are also encouraged to speak with their Studies Adviser, the SASC team or email the 'Have Your Say' inbox if unsure of the staff or department to contact. They can also contact the Complaints Officer via email who can help facilitate communication between the student and the subject of the complaint. The majority of complaints are resolved informally.

79 The policy clearly defines what counts as a complaint and this includes admissions issues. It also specifies who will be investigating a formal complaint, when receipt of the complaint is acknowledged and what the normal resolution period is. The Complaints Officer will act as an investigator for formal complaints. Timescales for the resolution of formal complaints are in line with other practice in the sector. The complainant will receive a written acknowledgment within three working days, and a written response will be sent within 15 working days of receiving the formal complaint. There are also escalation options to the awarding body and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) in case of unsatisfactory outcomes. Staff recently attended investigation skills training on the Ulster University complaints process.

80 The Complaints Policy and associated forms are easily accessible for students and staff on the QAHE website. However, the information presented there is potentially confusing for students as it is not clear which complaints policy and process Ulster University students should adopt. On the one hand the website states that the QAHE complaints policy and process can be used by any prospective or current student but then goes on to say that for students at one of QAHE's partner universities, there is an option to make a complaint through the awarding university's complaints procedure. Course handbooks, also available on the VLE, only signpost students to the Ulster University complaints process. Similarly, the Ulster University branch campus website only provides the Ulster University complaints policy and forms together with detailed guidance for students about the various stages of its policy and the resolution process. Student meetings revealed that some students were unclear about the processes and who has responsibility for each stage. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the timescale for addressing some complaints and the lack of empathy for bereaved students. In addition, not all staff who met the team were fully aware that QAHE had its own policy. The review team considers that QAHE operates processes for complaints that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible to staff and students. The QAHE Complaints

Policy is modelled on that of the awarding body but there is potential for confusion on which policy applies. The review team, therefore, **recommends** QAHE provide greater clarity to students and staff on which complaints policy applies for Ulster University students.

81 There is evidence that shows complaints have been used by QAHE for the enhancement of the student learning experience and an example of how complaints data were used to change teaching, learning and assessment practice in a programme was provided. Formal complaints are logged and monitored by the senior management team. Data on complaints is also received at the Department Board to determine common themes and enhancements that can be made. Recent minutes lists common themes from student complaints and planned actions.

82 Overall, the review team concluded that there are robust, transparent and accessible procedures for complaints. While consistency of the information provided and their dissemination to students and staff could be improved, the outcomes of the complaints process are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience. QAHE (Ulster) therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Enhancement initiatives

Commentary on institutional approach to enhancement

83 QAHE regularly uses monitoring and evaluation to drive improvement and enhancement. It reflects on academic standards across its provision through PEC which discusses data on student retention and performance. In addition, annual faculty planning days are held to review, evaluate, and draw up enhancement action plans based on a reflection and review of quality issues, the student experience, student engagement and outcomes and the effectiveness of current operational processes. Outcomes from external review also feed into action plans. The QAHE Department Board makes recommendations to UUBS's Department Board on the quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning.

84 The Director of Quality Assurance is responsible for the management and enhancement of QAHE's quality assurance framework; and ensuring that enhancement plans are followed through and monitored. Responsibility for programme enhancement lies with the course delivery team and enhancement activities are discussed at Course Committees which consider quantitative and qualitative data such as student performance and feedback to establish the effectiveness and impact of its learning environments and the resources required for the delivery and enhancement of the student learning experience. QAHE monitors and evaluates student engagement via VLE analytics and usage data to establish the effectiveness and impact of its learning environments and the resources required for the delivery and enhancement of the learning experience. Outputs feed into the annual partnership review meeting, a meeting of QAHE and Ulster University course management teams, to inform areas for enhancement at module and programme level.

85 Enhancement activity is further supported by regular internal and external peer review. Programmes benefit from external examiner oversight and periodic review, while internal evaluations are supported by teaching observations and peer review processes. The effectiveness of enhancements is monitored through ongoing review and formal documentation of outcomes, feeding back into the programme lifecycle.

86 One of the key enhancements has been the launch of the Research Department in 2024 based on discussions with partner universities to facilitate and promote collaborative research and from staff feedback for enhancing the quality of teaching. The replacement of the application management system with a new system in the same year has greatly enhanced and improved QAHE's service for applicants. The adoption of new customer management software for the student records system has further enhanced operational efficiency and enabled more coherent management of student data and support.

87 In relation to student engagement and progression challenges were identified, particularly at the London campus, with plans to enhance student participation and support. The impact of the actions taken has been positive with pass rates and averages across all programmes consistently improving from 2023 to 2025, indicating the effectiveness of the enhancements and student support structures.

88 QAHE's commitment to enhancing the student experience is reflected not only in the academic and administrative improvements but also in the physical upgrades across the campuses. The introduction of breakout space enhancements and additional quiet study spaces have created dynamic environments that foster collaboration among students.

89 QAHE's enhancement culture is evident not only in its use of data and formal monitoring processes but also in its willingness to pilot and refine new approaches. The ACE service, for example, emerged in response to identified student needs and has since become a key feature of the academic support landscape. Enhancements, once

implemented, are subject to further evaluation to ensure they are delivering the intended benefits.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000
Web: www.qaa.ac.uk