



Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements: report of the desk-based analysis of INTO Queen's LLP, trading as INTO Queen's University Belfast, February 2022

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that INTO Queen's University Belfast is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the February 2021 [annual monitoring report](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There are 122 students studying for Queen's University Belfast (QUB) awards and 44 on awards from INTO University Partnership as of December 2021; all of these are studying full-time. There have been no changes to awarding bodies with QUB being the principal awarding body. Of these, 87 are studying programmes at Level 4 and above. There have been no changes in programmes offered, premises or staffing levels. There have been no material changes to the institution or to provision. Student satisfaction surveys indicate generally high levels of satisfaction.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 INTO Queen's University Belfast (the Centre; INTO Queen's) continues to make progress in monitoring, evaluating and enhancing its higher education provision. The review team considered the QAA Action Plan - updated in December 2021 and originally developed in response to QAA's Educational Oversight Review undertaken in 2018, the Annual Monitoring Return and supporting evidence submitted in December 2021, and supplementary documentation received prior to the desk-based analysis. Consideration of the desk-based evidence provided indicates that the Centre continues to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives put forward to maintain standards and enhance the quality of students' learning experiences.

4 The QAA Review Panel made two advisable and one desirable recommendation in the 2018 Report, which the Centre subsequently addressed. As evidenced in QAA's Annual Monitoring Report in 2021, INTO Queen's commenced positive steps to evaluate the impact of the actions taken, and the current Action Plan - together with the evidence provided - indicates that the Centre continues to build upon efforts made in this respect.

5 Advisable recommendation one related to establishing quoracy requirements in major committees to ensure that a minimum number of members were present when making decisions. INTO Queen's completed the action in December 2019, and members agreed that if quoracy was not met in a particular meeting, then no decisions could be taken. Terms of Reference set out in the Centre's Academic Management-Quality Assurance Manual for 2021-2022 set out the current quoracy requirements for each of the Centre's major committees, as well as the Board of Examiners and the Students of Concern Group. To confirm quoracy, attendance in meetings is formally recorded in the minutes.

6 Advisable recommendation two suggested that INTO Queen's develop a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy (TLAP). Following implementation in 2021, senior

managers rendered an initial evaluation of its impact as of December 2021. The Policy is now regarded as a key measure in academic delivery and is available for all stakeholders to review. In respect of students, the policy is printed in the Student Policy Handbook and can be accessed on the Centre's virtual learning environment (VLE). With regard to staff, the Policy has been shared with new and existing staff members.

7 The Centre maintains that key principles within the TLAP provide a useful measure of enhancements made in teaching and learning over the past year, together with an assessment of their relevant impacts. For example, additional tutorial support provided to one student beginning her studies abroad enabled her to complete her studies at INTO Queen's in Belfast and graduate with a master's degree from Queen's University (QUB).

8 To facilitate student engagement and successful transition to other schools in QUB, INTO Queen's introduced an initiative aimed at monitoring and improving student engagement levels in 2021. Initial efforts are positive, as the Student Engagement Report for 2020-21 indicates that levels of student engagement have improved. In respect of transition to QUB programmes, the Centre continues to operate a system for monitoring the progression of students who initially registered in INTO programmes and subsequently progressed to QUB programmes. The system has proved to be particularly useful for monitoring the transition of Graduate Diploma Students.

9 Collaborative initiatives undertaken with QUB have improved student learning experiences. For example, INTO Queen's developed and piloted an Integrated International Year One Engineering (IYOE) with QUB's BEng programme that allowed students to progress from Level 3 to Level 5 and obtain a single three-year Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) and visa. The integrated programme is now offered on a permanent basis.

10 The Centre continues to employ a blended approach to online teaching to meet the learning needs of campus-based and distance-based students. Lectures employ a mixture of synchronous (live teaching that includes exercises for testing knowledge and understanding) and asynchronous (prerecorded) teaching methods, delivered through the College's VLE. Within the system, campus-based and distance-based learners access the same online synchronous and asynchronous provision. Students receive information about the various modes of instruction and programme requirements in Induction Sessions, Programme Handbooks and in the Student Handbook.

11 To ensure delivery methods and learning plans for online blended learning remain effective, the Centre operates a robust internal system for implementing and recording teaching observations. Externally, positive feedback received from external examiners, cited in the Continuous Actions for Programme Enhancement (CAPE) reports and panellist responses in QUB Periodic Review Reports support further developments in online learning.

12 To strengthen its student-centred approach, the Centre provides opportunities for staff members to discuss issues and acquire the knowledge and skills deemed requisite for supporting students effectively. 'Student of Concern' meetings facilitate discussions about 'at risk' students. Training events, such as the session on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy and Processes which took place in November 2021, provide important policy updates. Instruction briefings, such as the one on Student Wellbeing Checks, set out staff responsibilities for undertaking reviews. Expectations set for academic tutors in the Academic (Personal) Tutor system ensure that staff understand their responsibilities in respect of providing academic support. The production of a single Student Policy Handbook, applicable to all INTO Queen's programmes, clarifies anomalies previously arising within separate programmes. A clearly defined approach to social media and procedures to be followed has opened opportunities for broadening staff and student communication.

13 The TLAP has also brought forward some initiatives for enhancing student skills and increasing prospects for student interaction with INTO Queen's alumni. For example, the Centre introduced a Peer Tutoring system in 2021 to assist students in International Foundation (IFP) who were concerned about mathematics classes. Students with numeracy skills were encouraged to become peer tutors and, after training, helped fellow students to progress. In November 2021, INTO Queen's Alumni were invited to a Business Breakfast to discuss their experiences with Centre students, which attendees found helpful.

14 INTO Queen's continues to make positive progress in evaluating the impact of QAA's Desirable Recommendation to implement a plan that ensures the active engagement of students in the quality of their learning experience. In particular, the Centre has established the International Student Representative Committee (ISRC) as an important channel for the student voice, as demonstrated in the Committee's 'You Said, We Did' Reports. Activities are monitored and evaluated periodically to assess the Committee's impact upon student learning experiences, and staff members receive updates from the Academic Director and the Student Liaison Officer on the ISRC's work.

15 In respect of monitoring student opinions about the ISRC, feedback obtained from the ISRC survey and programme committee meetings obtained in 2021 indicates that student representatives view their experiences positively and other students value the ISRC's assistance in representing their views in programme and committee meetings. For example, when the ISRC received a concern about the lack of student participation in Programme Coordination meetings, representatives agreed that the Student Liaison Officer would attend the meetings to support students and increase their levels of engagement.

16 INTO also undertakes independently a comprehensive annual survey of student opinions regarding their learning experiences in all of their centres, without reference to any universities involved. In the 2021 Student Satisfaction Survey undertaken in INTO Queen's, an overall satisfaction rate of 91.7% was recorded. Satisfaction with the levels of support was rated at 96.6%.

Student Data Return

17 All students are international (non-EU). Retention is very good across all programmes with the exception of the International Foundation programme in Business, Humanities and Social Sciences, which shows **89.6%** retention. Achievement generally follows the rates of retention.

18 In 2020-21, the overall pass rate for students studying programmes at Level 4 or above was 93%. Although representing a marginal decline from the 94.5% achievement rate reported for all programmes in 2019-20, in six of the programmes 100% pass rates were reported over nine intakes. The average percentage pass rate across the Level 3 programmes in 2021 that allowed entry to specified degrees, was 91%. Although slightly below the average pass rate of 93% in 2019-20, results were well above the 86% figure recorded in 2018-2019.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

19 INTO Queen's continues to make effective progress in using external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education. Although no external reviews have taken place since the last QAA monitoring visit, the Centre has actively engaged in two comprehensive Periodic Reviews undertaken by Queen's University (QUB) in respect of eight programmes in 2021. In each case, panels made up of QUB academic staff and academics

drawn from other universities provided external reference points for Centre reflection by conducting full reviews and producing detailed reports that included examples of good practice as well as recommendations for improvement. The Centre responded to each report, taking recommendations fully into account and outlining actions for improvement and programme enhancements.

20 INTO Queen's continues to use input from external examiners as external reference points to improve the quality of all programmes offered. Expectations and responsibilities are set out in the Centre's current Action Plan. External examiner reports are sent to the Academic Director for review, and programme managers are expected to share the reports with teaching teams and students. Detailed comments drawn from each external examiner report are presented in CAPE Reports and reviewed by QUB. Within each CAPE report, a separate section exists for the Centre to respond specifically to the comments made by external examiners. Reviews of the CAPE reports submitted as evidence in 2022, indicate that reports are generally positive and that INTO Queen's has carefully considered each recommendation made by an external examiner and used those suggestions to improve the quality of its foundation and higher education provision. The Centre responds in the same professional manner to comments and recommendations made by the external examiner in Academic English.

21 INTO Queen's continues to engage actively with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The Code informs all policies developed by the Centre and those of QUB, and are embodied in the Centre's current Academic Management Quality Assurance Manual. The Code is used to guide programme development. For example, the Code served as the basis for structuring the Reflective Statement for INTO's Graduate Diploma programme in the QUB's Periodic Review undertaken in March 2021. In November 2021, the Centre updated the mapping exercise carried out in 2020 to ensure that Expectations previously met in respect of the Quality Code's Core conditions and Core practices remain fit-for-purpose.

Background to the desk-based analysis

22 The desk-based analysis serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous annual monitoring. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring process or review.

23 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, Reviewer, and Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, in February 2022. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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