



INTO University of Exeter LLP

Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements

November 2018

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at INTO University of Exeter LLP. The review took place on 7 November 2018 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Ms Barbara Howell

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the Centre's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner
- make judgements on the Centre's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- make judgements about the reliability of the information that the Centre produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 4. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

Key findings

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

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgement about INTO University of Exeter LLP.

- **Confidence** can be placed in INTO University of Exeter LLP's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner.
- **Confidence** can be placed in INTO University of Exeter LLP's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.
- **Reliance can** be placed on the information that INTO University of Exeter LLP produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **feature of good practice** at INTO University of Exeter LLP.

- The comprehensive support and access for personal and professional staff development which contributes to the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to INTO University of Exeter LLP.

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

- update the Joint Venture Quality Assurance Agreement to better reflect current working practice and sector developments.
- improve student attendance at each Board of Study, in line with the terms of reference.

About INTO University of Exeter LLP

INTO University of Exeter LLP (the Centre) is a Joint Venture partnership between the University of Exeter and INTO University Partnerships.

The INTO mission is to seek through innovative partnerships with leading universities, the expansion of opportunities for higher education, ensuring success and transforming the lives of their students and staff. The Centre opened in 2007 to support the University in its mission to increase the number of well qualified international students and support the University's International Strategy as appropriate.

At the time of the review the Centre had 572 students enrolled on INTO University of Exeter programmes and expected a further cohort in January 2019 of 110. The Centre further reported 112 full-time equivalent staff.

The Joint Venture is a Limited Liability Partnership which is supervised and managed by the Joint Venture Management Committee composed of membership from both parties. The Centre Director is the operational lead for the Joint Venture with reporting lines to the Management Committee and is managed by INTO University Partnerships.

The University of Exeter is the degree-awarding body and validates the INTO University of Exeter programmes. The University is responsible for all INTO University of Exeter academic issues relating to the Limited Liability Partnership including entry standards, teaching quality and progression criteria as set out in their Teaching Quality Assurance Manual (TQA) and articulated in the Quality Assurance Agreement. The University is also responsible for overseeing academic governance processes for the Centre. The relationship between the University and INTO is clearly set out in the Joint Venture Quality Assurance Agreement.

The Centre makes full use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities through its partnership with the University. The University carries out reviews of INTO provision with the most recent review carried out in February 2016. External expertise is used to evaluate and finalise the detail of the proposed programme and ongoing checks are made through the use of external assessors who confirm that intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the programme and map onto any suitable reference points.

The Centre has not undergone an external review independent of the University. It was incorporated into the University of Exeter QAA Institutional Review in April 2012, however very little emphasis was placed on this particular partnership.

Detailed findings about INTO University of Exeter LLP

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The University of Exeter is the degree-awarding body and validates the INTO University of Exeter LLP programmes. The University is responsible for the Centre's quality assurance processes that support teaching and learning as set out in their Teaching Quality Assurance Manual (TQA) and for overseeing the academic governance processes. The University is also responsible for awarding the appropriate University award to programme students, approving all modes of assessment, and setting both the entry and progression requirements.

1.2 The Quality Assurance Agreement, dated and signed the 15 December 2006, clearly sets out the respective quality assurance arrangements although does not give consideration to recent sector developments. As part of that undertaking, the University requires the Limited Liability Partnership to carry out annual monitoring and the periodic review of programmes in respect of the standards, delivery and content. The review team found that annual monitoring and periodic review operated as intended, however, other elements of the Quality Assurance Agreement did not reflect current practice. For example the agreement refers to a School Planning Group chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor and twice-yearly meetings for the review and evaluation of the Joint Venture arrangements. From meeting the review team had with the senior managers, it was clear that over time practice had changed and these events no longer took place. The review team, therefore, considers that it is **desirable** for the Centre to update the Joint Venture Quality Assurance Agreement to better reflect current practice and sector developments.

1.3 The governance structures were reviewed in 2017 and were subsequently approved by the Academic Board in November 2017. The governance structure includes the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC), which is organised by programme and meets termly. The Committee clearly enables staff and students to meet to discuss both operational and strategic aspects of the programmes.

1.4 Each programme is also expected to conduct formal Programme Meetings at least twice a year to evaluate and review proposed changes to or new programmes and matters associated to teaching and learning. INTO Boards of Study ensure the appropriate level of resources, monitor provision at a modular level, evaluate student feedback and performance and receive updates from INTO and University staff. The Boards of study were found to generally operate as intended, with the exception of student representation as set out in the terms of reference. The review team confirmed this was the expectation, however, it noted that students had been absent from over 50 per cent of meetings. The review team, therefore, considers that it is **desirable** for the Centre to improve student attendance at each Board of Study, in line with the terms of reference.

1.5 The Education Committee's main purpose is to produce Annual Student Experience Review action plans, consider performance data and outcomes from both the SSLC and Boards of Study. The Education Committee also receives the minutes of the Boards of Study.

1.6 The Board of Study and Education Committee both report to the INTO Academic Board. The latter is chaired by the University's Academic Dean for Students or the Associate Academic Dean for Students and oversees the quality assurance, advises on academic

matter and monitors the performance of the students. Academic Board reports into the University's Taught Faculty Board, which in turn reports to Senate.

1.7 The provision is supported by the Exeter TQA manual which has been written in accordance with the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The manual comprises the process for assessment progression and awards, the Credit and Qualifications Framework, approval and revision of taught modules and programmes, and learning and teaching support.

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

1.8 The University carries out reviews of INTO provision with the most recent review carried out in February 2016. As a result of the review two actions plans were produced, an INTO College Action Plan and the University's action plan. Changes made in response to those plans include improvements to academic spaces, the introduction of a non-academic complaints procedure, revised assessment processes and better dissemination of staff development opportunities.

1.9 The TQA chapter for the Approval and Revision of Taught modules and programmes requires qualifications to be set at an appropriate FHEQ level. This chapter further subscribes to the use of external expertise to evaluate and finalise the detail of the proposed programme (for example learning, teaching and assessment methods). As part of external oversight an external assessors is expected to complete an external assessors report form. The form requires confirmation that the intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the programme and map onto any suitable reference points (for example, Subject Benchmark Statement; criteria from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies). The recent programme approval for the International Year One Mathematics with Accounting, Economics, Finance or Management programme confirms the use of an external assessor in the process and satisfactory checks of both Subject Benchmark Statement and FHEQ level. The Programme Director then responds to the comments and recommendations made by the external assessor before submission to the University as part of the approval process.

1.10 Characteristics of the awards and the requirements for academic credit for each exit award are further set out in the TQA Credit and Qualifications Framework and TQA Learning and Teaching Handbook.

1.11 The chapter for the Approval and Revision of Taught modules and programmes further includes Module Descriptor Template and Programme Specification Template. Those templates require confirmation of the level of the award and in the case of the Programme Specification, the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement Group. The Module Descriptor and Programme Specification provided were found to be consistent with those templates.

1.12 External examiners are expected to confirm that academic standards of the awards and award elements are appropriately set with reference to national subject benchmarks (where they exist) and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education/National Qualifications Framework. The external examiner report provided confirmed those standards were appropriate.

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

1.13 The maintenance of academic standards is further supported by external examiners, who are appointed by the University for all taught programmes delivered by

INTO. The external examiner must be satisfied that the assessment requirements are such as to enable students to be fairly assessed in relation to programme intended learning outcomes.

1.14 The process for Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees is set out in the TQA. A two-tier system is in place with the tier-one committee responsible for safeguarding the academic standards of the programmes and the tier-two committee responsible for overseeing that the regulations have been consistently and equitably applied. The external examiners are expected to be present and safeguard the academic standards of particular programmes at tier-one Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees.

1.15 The review team found the external examiner oral reviews to be very positive and included confirmation of the quality and standard of the work, appropriate level of study, constructive and consistent marking and a good distribution of marks. Following the Committee meeting, the external examiners submit a report. Those reports confirm that the awards meet National Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ standards. The comments made by the external examiners also clearly feed into the INTO Annual Student Experience Review, with the Centre holding the responsibility to formally respond to those comments.

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

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 Appropriate management structures, with clear reporting lines to the University, are in place which enable the Centre to effectively fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities. The Centre Director and Academic Director are members of appropriate University committees and engage regularly in deliberative and executive discussions.

2.2 The formal agreement, signed in 2006, details the responsibilities of the University and those of the Centre. Some aspects of the formal agreement, such as the need for twice yearly meetings with the University Deputy Vice Chancellor no longer apply, and paragraph 1.2 makes a recommendation in this respect. In relation to the quality of learning opportunities, both the University and the Centre share responsibility for programme development; admissions; learning resources; annual monitoring; and student complaints and appeals. First-line responsibility for the student learning experience rests with the Centre in the day-to-day operation of programmes. The Centre is responsible for all teaching, assessment matters, student engagement, and the appointment of teaching staff. The student and programme handbooks provide comprehensive information on what students may expect, listing programme aims and learning outcomes, the contents of modules, and information on the virtual learning environment (VLE), including a description of learning and teaching modes.

2.3 The Centre effectively fulfils its responsibilities for enhancing student learning opportunities by systematically reviewing the quality of provision and enacting improvements. Policies and procedures relating to students' learning opportunities are set out in the University Teaching Quality Assurance Manual, and the Centre's practice is

aligned to the relevant sections. Processes for annual review are determined by the University and evidence from Annual Student Experience Review reports and periodic reviews undertaken by the University, student surveys and feedback and meetings held by the review team confirm that the enhancement of the learning opportunities is duly considered. Recent examples of enhancement initiatives, overseen by the Education Committee, included the introduction of lecture capture facilities, and the review team noted the successful use of student ambassadors to assist in the transition from the Centre's programmes to those of the University.

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

2.4 The Centre makes full use of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities through its partnership with the University. The programmes are designed, validated and monitored according to the University quality procedures as determined in the University's Teaching Quality Manual.

2.5 There is a shared responsibility for admissions. INTO University Partnerships operates a centralised admission function on behalf of all its UK partners for prospective students. Thereafter, the Centre deals with applicants with its own trained admission staff. Entry requirements are defined by the University, with a process to reassess borderline cases. There is comprehensive information for applicants, including a complaints policy. The University's policies apply to academic appeals and student complaints. In addition, the Centre has its own complaints process to deal with non-academic issues. Complaints are reported to the University on a quarterly basis. The Student Handbook includes a clear complaints flowchart, illustrating the procedure with hyperlinks to all relevant University student policies. Programme handbooks provide information on academic appeals. Students, whom the review team met, confirm that this information is clearly signposted and indicate satisfaction with the support received from staff when issues are raised.

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

2.6 The Centre effectively manages the maintenance and enhancement of teaching and learning through various methods including review activity reports and action plans, managerial and peer observation, external examiners' reports and student feedback. The approach to teaching and learning is shared with that of the University and more recently this has been developed to better reflect the context of the Centre with a focus on the development of independent study skills and employability skills. The Centre and Academic Directors have strategic responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching, and such matters are reported in the deliberative committees as appropriate. University oversight of teaching and learning is maintained through representation in the same deliberative committee structures and via the Annual Student Experience Review cycle, which results in both programme level and Centre-level reporting, the latter is received by the University and all of which have action planning. The University also undertakes periodic reviews of the Centre. Developmental peer observation and managerial observations of teaching are in place to contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice.

2.7 A variety of effective formal and informal methods for gaining student feedback are in place. These include module and programme level student surveys, and via personal tutorials, the regular access to staff, and through the SSLC. Students, whom the review team met, reported a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching, and cited the benefits of the personal tutorial system, approachability of staff and the rapid actions taken by the Centre in response to issues raised. Current students displayed a level of confidence

regarding the prospect of their transition from the Centre to the University, and former students referred to the efforts made to ease this transition and some were presently acting as ambassadors to assist the current students in their progression experience. External examiners are appointed as for University provision, and comment positively on teaching methods, assessment types and assessment feedback. Responses to examiner reports are thorough and form part of the evidence base for the annual review cycle.

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

2.8 Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced, and new staff receive an induction, mentoring and observations of their practice during a probationary period. Staff are able to access a comprehensive suite of staff development opportunities in the form of training, workshops and away days, and are encouraged to attend external events relevant to their development and to inform their teaching. Further, the Centre is committed to support teaching staff in achieving fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, via the University's Aspire Programme as part of their personal and professional development. Oversight of staff development is monitored through appraisal and by a dedicated Committee. Reviewers saw a variety of evidence to show the active encouragement of staff development to participate, and how this was enabling the continuous enhancement of teaching practice. Teaching staff described the implementation of the wide-ranging staff development programme and how learning, teaching and assessment are encouraged for discussion across teaching teams. Of particular note was the establishment of a Research Committee to oversee and fund staff applications to attend conference, and pedagogic research projects. Teaching staff further reported how their peer observations and the Programme Pathway meetings enabled the sharing of good practice. Reviewers judged the comprehensive support and access for personal and professional staff development which contributes to the enhancement of the student learning to represent **good practice**.

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

2.9 The Centre applies a number of mechanisms to ensure that students are appropriately and effectively supported. Following a comprehensive induction, a wide range of formal and informal support mechanisms are available - including progression support, study skills, pastoral support and further support available to all students from the University's Student Service which underpins that delivered by the Centre. The recent appointment of a Learning Support Teacher has helped to ensure that students with additional support receive what is needed. The approach to personal tutorials is well developed with regular sessions to focus on academic progress. Student performance and attendance is monitored to highlight individual students whose performance may be at risk, and can trigger academic tutor intervention. The Student Handbook provides clear and detailed information on all aspects of support available to students. Students the review team met confirmed that the combination of support arrangements available to them is effective and assists both their learning and the transition to higher education. Those students that had progressed to the University considered that they were well prepared for their further studies and several were providing peer support to others.

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

2.10 Students at the Centre have access to the learning resources of the University under the same conditions as other University students, with the exception of access to the University's Career Zone. Through the programme approval procedure, the Centre ensures that learning resources are accessible and sufficient to enable students to achieve the

intended learning outcomes. This process also enables the University to be assured that appropriate provision is in place. Students are able to access the University's resources such as library, technology support, information services (including the University's VLE), and other services such as estates, sports facilities and security. The Centre has a range of facilities exclusively for their students, including a library and information technology suites with a dedicated budget for the acquisition of new learning and teaching resources. Students the review team met noted satisfaction with the access and quality of learning resources available for their studies.

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

3 Information

How effective are the Centre's arrangements for ensuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?

3.1 Information for prospective students is largely provided by INTO University Partnerships, who provide a brochure and student facing website. The Centre has limited responsibilities in respect of information about learning opportunities due to the extent of integration into the systems of the University. The Centre Director works to ensure that IUP produced content is accurate in respect of the Centre's context, and the University also approves marketing materials.

3.2 On arrival students benefit from an induction, which is extended and embedded within the tutorial programme, and receive the student handbook. Programme handbooks are also issued on commencement, and contain further academic related content, and links to applicable University policies. Programme handbooks further detail the intended learning outcomes, available also in programme specifications and on the VLE. Handbooks are checked to ensure consistency with the University standard. The VLE has programme and module specific content and details of resources. Information and guidance is further provided via tutorials, ensuring that key policies and regulations, such as those relating to plagiarism, are understood.

3.3 Information for staff is largely contained within the University TQA Manual, and within Centre specific documentation. The Academic Director sits on relevant University committees and provides updates to any regulatory changes to Centre staff via Programme Manager meetings. Students who the review team met, reported satisfaction with the accuracy and completeness of the information received prior to making an application and throughout their studies. The systems for checking the currency, accuracy and fitness for purpose of the information published by the Centre are appropriate and effective.

The review team concludes that **reliance can** be placed on the information INTO University of Exeter LLP produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms that may be used in this report.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary

Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education Centre (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.
See also **blended learning**.

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Embedded college

Colleges, often operating as part of a network, that are embedded on or near the campuses of UK higher education institutions (HEI) and that primarily provide preparatory programmes for higher education

Enhancement

The process by which higher education Centres systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education Centres in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

Good practice

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education Centre's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Operational definition

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education Centres (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all Centres are required to meet.

Reference points

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to

bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **subject benchmark statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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