



INTO University of Stirling

Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements

May 2019

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 Stirling. The review took place on 17 May 2019 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Professor Alan Jago.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partner
- make judgements on the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- make judgements about the reliability of the information that the provider 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 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us) and its mission.¹ More information about this review method can be found in the Handbook for providers.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at INTO Stirling (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 judgements about INTO Stirling.

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

Recommendations

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

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

- develop arrangements with the University to review how good practice approaches undertaken by Link Tutors can be applied consistently
- ensure students are fully informed of the external examiner system and make all external examiner reports available to students.

About INTO University of Stirling

The University of Stirling (the University) and INTO University partnerships (IUP) formed a joint venture (JV) company in 2014. The aim was to combine the internationalisation experience, resources and assets of both the University and IUP to create a study centre on the University campus. INTO Stirling (the Centre) moved into a custom-designed building on the campus in 2017.

In 2018-19, there were 241 students at the Centre on a mix of Academic English Language programmes and academic programmes. There are 15.2 full-time equivalent teaching staff.

The Centre, the University and IUP share educational responsibilities for standards and quality. The University approves the programmes and is ultimately responsible for overseeing academic standards. The Centre is responsible for setting assignments, internal moderation, assessment feedback, recruiting staff, student engagement, annual monitoring and producing programme specifications. The University is the awarding body. The Centre was reviewed by the University in February 2019. There is a written contract between the three parties.

The programmes are guided by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Quality Code for Higher Education. Marketing and information conform with the Competition and Markets Authority guidelines.

Detailed findings about INTO Stirling

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 There are effective processes for maintaining academic standards which are overseen by the INTO University of Stirling Centre and the University of Stirling. A Joint Venture (JV) company was created in 2014 between the University of Stirling and INTO University Partnerships to provide a variety of progression opportunities for international students through the provision of an INTO University of Stirling Centre (the Centre) on the University's campus. A signed agreement sets out the responsibilities of each party and details the quality assurance arrangements. Roles are shared between the University, INTO University Partnerships and the Centre in respect of the management of academic standards, with the University ultimately responsible through its responsibility for validation, academic regulation, periodic review and committee processes, and as the awarding body for all the Centre's academic programmes.

1.2 The governance and strategic management of the Centre operates through an agreed committee structure. Academic governance is maintained through the JV Board, which acts as an executive board with responsibility for the delivery of the Joint Venture Business Plan. It has senior staff representation from both the University and the Centre. The Centre Director makes an annual report to the JV Board, and the JV Board is supported by three sub-committees. The sub-committees include: an Operations Group which oversees aspects such as IT and data integration; the Marketing and Recruitment Board which considers recruitment issues; and the Academic Management Board regarding academic standards and learning opportunities. University and Centre staff are represented on these sub-committees of the JV Board, and Centre staff also attend key university committees. The JV Academic Management Board ensures the appropriateness of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy, reviews programme performance and oversees the quality framework.

1.3 The University provides the quality assurance framework and regulations within which the Centre operates and assures the setting and maintaining of threshold academic standards. All programmes are approved as University of Stirling programmes and suitable processes exist for subsequent minor amendment and major changes to programmes after approval. The Centre has responsibility for the setting of assessments, and a range of assessment and examination processes exists that are consistent with university policies and regulations. The Centre also has responsibility to produce definitive programme information, first marking and internal moderation of work, feedback to students, responding to external examiner reports, and Board of Examiners meetings. The relevant procedures are laid out in the different sections of the Quality Handbook and Assessment Regulations. Annual and periodic reviews follow a formal university process, updated for the 18-19 academic year, and are considered within the University's deliberative structures. There is shared responsibility for student complaints and academic appeals, understood by staff and students. The University supports the Centre through the provision of Link Tutors, who liaise between the Centre and University staff to provide assurance that the delivery matches current practice. The Self-Evaluation Document (SED) states that there is a variety of approaches undertaken in this role, and a need to review it for consistency. The review team considers it **desirable** that the Centre develops arrangements with the University to review how good practice approaches undertaken by Link Tutors can be applied consistently.

1.4 The collaboration between the University and the Centre provides an effective quality assurance framework that ensures academic standards are appropriately set and maintained across the academic programmes.

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

1.5 The Centre makes appropriate use of a range of external reference points. All programmes, standards and processes are mapped against the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements, and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Responsibilities for programme design, development and approval are shared by the Centre and the University, and use the University's processes, informed by the Quality Code. The University's approval procedures include the involvement of external members on panels. The Centre also makes use of University reference points, including the University's Common Marking Scheme and Quality Handbook.

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

1.6 Programme specifications give the level of the programme that is consistent with the SCQF, provide a link to Subject Benchmark Statements, and state the course learning outcomes and the approved learning, teaching and assessment methods, and weightings within each module. Summative assessments are set by Centre staff and then commented on and approved by the relevant university-appointed external examiner. First marking and internal moderation of summative assessments is undertaken by the Centre staff prior to a sample being reviewed by the external examiner. Assessment marks are considered and approved in the Boards of Examiners. External examiners produce reports which are received by the Centre via the University, are considered and responded to by the Centre's Programme Leaders, and the appropriateness of actions confirmed in the Learning and Teaching Committee, and by the JV Academic Management Board. External examiners are expected to confirm that academic standards of the awards and award elements are appropriately set for the qualification level. The external examiner reports provided confirmed that standards were appropriate. Reviewers were informed that examiner reports are shared with student representatives of the Learning and Teaching Committee but are not shared with the entire student body. The review team determined that it would be **desirable** that the Centre ensures students are fully informed of the external examiner system and to make all external examiner reports available to students.

1.7 Through its use of internal moderation and external examiners, the Centre effectively assures that academic standards are maintained.

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

2 Quality of learning opportunities

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

2.1 The JV Board has responsibility for the delivery of the JV Business Plan and receives reports from each of the sub-committees for consideration. The JV Academic Board oversees the academic standards and learning opportunities delivered by the Centre. The JV/University Management Group meets approximately fortnightly to discuss operational matters and student recruitment progress. Operational management of the partnership with the University is the responsibility of the Centre Senior Management Team (SMT) which consists of the Centre Director, the Assistant Recruitment Director, the Head of Student Services and the Quality Assurance Manager. The SMT meets weekly to manage operations and monitor performance against KPIs including: student recruitment and retention; student achievement and progression; and staff engagement.

2.2 The Centre's programmes are designed and approved by the University to support international students in both language and academic skills development.

2.3 The Centre has a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy that informs the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. The Centre recognises the opportunities and challenges in supporting international students from diverse backgrounds and there is an emphasis on small class tuition to encourage the active engagement of all students.

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

2.4 The Centre uses a range of external reference points for the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. These include the University's processes for programme design, approval and review. They also make use of the SCQF, English Language course benchmarks, external examiners and the IUP network.

2.5 The University's Link Tutors provide assurance that module and programme content delivered by the Centre reflects current practice at the University - they act as liaison for any communication and sharing of information or learning materials between the Centre and University staff. The SED identified that there was differential practice between the University's faculties in their approach to the use of Link Tutors. A Link Tutors' Forum has been established to discuss issues and good practice, and a conscious effort is being made to ensure effective and consistent use of Link Tutors.

2.6 IUP operates a centralised admissions function. There is close liaison between the admissions office at Head Office and the Centre.

2.7 The Centre uses the complaints and appeals processes of the University.

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

2.8 The Centre operates annual monitoring and review processes for all programmes. Programme Managers produce Annual Programme Monitoring reports, and the Quality Assurance Manager then produces an Annual Quality Monitoring Report. These reports are then considered by the JV Academic Management Board. They are informed by statistical information and feedback from students and staff. Student feedback is obtained through a

range of mechanisms, including module evaluation, student satisfaction surveys and the operation of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee.

2.9 The Centre Director produces an annual report that contains key statistical information on student recruitment and performance, and identifies areas which have gone well and those that require improvement. The Report is considered by the JV Board.

2.10 Currently the Centre does not receive regular systematic information about the progression of its students when they move onto the University. However, a system is currently being developed to share data. The review team consider it **desirable** that the Centre and the University work towards improving its progression data.

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

2.11 The Centre is committed to ensuring the quality of teaching is upheld. Staff are employed by the JV. A revised Approved Teacher process is to be introduced from 2019-2020. Subject teachers are required to have a degree in a relevant subject and teaching experience is desirable. New staff have an induction and undertake a probationary period; they are also required to have specific IT induction and are mentored.

2.12 The Centre is committed to continuing professional development (CPD) for its staff. There is a Staff Development Manual. Programme Managers are responsible for promoting staff development opportunities. Following the introduction of a Performance Coaching Process across the IUP network, Programme Managers engage with staff to plan and pursue professional development. It is thought that this process will offer the opportunity for a more systematic way of recording and monitoring staff development and performance. A list of CPD events has been provided. Staff can participate in the University's PG Cert in Education and are able to attend both University and IUP staff development events. The SED acknowledges that there would be benefit from a systematic review of staff CPD to ascertain commonalities, risks to the student experience and opportunities to share best practice.

2.13 There is system of regular teaching observations by management, and a peer observation system has been introduced. The former leads to a discussion on professional practice, reflection and areas for development.

2.14 Staff that the review team met were positive about the way in which they were supported and staff development opportunities that are available.

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

2.15 All students receive an Induction programme when they arrive at the Centre. Students are required to attend all sessions and scheduled classes and the Centre operates a rigorous attendance monitoring system. The Centre has mechanisms in place to identify and support students perceived to be at risk of academic failure. Support is available through weekly meetings with their Academic Advisor. During this academic session, there has been a change to the form of these meetings with more group sessions in addition to the individual ones. Academic Advisors meet regularly to discuss student issues and produce mid and end term reports. As a consequence, monitoring of student progress is both thorough and timely with support, when needed, immediately provided.

2.16 The Centre has a comprehensive in-house student support resource with a dedicated Student Support team providing a range of services including Admissions, Accommodation, Welfare and Finance. The team is managed by the Head of Student

Services. The Team works closely with University departments to ensure that students have access to University resources and appropriate services. The Student Handbook provides information on all aspects of the services available. Students who met the review team were positive about the level of support that they received.

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

2.17 Consistent with the agreement that set up the arrangement between the IUP and the University, students are given full access to University services and facilities, including the activities and services provided by the Students' Union. Students use the University virtual learning environment which is viewed very positively.

2.18 The Centre moved to a new purpose-built building in 2017, about which the students have been very positive. Its central location and prominence on the campus is symbolic of the strength of the relationship between the University and the IUP.

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

3 Information

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

3.1 IUP provides information about the Centre through a variety of media, including the corporate website, the Centre's website and brochures. The material is produced by the University's Marketing team and the IUP Marketing and Digital Content team. A recent development has been the creation of a single Content team whose aim is to reduce the potential for any inconsistency.

3.2 Many students are recruited through agents. Students that the review team met confirmed that the information the agents provided was accurate. IUP provide training for agents and their liaison between the University and IUP over the use of agents and their location.

3.3 The Student Handbook is made available to students prior to arrival. Students confirmed that it contained all the information they needed. Students are also provided with a Programme Handbook, which has comprehensive information about the individual programmes.

The review team concludes that **reliance** can be placed on the information INTO Stirling 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 provider (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 providers 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 providers 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 provider'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 providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers 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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