



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of QAHE (Ulst) Limited, June 2022

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that QAHE (Ulst) Limited (QAHE) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the June 2021 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 There are currently 4032 students enrolled on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes located on the provider's two campuses in London and Birmingham. This represents an increase of over 84% since the last review. The increase has been driven by three main factors: the introduction of two further specialisms to the MSc Business courses; the introduction of a May intake; and the increased popularity of a pre-master's route.

3 Staffing has increased from 267 to 336 - a rise of just under 26% since last year - with additional academic, administrative and student support posts being created to support the increased numbers of students, particularly in Business courses and on the Birmingham campus. Structural changes at Registry and course management-level have been made, again to support the increase in student numbers. In addition, there has been a change in the Chief Executive Officer since the last review.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 From the Annual Monitoring Return, the 14 pieces of evidence submitted and the meetings with staff and students, the reviewer concludes that QAHE is making acceptable progress in addressing the action plan arising from the previous review. The three recommendations have been addressed (paragraphs 5-7), the area of good practice continues to be developed and embedded (paragraph 8), and QAHE continues to monitor and evaluate its processes and practices, so that further enhancements can be implemented.

5 A systematic and comprehensive process for the observation of learning and teaching has been developed and begun to be implemented in response to the first recommendation. Video resources and training materials have been created to ensure that all staff understand the process and their part in this. Outcomes of the observations are recorded so that their impact can be measured and evaluated. The learning and teaching observation process has already made a positive impact in identifying support needs and addressing these. For example, additional resources and support have been introduced by the Learning and Teaching Team to enable academic staff to develop their approaches to concurrent teaching so that it is engaging and interactive for students who are accessing learning in the classroom and for those who are doing so remotely.

6 With regard to the second recommendation, QAHE has developed its Student Engagement Strategy to ensure that student representatives understand their role and are

supported to fulfil it effectively. The strategy clarifies how QAHE listens to and responds to student feedback and outlines its plans to enhance mechanisms to hear the student voice and to include students more formally in course design activities. Video training materials have been developed to enable students to understand the role of their representatives. While it is too early to evaluate the full impact of the strategy, students confirmed that they were informed about how to elect their student representatives and that processes had been implemented to facilitate communication with them. The Staff Student Consultative Committee is the formal mechanism for hearing student feedback and meets once every semester. Students also provide feedback through the module evaluation process. New students complete a learning experience evaluation that checks that they are making an effective transition to their courses and know how to access the support available to them. Students provided examples of how their feedback had been acted upon and were satisfied that, when action was not feasible, QAHE explained the reasons for this.

7 In response to the third recommendation, QAHE has developed and is piloting an Internship Organisational Supervisor Handbook to ensure that employer-based supervisors are formally trained and supported. The handbook sets out the roles of those supporting internship students and provides a schedule that sets out the expectations at each stage of the placement, including a timetable for formative and summative assessment. The handbook outlines the role of the Internship Academic Supervisor and how this supports consistency of assessment and compliance with the internship module's performance and assessment criteria. The handbook provides a comprehensive outline of the assessment process, including guidance for employer-based staff to use assessment criteria effectively and to set appropriate objectives and measurable targets for individual students. Staff confirmed that it had been well-received by employers who find the clarity it provides as helpful.

8 QAHE continues to enhance the area of good practice identified in the last review. Its monitoring and evaluation processes identify areas where provision can be further enhanced. For example, induction for incoming students was reviewed in December 2021 using feedback from academic staff and recently-enrolled students. This process identified areas where improvements could be made in connection with students' use of the virtual learning environment, and with library and online learning resources. Induction was restructured and more online support was provided pre-enrolment as a result of these findings. Students confirmed that their learning experiences had been well-supported by the induction process and were satisfied that they could access appropriate learning resources.

9 Students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the services provided by the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team. In addition to supporting students' pre-enrolment and at induction with a range of video materials, the ACE team has recently developed a suite of online workshops which offer students a range of academic study skills, including digital literacy, that can be accessed at any point during their studies. A recent development is the online facility for students to book individual support sessions with the ACE team. The ACE team works closely with academic and marketing teams to ensure that all students and staff are aware of the support it provides. The team is proactive in seeking feedback on its provision and is currently developing a process for gaining student feedback on its tutorial support.

10 QAHE's evaluation processes have led to enhancements being made in its pastoral support for students. For example, additional staffing has been allocated to the student welfare team so that more specialist support is available to those disclosing health and wellbeing issues. QAHE has also identified the need to enhance its support for students and their families who are seeking accommodation during their studies.

11 Evaluation processes, together with changes and additional staffing in Registry, have led to key areas of focus for the Registry team, including the enhancement of examination board procedures and the development of a more effective attendance monitoring process.

12 In the period between 2018-19 and 2020-21, student numbers increased year-on-year from 530 in 2018 to 782 in 2019 (a rise of 47%); and from 782 to 2259 in 2020 (a further rise of 188%). QAHE's retention data reflects its high level of support for students. Retention rates have improved steadily since 2018-19 when retention was 75% (399 out of 530 students). In 2019-20, retention improved to 83% (647 out of 782 students). The most recent data for 2020-21 demonstrates further improvement in retention to 87% (1977 out of 2259).

13 QAHE's overall pass rates decreased slightly from 67% in 2018-19 to just under 63% in 2019-20. Data for 2020-21 entry is not yet available because programmes do not end until 2022. The annual monitoring process enables module performance to be analysed and, where appropriate, actions put in place. Recent evaluation identified that students performed comparatively poorly in modules which required quantitative data analysis skills. As a result, additional materials, support and formative assessment opportunities were introduced and these have contributed towards improved pass rates on the MSc International Business programmes from 87.5% (56 out of 64 students) in 2018-19 to 94% in 2019-20 (65 out of 69 students).

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

14 Ulster University is responsible for the academic standards of its awards but QAHE has delegated responsibility for some aspects of provision. There is evidence of QAHE's use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (UKQC) in the admissions and assessment processes.

15 QAHE is a member of Advance HE and Independent Higher Education (IHE), both of which provide opportunities to engage with the wider higher education sector and to keep up-to-date with regulatory changes and best professional practice. Membership of the IHE provides access to professional networks and enables QAHE to keep abreast of developments across the higher education sector. This was particularly useful during the pandemic.

16 Further evidence of engagement with external reference points is found in the use of the requirements of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) to inform the development of the undergraduate Accounting with Management programme which enables students to gain exemptions from professional body examinations.

Background to the monitoring visit

17 The monitoring visit 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 review. 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 visit or review.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Lynn Fulford, Reviewer, and Mrs Nadine Baker, QAA Officer, on 7 June 2022.

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