



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of QAHE (Ulst) Limited

June 2021

Contents

About this review	1
The impact of COVID-19	1
Key findings.....	2
Judgements.....	2
Good practice.....	2
Recommendations	2
Financial sustainability, management and governance	2
About the provider	3
Explanation of findings	5
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.....	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities	13
Glossary	26

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at QAHE (Ulst) Limited. The review took place from 1 to 4 June 2021 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Sally Dixon
- Dr Richard Samuels
- Professor Denis Wright.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK Expectations. These Expectations (and the associated Core and Common practices) are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)² and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).³ For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the monitoring visit was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review

Key findings

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The proactive and highly-effective development of structures to support students with their learning and welfare that is based on a thorough understanding of the needs of students and which is reflected in improved retention rates and positive feedback from students. (Core practice Q4)

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By January 2022:

- Introduce a systematic approach to observations of teaching and learning (Core practice Q3).
- Develop a strategy for student engagement that makes clear the role of students as representatives, and the support they can expect to help them to fulfil their role (Core practice Q5).
- Ensure employer-based supervisors for internships are formally trained and supported to carry out their assessment role within the Level 7 Advanced Practice Module (Core practice Q8).

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

About the provider

QA Higher Education (QAHE) is part of a wider QA group. QA's origins go back to 1985 and it is a large UK provider of professional training and development solutions across a wide variety of digital and computing technologies. The QA group has a substantial portfolio of courses related to project and business management. At the time of the review, QAHE - of which QAHE (Ulst) Limited forms a part - had approximately 10,000 students.

QAHE offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in conjunction with its university partners, as well as a number of degree apprenticeships. This review considers only the higher education provision delivered with its partner Ulster University. The official legal entity for the partnership is known as QAHE (Ulst) Limited (QAHE(Ulst)).

As part of its vision statement, QAHE states that 'it passionately believes (in) the power of education to transform people's lives.' Other key aspects of the vision include strongly encouraging greater participation in higher education, partnership working, the delivery of academically accessible courses that focus on student needs, and developing the employability of its graduates.

The partnership with Ulster University was established in 2011 and is delivered through two campuses - one in London and one in Birmingham. Over time, QAHE(Ulst) has increased the provision of Ulster University courses in terms of student numbers and intakes. 19 programmes are offered under the partnership arrangement. All 19 are offered at the London campus and 15 at the Birmingham site. Two of the programmes are undergraduate and the remainder postgraduate. The undergraduate programmes consist of a BSc (Hons) in Computing Systems and a BSc (Hons) Accounting with Management. The postgraduate programmes are all related to Business and Management subjects.

The total number of students on QAHE(Ulst) programmes is 2,209. Undergraduate students total 195 and postgraduate 2,014. All students are full-time. All undergraduates are London based. Birmingham has 605 postgraduate and London 1,409. The total number of academic staff is 98. Some of these staff (20) also have leadership roles such as course director. Most academic staff are full-time (76%). Programme administrative support is provided by QAHE and functions such as human resources and finance are provided centrally by the QA group. The programmes are also supported by freelance teaching staff (not included in the above numbers).

There have been a significant number of changes introduced since the 2016 Higher Education Review. These have arisen predominantly to support the significant growth in student numbers and expansion in the portfolio of courses offered. The governance structure has been enhanced with the addition of an Academic Council, promotions have been made to expand the course management team, new appointments have been made to the senior team with two new Deputy Associate Deans for the Ulster University provision. A retention coach has been appointed as a new role to help students identified as 'at risk'. QAHE's Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team has introduced a range of initiatives to support students with an increase in online support for academic skills development, maths and computing. This has occurred not only in response to the pandemic restrictions but more generally.

Key challenges faced in the future include continuing to manage the implications of growth and expansion, and the impact this has on ensuring consistency of experience for both students and staff. The transition out of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions is also going to be a significant influencing factor.

Since the Higher Education Review of 2016, QAHE(Ulst) has had consistently satisfactory monitoring outcomes, being assessed as making acceptable progress in every year since 2017. The provider has responded to the recommendations made in 2016 and has continued to make effective use of its internal quality assurance framework to make improvements.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

Core practice (S1): The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.

Findings

1.1 QAHE(Ulst) provides taught awards in franchise partnerships, including with the University of Ulster (the University). All undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are linked with the University's Business School (UUBS) with the exception of the BSc (Hons) Computing Systems, which is linked with the School of Computing in the University's Computing, Engineering and Built Environment Faculty (CEBE). The University retains overall responsibility for setting the academic standards of awards according to the principles described in its Programme Approval Management and Review Handbook, which align with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), degree characteristics, national subject benchmark and the requirements of relevant external professional bodies.

1.2 QAHE(Ulst) has delegated responsibility for some aspects of the provision. QAHE(Ulst) staff contribute to maintaining qualification standards at programme validation and revalidation, and through delivery of the University's programmes, and QAHE(Ulst) staff are represented on the University's partnership committees. The University Partnership and Programme Approval Management and Review Handbooks provide guidance for QAHE(Ulst) staff on quality assurance arrangements, thus helping to ensure that threshold standards are consistent with the FHEQ. The processes and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met.

1.3 To test the Core practice, the review team considered a range of internal documentation, including policies related to the design of programmes and assessments, programme validation and revalidation reports, committee minutes, external examiner reports, and reports on key performance indicators (KPI) to confirm that threshold standards are consistent with national qualifications frameworks. The team also held discussions with a range of staff at QAHE(Ulst) and a member of the University's senior staff associated with the partnership to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice.

1.4 The Provost and Executive Dean is the academic head of QAHE(Ulst) and manages the relationship with QAHE(Ulst) partner institutions. The Senior Dean of Faculty (Business) (Senior Dean) has responsibility for much of the day-to-day faculty management, and for planning and oversight of academic delivery, including assuring that the programmes meet the requirements of the partner university with regard to maintaining threshold standards. The Provost and Executive Dean has indirect oversight of the BSc (Hons) Computing Systems programme through the governance committee structure (paragraph 1.6).

1.5 The Senior Management Team (SMT) is chaired by the QAHE(Ulst) Chief Executive and includes the Provost and Executive Dean, and Senior Dean. The SMT, which met weekly prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, now meets on an almost daily basis. The

review team found there were clear and effective reporting lines between SMT, Course Management Teams and the Associate Dean (Business) through the Provost and Executive Dean, and the Senior Dean. The Senior Dean chairs weekly Associate Dean/Head of Department QAHE(Ulst) Business Faculty meetings.

1.6 QAHE(Ulst) enhanced its governance structure through the establishment of an Academic Council (June 2020) to provide oversight of all programmes delivered by QAHE for external partners. Academic Council, chaired by the Provost and Executive Dean, meets at least three times each year and has two sub-committees: Learning and Teaching (LTC) and Performance Evaluation (PEC). Academic Council is responsible for overseeing development and implementation of QAHE's academic strategy and has delegated responsibility for the design, development and validation of academic programmes, including arrangement for assessments, and is thus responsible for the oversight of threshold standards. Minutes of Academic Council meetings are received by SMT, the University's Affiliate College Executive Board (ACEB) and UUBS QAHE(Ulst) Department Board. The review team concludes from documentation examined and meetings with staff, that the governance structures in place ensure threshold standards of QAHE(Ulst) programmes align with FHEQ.

1.7 Partnership Reports - which the review team found to include comprehensive data on student retention, progression and completion, and module and course performance, together with student feedback and actions plans - are produced for the Business and Computing programmes by their respective Associate Deans. Partnership Reports are received by Academic Council, with components of the reports going to SMT, which enables QAHE to compare the performance of programmes it delivers across the partnerships and to monitor and maintain quality and standards.

1.8 The ACEB, chaired by the Associate Dean Education (UUBS) is responsible for maintaining the University's strategic oversight of awards delivered by QAHE(Ulst) and its membership includes senior staff from both the University and QAHE, including the Provost and Executive Dean, Senior Dean, Associate Dean (Business) and the Director of Quality Assurance. The review team found, from documentation examined and meetings with staff, that ACEB reviews key performance indicators (KPI), including applications, enrolments, retention, progression and achievement; student satisfaction and complaints; graduate employment. The Associate Dean (Computing), who is the Course Co-ordinator BSc Computing Systems, reports to the University's Computing Course Committee and any actions or issues are raised at ACEB by the Associate Dean Global (CEBE).

1.9 The QAHE(Ulst) Department Board (Business), chaired by the University Head of Partnerships (Business), reports to the UUBS Department Board and its membership includes academic staff from QAHE, including the Senior Dean, Associate Dean, Director of Quality Assurance and the Course Co-ordinators. The University's QAHE(Ulst) Department Board liaises with and receives reports from QAHE, and reviews, advises and makes recommendations to the UUBS Board on quality assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching, planning, design, approval and periodic review of QAHE(Ulst) courses, thus ensuring that threshold standards are maintained in alignment with the FHEQ.

1.10 QAHE(Ulst)'s academic staff make a substantial contribution to both the validation and revalidation process, which includes the responsibility for ensuring programmes are designed to meet the threshold standards as set in the FHEQ. QAHE(Ulst) academic staff are responsible for producing an evaluation document, which includes programme specifications with programme learning outcomes, module descriptors with module learning outcomes and University regulations, and which also include course and module handbooks. This is followed up at a validation/revalidation event where QAHE(Ulst) staff are questioned on policies and procedures, their understanding of the curriculum and how it facilitates

academic progression by a university panel which includes external specialists and a student representative from QAHE. Student views are taken into account at course revalidation.

1.11 Assessment and student performance is considered through moderation forms, course committees and through the reports to PEC, Academic Council, and the University's QAHE(Ulst) Department Board and ACEB. PEC produces a compiled report on student retention and performance each semester, taking into account institutional and partner university benchmarks and expectations, which informs decisions to better support student needs.

1.12 External examiners are appointed by the University for each programme and their annual reports include the comparability of programme standards with those at other institutions and with national subject benchmarks and qualification frameworks. QAHE's Quality Assurance Team maintain an overview of external examiner reports, and any issues are referred to the relevant Course Co-ordinator and Associate Dean for action. External examiner reports seen by the review team affirmed alignment of QAHE(Ulst) programmes with national qualification frameworks.

1.13 The review team found QAHE(Ulst) has effective structures and procedures that ensure the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the FHEQ. The knowledge and understanding of threshold standards is maintained at institutional level and disseminated to teaching staff. The review team concludes that the Core practice is met and that the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S2): The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

Findings

1.14 The University is responsible for setting course assessments that measure the extent to which students achieve learning outcomes beyond the threshold level. Responsibility for assessment is shared with QAHE. The University determines through its course design, development and validation/revalidation process that student achievement is comparable with those of other UK providers. QAHE(Ulst) staff can contribute to course planning and are involved in course validation/revalidation.

1.15 External subject specialists on validation/revalidation panels and external examiners, who are appointed for each programme, are all consulted on the appropriateness of standards and that opportunities are provided to enable the achievement of standard beyond the threshold level.

1.16 The processes and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met. To test the Core practice, the review team considered a range of documentation on course design, approval and revalidation, assessment design, marking, moderation, student performance and committee minutes, and held discussions with a range of staff and students at QAHE(Ulst) and a member of the University's senior staff associated with the partnership to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice.

1.17 The review team found there is a rigorous process of course planning, validation and revalidation with the active involvement of QAHE. For university programmes to be delivered at QAHE(Ulst), academic staff are responsible for producing an evaluation document that includes the Programme Specification with programme learning outcomes and module descriptors with module learning outcomes, the assessment strategy and assessment criteria.

1.18 The University's assessment strategy links effective assessment directly to programme learning outcomes. In the Programme Specification, each module is mapped to learning outcomes. The validation and revalidation documentation also map modules to assessment type and schedule. Each course and module has a detailed handbook that outlines learning outcomes, assessment requirements, module content and required reading.

1.19 QAHE's Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team has produced accessible resources for students on Level expectations. Students are introduced to the concept of the level of the qualification they are studying for at induction and reinduction, and what is needed to do well at each level and achieve standards beyond the threshold level. External examiner reports confirm that qualifications provide the opportunity for students to achieve standards beyond the threshold level.

1.20 The review team found there is close monitoring by QAHE(Ulst) of student academic performance, which feeds into academic team planning and actions (evaluated weekly). Student performance and achievement is considered at the University's ACEB and QAHE(Ulst) Department Board and at QAHE(Ulst) course committees, PEC and Academic Council (see Core practice S1).

1.21 The review team concludes that QAHE(Ulst) engages with processes that ensure students have the opportunity to achieve course learning outcomes that are above the threshold level and consistent with the requirements of national qualification frameworks, and that the Core practice is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S3): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

Findings

1.22 The University is responsible for academic standards of all credit and qualifications granted in its name and has processes and procedures that provide oversight of courses delivered by QAHE(Ulst). The University's processes and procedures adhered to by QAHE(Ulst) would allow the Core practice to be met.

1.23 To test the Core practice the review team considered a range of evidence provided, including external examiner reports, policies and procedures related to staff development, Partnership Reports and documentation for internship providers. The team also held discussions with a range of staff at QAHE(Ulst) and a member of the University's senior staff associated with the partnership to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice.

1.24 All teaching staff are approved through the University's Recognised Teacher Nomination process and approval is sought every time a member of staff, new or existing, intends teaching or supervising a module or element. The review team found there is a comprehensive induction process for new teaching staff, which includes the performance standards required, programme and module handbooks, roles and responsibilities, university rules and regulations, teaching materials, and assessment and feedback. Line managers ensure that new staff are ready to teach (see Core practice Q3).

1.25 QAHE(Ulst) teaching staff use the University's teaching materials and virtual learning environment (VLE), although staff are permitted to contextualise the material for local conditions following liaison with their module counterparts at the University. The review team found these arrangements enable a consistency of approach, thus ensuring that the standards of awards are credible and secure, irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

1.26 QAHE(Ulst) use the same assessments as the University. QAHE(Ulst) teaching staff are responsible for first marking of student work and for providing feedback to students. The review team found QAHE(Ulst) has a well-defined internal marking moderation process, after which the University Module Coordinator conducts a second moderation process and assessments are then sent to external examiners for review. QAHE(Ulst) staff attend and present at University Examination Boards, where external examiners sign off all awards issued. Marks are not ratified at the Examination Board until this process has been completed.

1.27 External examiner reports are reviewed by the QAHE Director of Quality Assurance and, where necessary, the Associate Dean and relevant Course Co-ordinator are informed of issues requiring attention; actions taken being reported at the Course Committee. The review team was provided with examples of where external examiner comments had resulted in a significant change. For example, a Management and Research Methods module was moved to a later point in the programme, enabling it to be more closely aligned with the project work to which it is related.

1.28 The University's Head of Partnership, Business and the equivalent member of staff for Computing attend QAHE(Ulst) Course Committee for Business or Computing programmes as appropriate to ensure consistency of standards between QAHE's London and Birmingham campuses and the main university campus.

1.29 Planning days are held at the University, which allow the sharing of best practice on module content and assessment grading. Joint university and QAHE(Ulst) staff development events are also held (see Core Practice Q3).

1.30 The review team found QAHE(Ulst) staff understand the requirements for delivery and assessment of programmes approved by the University and concludes that effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the standards of the University's awards are credible and secure and that the Core practice is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S4): The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

Findings

1.31 The University makes use of external, independent expertise at key stages of developing and approving new programmes, monitoring and review and assuring the academic standards of its awards. QAHE(Ulst) adheres to the University's Assessment Strategy processes and procedures for the delivery of its courses, which are available in the University's Assessment Handbook.

1.32 The University's processes and procedures followed by QAHE(Ulst) would allow the Core practice to be met. To test the Core practice the review team considered a range of documentation including external examiner reports, validation and revalidation reports, and held meetings with a range of staff and students at QAHE(Ulst) and a member of the University's senior staff associated with the partnership to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice. The review team also received a demonstration on QAHE's online portal and VLE.

1.33 Two external higher education specialists are included on course validation and revalidation panels and external subject specialists are appointed as course external examiners for courses delivered by QAHE(Ulst) to provide independent confirmation that the University's assessment and classification processes and procedures have been applied appropriately, and qualifications have been awarded reliably, fairly and transparently.

1.34 External examiner reports on courses delivered by QAHE(Ulst) are forwarded to the QAHE Director of Quality Assurance, who determines whether there is an issue which requires forwarding to the relevant Course Co-ordinator and Associate Dean. Course Co-ordinators are required to take any necessary action and report to the Course Committee. The review team learned that student representatives on course committees have the opportunity to consider the external examiners' comments.

1.35 The British Accreditation Council (BAC) conducted an interim inspection and reaccredited QAHE's provision in June 2020. BAC reported a number of strengths, including the close working relationship with partner universities that ensures the student experience matches that of their students, and the commitment to constant improvement to ensure students have access to up-to-date learning resources. BAC identified two required actions and two recommended areas for improvement that have been or are being addressed.

1.36 The review team found that information on the University's assessment processes and procedures was provided to QAHE(Ulst) staff and students at their inductions and is fully accessible in course, module and other documentation (see Core practice S2), including through QAHE's online portal and VLE.

1.37 The review team concludes that the use of external expertise, assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent and that the Core practice is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Common practice (Standards 1): The provider reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

1.38 The University conducts programme monitoring through its Programme Management System, where responsibility for its partnership programme review lies with QAHE(Ulst) course committees. Course committees consider KPIs such as student retention, progression and achievement, as well as module and overall performance, external examiner reports, student feedback, and NSS and Graduate Outcomes. The programme monitoring system in place would allow the Common practice to be met.

1.39 To test the Common practice, the review team considered a range of documentation, including minutes of course committees, Partnership Reports and monitoring reports. Meetings were held with a range of staff at QAHE(Ulst) and a member of the University's senior staff associated with the partnership to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice.

1.40 QAHE(Ulst) course committees for each course are held every semester at QAHE's London campus. Membership includes the University Head of Partnerships (Business or equivalent for Computing), the Director of Quality Assurance, academic staff from both the London and Birmingham campuses, heads of relevant departments and student representatives. The minutes of QAHE(Ulst) course committees are sent to the University Course Committee. The review team found these meetings provide an opportunity to reflect on the level of achievement with regard to the Core practices related to standards, to identify areas for improvement and determine actions to address these.

1.41 QAHE(Ulst) introduced semester monitoring reports in 2016 - which included course statistics, individual module reviews and action plans to drive improvement, and enhancement of standards through identification of good practice - for all university programmes to help identify good practice internally. Partnership Reports were introduced in October 2020 for Business and Computing to replace individual course monitoring reports.

1.42 QAHE(Ulst) also reflects on academic standards through PEC (see Core practice S1), which produces compiled reports to help identify trends in performance across all QAHE(Ulst) programmes in order to make more informed decisions on adjusting support or delivery strategies to better meet students' needs. An example provided to the review team of a change made in response to such data is the introduction of an extended induction course for business studies students without prior experience of business.

1.43 The review team concludes that the programme monitoring and review system in place uses outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement of the provision.

Common practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.44 In reaching its conclusion the review team matched its findings against the Core practices set out in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.45 The provider has effective structures and procedures that ensure the threshold level of the academic standards is maintained at institutional level and understood by teaching staff. QAHE(Ulst) engages with processes that ensure students have the opportunity to achieve course learning outcomes that are above the threshold level and consistent with the requirements of national qualification frameworks. Staff understand the requirements for delivery and assessment of programmes approved by the awarding university and that effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the standards of awards are credible and secure. External expertise is used and assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent. Programme monitoring and review systems in place use outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement of the provision

1.46 The team established that all four of the Core practices are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas.

1.47 No recommendations, affirmations or instances of good practice are identified under this judgement area.

1.48 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Core practice (Q1): The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

Findings

2.1 As outlined in the Partnerships Handbook, the awarding body takes responsibility for overseeing admissions systems. QAHE(Ulst) is responsible for processing applications in accordance with an Admissions Policy Framework that is modelled on the University's admissions policy. The policy is publicly available on the QAHE(Ulst) website, outlining the process of application, staff training requirements and the setting of entry requirements. As part of the application process, QAHE(Ulst) offers students the opportunity to complete approved internal tests in English and will hold interviews for those students looking to receive recognition for prior learning or work experience that is not a standard entry requirement. The University is responsible for the setting of entry requirements and receiving referrals for final decision-making on those cases that fall outside of the stated entry requirements. The University monitors student admissions and performance rates and periodically reviews entry requirements which provides QAHE(Ulst) with an opportunity to request changes. The University audits QAHE(Ulst) periodically to ensure it is satisfied that this process is being followed, and that the university entry criteria are being applied accurately and consistently at all times. The application process is owned by QAHE's Head of Admissions. If dissatisfied with any parts of the application process, a complaints process is outlined in the Admissions Policy and accessible on the website.

2.2 QAHE(Ulst) is responsible for student recruitment. A website has been developed in partnership with the University to promote programmes across the branch campuses. Information is available to prospective students on the website, including course overview, fees, entry requirements and the application process for students who choose to apply direct. The review team found the information to be accessible and fit-for-purpose. In addition to recruiting students directly, QAHE(Ulst) use a network of agents which are contracted to QAHE. To ensure reliable admissions practices across its network of agents, responsibilities are outlined in an Agent Policy. Agent training is provided by QAHE(Ulst) and they monitor student performance patterns from across the agent network.

2.3 The policies and process outlined would allow the Core practice to be met. The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions procedures by analysing published documentation, including website information. The team also held meetings with senior managers, teaching and support staff, and with students.

2.4 The review team found that the admissions processes work effectively. Staff met by the review team were knowledgeable and demonstrated sound understanding of the admissions process. Students who met the review team, stated that they had received sufficient information to make an appropriate decision on whether to study at QAHE. The application process operated smoothly for the students with a new application management system introduced by QAHE(Ulst) to reduce the danger of data entry errors. Those students who had applied through an agency believed that the agencies were effective in supporting them through the application process. The students also highlighted the use of interviews and internal entry exams for those whose qualifications fell outside the stated English language entry requirements.

2.5 QAHE(Ulst) was also found to be serving the needs of a diverse range of students by focusing on widening access to higher education. As well as providing flexible delivery

models such as weekend teaching, QAHE(Ulst) offers financial incentives such as scholarships to those students facing financial barriers to study. Some students stressed the importance of financial incentives when choosing QAHE(Ulst).

2.6 The review team additionally found that the selection criteria is set appropriately for students to succeed academically, which is important for an institution that is recruiting students from across a wide range of backgrounds - many of whom are mature and without a background in tertiary education. QAHE(Ulst) has acknowledged historic challenges in attainment and retention, also evident in previous external examiner reports. Nevertheless, from 2017-20, overall pass rates and rates of withdrawal have significantly improved which shows that the process of setting and reviewing entry requirements is working satisfactorily.

2.7 Based on documentary analysis and meetings with students, managers and staff, the review team concludes that students joining QAHE(Ulst) have been well informed and selected as having the potential to complete their courses. QAHE(Ulst) has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system and the Core practice is therefore met and any associated risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q2): The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

Findings

2.8 The University holds the responsibility for the design and approval of the programmes QAHE(Ulst) delivers at its London and Birmingham campuses, with QAHE(Ulst) staff having input into course and module-level design and development through working collaboratively with their university counterparts.

2.9 The University has formal programme validation and revalidation processes, set out in its Programme Approval Management and Review Handbook, which ensures that academic standards are at the appropriate level and in accordance with their academic frameworks and regulations. In preparation for programme validation and revalidation, QAHE(Ulst) staff are responsible for producing an evaluation document which includes programme specifications, module descriptors and programme regulations, and information on staffing, learning resources and student engagement (see Core practice S1). Programme revalidation generally occurs at five-year intervals at the same time as the equivalent university programme.

2.10 The University's processes and procedures followed by QAHE(Ulst) would allow the Core practice to be met. To test the Core practice, the review team considered a range of documentation and held meetings with staff and students at QAHE(Ulst) and a member of the University's senior staff associated with the partnership to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice.

2.11 The University has comprehensive validation/revalidation processes which the review team found had substantial input from QAHE(Ulst) staff (see Core Practice S1). Suggestions for course and module developments are considered at planning days, through module moderation forms, and at course committees and QAHE(Ulst) Department Board. Examples provided to the review team were: Advanced Practice, Human Resources Management, Data Analytics and Cyber Security modules, which were developed in partnership with QAHE(Ulst) staff and informed by QAHE's international marketing and recruitment.

2.12 The review team found the quality of delivery is maintained in a number of ways, including joint planning days at course level held prior to the start of each academic year, which are attended by QAHE(Ulst) and University Course Directors and Module Coordinators, the Associate Dean, (Business) and the University Head of Partnership (Business).

2.13 The QAHE Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), chaired by the Dean of Learning and Teaching, advises Academic Council on the enhancement of learning opportunities and monitors the development, implementation and effectiveness of enhancements to learning and teaching, including on technology, staff development and digital delivery, and through its sub-committees, assessment, content and feedback, and equality, diversity and employability. The LTC provides an organisational forum that can focus on learning and teaching across the organisation ensuring that there is a strong underpinning of practice at all levels of QAHE.

2.14 Standardisation meetings are held at QAHE(Ulst) at course and modular level, where Module Coordinators ensure that all of the teaching team are clear on plans for delivery, expectations of module outcomes and assessment requirements. QAHE(Ulst) Course Co-ordinators also hold meetings with teaching teams at regular intervals throughout the semester. Course Management Teams meet weekly to consider all aspects in relation to the student journey and student experience. Feedback from students is obtained by various means - including virtual drop-in sessions for students, Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs), focus groups and end-of-semester surveys for all students - and is used to help maintain quality and standards. Student survey data seen by the review team was very positive about the high quality of learning and teaching at QAHE; a view also reflected by the student submission video and students who met the team.

2.15 Most of the assessments on QAHE(Ulst) programmes are of an applied nature and the knowledge and skills acquired are beneficial to students entering employment. The review team learned that many QAHE(Ulst) teaching staff are from a professional background and able to impart much of their work-based experience to the students. Many modules also utilise industry and live-based case studies. Some courses offer work placements or internships and QAHE(Ulst) has a dedicated Internships, Placement and Employer Engagement team.

2.16 The review team concludes that the programme design and delivery processes and procedures followed ensure the delivery of high-quality courses and the Core practice is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q3): The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.17 QAHE(Ulst) ensures that staff members are appropriately qualified to deliver programmes at the associated academic level. The awarding body formally recognises staff through a Recognised Teacher process. The process involves QAHE(Ulst) appointing staff but they have to be approved by the University of Ulster before they can teach on university programmes. This ensures that there is consistency between the qualifications and skills of those employed by the University and by QAHE. The appropriate level of qualification and skills of staff is considered by the University of Ulster at approval for delivery of awards.

QAHE(Ulst) has in place a staff development policy, induction for new staff and an annual review of all teaching staff. These procedures and systems provide a support framework for staff which should allow the Core practice to be met.

2.18 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining minutes of meetings, policies and staff development activity. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, and a representative of the University to confirm that staff understand the requirements of the Core practice.

2.19 The University of Ulster reviews and approves staffing resources at validation. The appointment of all teaching staff is formally approved by the awarding body through the Recognised Teacher Process. New staff are supported through an induction and buddy system. The Course Director inducts new members of staff in the University of Ulster's procedures. The Staff Development Policy outlines how new staff are supported and how staff can gain access to professional development and conference attendance. There is a learning and teaching handbook, updated annually, which provides information for teaching staff about how QAHE manages teaching and learning across the institution. Staff at QAHE(Ulst) are provided with a number of training and development opportunities which are scheduled across the calendar year. An online skills audit was conducted with the academic team focusing on the range of staff skills required to successfully deliver face-to-face and live online.

2.20 There are three different kinds of teaching observation carried out at QAHE. Managers' observations are carried out each academic year. Peer observations and those conducted by the Learning and Teaching Faculty also form part of the opportunity for teaching staff to receive feedback. Observations are fed into the Learning and Teaching Faculty to influence further support and the planning of staff training and development. The standard practice is for new staff to have a management observation within six weeks. Senior staff confirmed that, more recently, management observations had been continued through remote delivery due to the pandemic. There is no overarching document that details the purpose and approach to the various forms of observation being used. In meetings held with staff and managers, the review team experienced a lack of clarity regarding explanations given about the different types of teaching observation and this has the potential to be reflected in the implementation. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that QAHE(Ulst) introduces a systematic approach to observations of teaching and learning.

2.21 The review team concluded that the provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q4): The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.22 The QA Board agrees the annual budgets for each of the four business divisions within QA and provides executive and governance responsibilities for human resources, physical resources, financial status and IT. The team considered documents relating to internal provision and space, library provision, remote learning and IT, staff expertise and development, peer reviews, handbooks, classroom technologies and support structures and interviews with students and staff. The arrangements in place would allow the Core practice

to be met.

2.23 The review team evaluated the arrangements in place through scrutinising minutes of meetings, student guidance information and programme specifications, and through discussions with a range of staff and students.

2.24 The learning resources are housed in accommodation with lecture and seminar space, library provision and personal space for teaching and learning. QAHE's libraries at the London and Birmingham campuses provide essential learning resources, enhanced study space, IT facilities and research support to students and staff. Students met by the review team found the teaching accommodation to be meeting their needs.

2.25 QAHE has a number of teams that provide mental health support including the welfare team and ACE team that have provided support in the evening and over holiday periods for students who were isolated due to the pandemic. In addition, QAHE(Ulst) has a number of roles to support students to achieve including a Studies Advisor and Retention Coach.

2.26 The Welfare and Compliance team has continued to offer support in a variety of ways. These include one-to-one welfare appointments, counselling sessions, compliance attendance meetings, student relations activities and events. The services have been extended to provide out of hours service during the pandemic and students met by the team indicated this support has been well received and appreciated by students.

2.27 COVID-19 related restrictions have created both challenges and opportunities for the QAHE library. Not all resources, namely textbooks, could have been made available to students in an electronic format. The library has put in place a click-and-collect system and also allow students to return books through a freepost system. Due to the pandemic, there was a greater focus on the purchase of e-books. In addition, the library introduced a new website to meet the needs of students mainly working from home. Students informed the review team that they were satisfied with the library service offered and appreciated the steps taken to adapt the service during the pandemic restrictions.

2.28 The ACE team (QAHE's learner support team) offers extensive support to learners including study and language skills, understanding assessments, referencing and personal confidence. The team can also offer specialist support for IT and maths skills development. Student feedback on the ACE online workshops shows a high level of student satisfaction.

2.29 The University of Ulster review student support at validation and revalidation. University of Ulster commended QAHE(Ulst) on the 'positive engagement with and comments from students about their overall experience and high-level support provided, in particular by the ACE Team'.

2.30 The review team recognised the proactive and highly effective development of structures to support students with their learning and welfare that is based on a thorough understanding of the needs of students, which is reflected in improved retention rates and positive feedback from students, as **good practice**.

2.31 The review team concluded that the provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience and that the Core practice is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q5): The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.32 QAHE(Ulst) is responsible for student engagement in their learning experience with the Quality Assurance Team required to ensure that students engage at an individual and collective level. At an individual level, students provide feedback through a range of mechanisms including the end-of-module surveys and end-of-course National Student Survey (NSS). End-of-module surveys are processed internally by management with feedback scores generated across each of the modules. NSS data in contrast is fed directly into the University's Departmental Board for processing.

2.33 At a collective level, each cohort is represented by a student who is selected by other students. The Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) is the main student-facing committee and is designed to provide a direct channel of communication on matters that interest students. The role of representatives and the SSCC is summarised in the student handbook that students receive on their arrival. The minutes of the SSCC are available to students on the VLE, with actions published through a 'You Said - We Did' mechanism. Minutes of the SSCC feed into the Course Management Teams meetings chaired by the Associate Dean. Student membership is also highlighted in the terms of reference of academic committees, including the Teaching and Learning Committee, Course Committee and Academic Council. The arrangements in place would enable the Core practice to be met.

2.34 The review team examined documentation linked to how QAHE(Ulst) engages with students, and held meetings with management, staff and students to confirm their understanding of how they are engaged both individually and collectively.

2.35 QAHE(Ulst) engages with students effectively at an informal and individual level. QAHE(Ulst) promotes an open-door approach to tutors with digital channels of communication available to students on the VLE. Students stressed that teachers were very approachable and that a positive feature of QAHE(Ulst) was the availability and responsiveness of teaching staff. QAHE(Ulst) has also been responsive to the student voice during the Covid pandemic, using surveys and focus groups to better understand the students' digital learning experience and to gauge potential issues relating to mental health and safety. These various feedback mechanisms have resulted in positive adjustments such as the creation of short online videos to support students with learning and, with respect to resources, an extension of borrowing rights.

2.36 Additionally, QAHE(Ulst) is enabling a system of student representation. Student representatives confirmed that they had been selected by their peers through a voting process, and that social media with emails is being used by the representatives to provide a link between peers, tutors and the Quality Assurance Team. The representatives further confirmed attendance at SSCC and that they had received a level of support on their role through video and documentation available on the VLE, though not all the representatives had been able to access the training.

2.37 While a student representative system at committee-level is established, the extent of student involvement is not clearly articulated and, for certain committees, is inconsistent with what is stated in terms of reference. SSCCs provide the main platform for the student voice with terms of reference requiring a weighting in favour of students. However, because QAHE(Ulst) promotes the attendance of staff at SSCCs, minutes show that there is a significant weighting in favour of staff over students. In addition, while student representatives attend Course Committees and Teaching and Learning subcommittees,

the team noted that students were not in attendance at higher-level committees despite terms of reference stating student membership. The higher-level committees in which students were consistently absent were the Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Council. The explanation provided by QAHE(Ulst) was that student representatives are not obliged to attend committees and that student representation will be introduced to the Academic Council in future.

2.38 The review team recognises that QAHE(Ulst) has been responsive to student concerns during Covid, and that a student representative system is established. Nevertheless, to embed quality in the student representative system, the team **recommends** that QAHE(Ulst) develops a strategy for student engagement that makes clear the role of students as representatives, and the support they can expect to help them to fulfil their role.

2.39 The institution has developed effective processes for obtaining, reviewing and acting upon individual and collective student feedback on their educational experience. However, further work should be undertaken to embed quality in the student representative system. Notwithstanding this further work, overall, the Core practice is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q6): The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

Findings

2.40 QAHE(Ulst) complaints procedures are designed to mirror those of the University, as outlined in the Partnerships Agreement, with responsibility for processing complaints being a shared responsibility. Informal mechanisms are used to try to capture and respond to student concerns before they become complaints, with the intention being for students to discuss matters of concern with student representatives, management or an appropriate member of staff. If the student chooses to formalise a complaint, then the complaint is received by the Director of Quality Assurance who acts as the Complaints Officer and is also sent to the Head of Partnerships at the University for processing by the awarding body. This complaints process is accessible to students through student handbooks and presented on the QAHE(Ulst) website with a dedicated mailbox for complaints.

2.41 Student appeals are the responsibility of the awarding body which sets policy, with all formal appeals being received by the University for processing. To make an appeal the student is required to complete an Appeals Form which is available on the QAHE(Ulst) website. Appeals can be made on grounds of extenuating circumstances or procedural irregularity. An Appeals Panel hears the appeal and students have an opportunity to refer their appeal to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman (NIPSO) if not satisfied with the decision. The policies and procedures in place would allow the Core practice to be met.

2.42 The team tested the Core practice by examining the complaints and appeals procedures, reviewing the student handbooks and website, and holding meetings with the senior managers, staff and students to confirm understanding of the Core practice.

2.43 The team found that the complaints and appeals processes are fair and transparent in practice. Students confirmed that QAHE(Ulst) has a culture of openness which ensures that students have the opportunity to raise concerns. The complaints and appeals procedures are transparent for those students who choose to escalate concerns, with

detailed policy and procedures on the website and summaries of the procedures provided in student handbooks. Students confirmed that the opportunity to make complaints was discussed at induction and that they would approach Student Services or their Course Director, or find procedures on the website if choosing to formalise a complaint or make an appeal. The team was able to examine formal cases of complaints and appeals and found that they were given suitable consideration and escalation routes made clear should these be needed. The cases were dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner and showed the procedures to be effective.

2.44 The team concludes that the complaints and appeals procedures comply with those of the awarding body. The provider, therefore, has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students. The Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q7): Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.

Findings

QAHE(Ulst) does not currently offer any research degrees, and this Core practice is therefore not applicable.

Core practice (Q8): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

Findings

2.45 QAHE(Ulst) is validated by the University of Ulster as a partner institution. It does not work in partnership with any other organisations to deliver programmes. Since QAHE(Ulst) is not itself a degree-awarding body, the only relevant aspects of the Core practice are those related to delivering learning opportunities with third parties. QAHE(Ulst) delivers one postgraduate module where a work placement or internship is required to meet learning outcomes and one undergraduate module where a placement may be required.

2.46 The review team examined the QAHE(Ulst) documentation and met staff and employers with responsibility for placements and internships.

2.47 QAHE(Ulst) provides information for students undertaking the advance practice module on the postgraduate programmes. QAHE(Ulst) does not source internships for students, however, the careers teams support students as needed. Employers spoke positively about the experience of internships and the positive direction it provides for students and their future employment.

2.48 QAHE(Ulst) has a checklist for students and employers to complete which covers health and safety and remote working. Employers provide job descriptions for internships. Regular meetings are held with employers while a student is engaged in the internship.

2.49 The module handbook for the Advanced Practice: Internship and Professional Development Project includes assessment methods that require an employer assessment of the intern which accounts for 25% of the overall module mark. Employers complete a summative organisational supervisor's assessment report, grading a student's performance level against a predefined classification. The review team concluded from the meetings held with QAHE(Ulst) staff and providers of internships that employers are not trained or supported to understand the grade boundaries or the assessment criteria. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that QAHE(Ulst) ensure employer-based supervisors for internships are formally trained and supported to carry out their assessment role within the Level 7 Advanced Practice Module.

2.50 Students on the BSc Computing Systems can undertake an optional placement in the third year of the programme or alternatively they are assigned a consultancy project. The consultancy briefs are obtained from real-life business situations and, as a result, add a level of veracity to the learning undertaken.

2.51 QAHE(Ulst) has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. However, preparation of employer-based mentors for their role in assessment needs to be formalised. This has potential implications for reliability of assessments and therefore the team, while judging the Core practice to be met, assess the level of risk as moderate.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Core practice (Q9): The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

Findings

2.52 QAHE(Ulst) supports students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes through alignment with the University's strategic aims, and the development, implementation, monitoring and review of its Learning and Teaching Strategy as outlined in QAHE's Learning and Teaching Handbook and its Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy. (2021-25). The support systems put in place by QAHE(Ulst) would allow the Core practice to be met and all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. To test the Core practice, the review team considered a range of documentation and held meetings with staff and students at QAHE(Ulst).

2.53 QAHE(Ulst) aims to ensure students have access to facilities and resources that enhance learning and teaching. The QAHE(Ulst) LTC has sub-committees concerned with learning technology, assessment, content, feedback, equality, diversity and employability, which aim to improve the student learning experience and academic and professional outcomes. QAHE's Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to transform student learning, with flexible learning modes to enhance accessibility, to place students at the heart of learning; and to provide students with the professional skills required in the workplace. QAHE's Assessment Strategy is based on the principles set out in the University's Assessment Handbook with an emphasis on active and reflective learning, and on transferable skills. Students met by the team understood QAHE's intention to put students at the heart of learning and of the focus on professional skills for the workplace. They were supportive of this approach and spoke positively of the strategies in place to pursue these aims.

2.54 Recent enhancements to staffing at QAHE(Ulst) to support student outcomes have included the expansion of the Course Management Team; the recruitment of a Retention Coach; the appointment of Subject Clubs and Guest Speaker Leads; and the expansion of student support services teams (see Core practice Q4). Students who met the team, and in the Student Submission video, commented very favourably on the level of support provided to help achieve successful professional outcomes.

2.55 Following a QAA review in 2016, which recommended 'all students are provided with formal opportunities for individual reflection of their progress to further their academic development', QAHE(Ulst) has raised student awareness of the role of its Studies Advisor (Personal Tutor) system, which offers appointments for individual students. Students are assigned a Studies Advisor for the duration of their studies at QAHE(Ulst) and are now formally introduced to their allocated Advisor at Induction. Students are also notified who their Advisor is by email, on the VLE and via student notice boards. Student feedback has been generally favourable and further improvements in communication have been made to enhance student and staff understanding of the Studies Advisor role.

2.56 Other recent changes made to help students achieve successful outcomes include enhanced induction and reinduction materials, which emphasise level, ACE-led workshops on the VLE and on academic skills, and drop-in sessions for students to discuss assessment questions and receive formative and summative assessment feedback. Current developments include extending learning resources on the VLE; the use of interactive worksheets, in particular to support students with learning differences; and an online booking system enabling students to make a virtual tutorial. Students met by the team were very satisfied with the level of support they receive and told reviewers that the feedback they receive on their assessed work was both timely and helpful, and they commented favourably on the responsiveness of tutors to any issues raised with regard to assessment grades. The review team concludes that the support provided allows all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes and the Core practice is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Common practice (1): The provider reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

2.57 QAHE(Ulst) monitors and evaluates quality to drive improvement and enhancement through a number of committees including the Affiliate College Executive Board (ACEB) and Department Board. ACEB reviews key performance data such as applications, enrolments, staffing, retention, progression and achievement. The Board also reviews student satisfaction and graduate employment. The QAHE(Ulst) Department Board makes recommendations to Ulster University Business School's Department Board on the quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning in relation to QAHE(Ulst) course provision and the planning, design, approval and periodic review of, and revisions to, courses offered by QAHE(Ulst).

2.58 Academic Council was introduced in June 2020 to provide oversight of all programmes delivered by QAHE including those awarded by the University of Ulster. Sub-committees of the Academic Council are the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Performance Evaluation Committee. The systems in place allow the Common practice to be met. The team considered wide-ranging evidence in relation to quality improvement and

enhancement and interviewed students and staff.

2.59 The processes associated with all aspects of the student learning journey are regularly reviewed for effectiveness and opportunities for improvement and enhancement identified. The Learning and Teaching Committee is designed to monitor the development, implementation and effectiveness of enhancements to learning and teaching across the organisation, such as those arising from the observations of learning and teaching.

2.60 QAHE also reflects on academic standards through its Performance Evaluation Committee which meets three times each academic year to discuss data on student retention and performance. The Learning and Teaching Committee is designed to monitor the development, implementation and effectiveness of enhancements to learning and teaching across the organisation.

2.61 Evidence confirms that QAHE(Ulst) reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Common practice (2): The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

Findings

2.62 QAHE(Ulst) is required through the Partnership Agreement with the University to engage fully with external examiner arrangements and ensure that they provide an important part in the management of quality. The role of the external examiner is clearly defined with specific duties outlined in the University's Code of Practice for External Examining. The University approves the posts with arrangements requiring that each programme has a minimum of one external examiner.

2.63 External examiners provide input into the annual review process through their engagement in the examination boards. External examiners approve assessment, moderate student work at the examination boards and write up reports which are received by the University's Dean on Learning Enhancement. Reports read by the review team highlighted that teachers are marking consistently and at the appropriate level with internal moderation processes used, though student performance varies significantly across the student cohorts. QAHE(Ulst) is required by the University to process comments from the reports at course committees. Action Plans are generated through the internal committee structure and evidenced to the University in the Partnerships Reports.

2.64 External expertise from different sources is used to support high quality in programme design. In addition to external examiners commenting on the quality of programmes and modules, professional bodies and employers have been used to provide input into programme design. The Association of Chartered Accountants (ACCA) has been used to inform developments in the BSc Accounting and Management programme and employers from placements provide feedback on the effectiveness of the Advanced Practice module. Also, prior to programme approval, an evaluation panel is convened by the University and consists of external subject specialists as well as university and student representatives.

2.65 Membership of external bodies provide the opportunity for further support to manage quality. Quality in teaching practices is promoted through membership of the Higher Education Academy and membership of Independent Higher Education (IHE) provides a community of practice in the independent sector. Furthermore, QAHE is reviewed by the British Accreditation Council (BAC) and uses the recommendation arising from the

accreditation process for the purpose of driving improvements based on any recommendations made. For instance, modifications to the teacher observation form.

2.66 Overall, the team concludes that external oversight by the awarding body, the use of external examiners and of external organisations ensures that full account is taken of external expertise when managing quality.

Common practice (3): The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.67 A variety of mechanisms ensure that students are engaged in the ongoing quality of their educational experience. The main formal channels of communication for the collective student voice is through student representation at the SSCC and course committees. Student representatives confirmed their attendance at these committees and were positive about their impact on academic matters, believing that the institution is sensitive to student concerns as they arise. Minutes from these committees feed into the Course Management Teams meetings chaired by the Associate Dean. Also, minutes from the SSCC and the Learning and Teaching Committees advise the Academic Council on enhancements which lead to actions documented in the Partnerships Report. As well as formalised channels of communication, QAHE(Ulst) has proactively engaged students in surveys and focus groups to understand and develop the students' online learning experience during Covid.

2.68 As required in the Partnership Agreement, structures are embedded to ensure that students can influence programme developments. An example is the students' voice influencing an increase in subject content over skills development on the Graduate Certificate Programme. Students have direct representation on the university evaluation panels for validation and revalidation. Additionally, the student cohort has influence at modular level - individually through the completion of module evaluation forms and through representation at SSCC. Space is provided for student feedback in Semester Monitoring Reports though the review team noted that the amount of content under the student voice was limited.

2.69 Students confirmed that they have the opportunity to view and comment on standards through access to the external examiner reports. Access is provided to all students on the VLE, and students are represented at course committees where external examiner reports are discussed.

2.70 Notwithstanding the recommendation in Core practice Q5 (see paragraph 2.38), QAHE(Ulst) provides students with individual and collective opportunities to engage in the development, assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.71 In reaching its judgment about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.72 All applicable Core practices have been met. Core practice Q7 is not applicable as the provider does not offer research degrees. Risk was judged to be low in all but one applicable Core practice. Core practice 8 was assessed as met but carrying a moderate level of risk.

2.73 Three recommendations are made in this judgement area. The first is under Core practice 3, in which the provider is recommended to introduce a systematic approach to the observations of teaching. This recommendation was made due to inconsistencies of understanding about the various approaches to observing teaching and learning practice. The Core practice was considered met overall as the other arrangements for supporting teaching staff were effective and the interventions to improve the situation are straightforward and relate to the documenting of procedures. The second recommendation relates to Core practice 5 and the student representation aspect of student engagement. Again, the risk was assessed as low because the student voice is heard and actions taken in response. However, the contribution of student representatives could be enhanced if a strategy for student engagement clearly set out the role of student representatives and the support they can expect to help them fulfil their role. The third recommendation carries a moderate level of risk given that there is a potential for grades to be awarded inconsistently. Students engaged on internships are partly assessed by an employer-based supervisor. Supervisors are not currently formally trained and supported in this role. The provider is therefore recommended to ensure such training and support is in place in order to secure the consistency of assessment decisions.

2.74 One feature of good practice is identified under Core practice Q4 - recognising the proactive and highly effective development of structures to support students with their learning and welfare that is based on a thorough understanding of the needs of students and which is reflected in improved retention rates and positive feedback from students.

2.75 There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

2.76 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 20-22 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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.

Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

Blended learning

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

Common practices

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that will be applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students. These are practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but are not regulatory requirements for providers in England (registered with the Office for Students).

Core practices

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality.

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**.

Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

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* (FQHEIS).

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.

Multiple awards

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

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.

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** (and associated, applicable, Core and Common practices) that providers are required to meet.

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.

QAA2627 - R13098 - Aug 21

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