



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of QAHE (Ulst) Ltd, September 2017

Section 1: 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) Ltd has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the September 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 QAHE (Ulst) offers Ulster University (the University) franchised undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Business, Marketing, Accounting and Management, and Computing. In July 2017, there were 447 full-time enrolled students (272 undergraduates and 175 postgraduates) compared with 542 full-time students enrolled in 2015-16 (385 undergraduates and 157 postgraduates). Within its course portfolio, QAHE (Ulst) has made the decision to cease offering, from September 2017, the BSc Business Studies programme, and a teach-out plan is in place to ensure students are not disadvantaged by this decision. QAHE (Ulst) is also planning to offer from January 2018 a full and part-time MSc Professional Software Development programme. In addition to the six members of the QAHE senior management team, there are 30 full-time equivalent academic staff delivering QAHE programmes. In June 2017, the quality assurance group, which includes QAHE (Ulst), was acquired by CVC Capital Partners, although the relationship with the University remains unchanged.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 QAHE (Ulst) is making acceptable progress in implementing the action plan arising from the 2016 review. The actions identified have been addressed and reasonable progress is being made on the aspects yet to be completed fully. These relate to the revised studies advice and support scheme; evaluating the revised induction scheme; and embedding the strategies for learning opportunities and support. QAHE (Ulst) continues to consolidate the areas of good practice relating to contextualising learning materials and sustaining the development of study skills. Positive steps have been taken to address the recommendation for providing students with formal opportunities for individual reflection on their progress. QAHE (Ulst) has also made progress on addressing the affirmations relating to student transition, student engagement and high-level committees; and improving the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities. Comprehensive admissions processes are in place to identify the appropriateness of students to study and succeed at QAHE (Ulst). Structures and processes are in place for annual monitoring and review, with the recent addition of semesterly reporting. These are aligned to University requirements, including student representation. QAHE (Ulst) has processes in place to monitor student data and performance, although in some cases small cohort sizes impact disproportionately on retention and achievement rates.

4 QAHE (Ulst) has built on the good practice identified in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report of September 2016. Staff continue to ensure that the learning materials and case studies provided by the University are suitable for their student

groups, with evidence confirming the use of appropriate approaches. QAHE (Ulst) has developed the role of study skills further by their inclusion in the taught timetable, alongside the strengthening of close working relationships between academic staff and English for Academic Purposes tutors. The value of these approaches to enhancing study skills was confirmed by staff and students. In addition, QAHE (Ulst) is actively recruiting skills tutors to strengthen academic support.

5 QAHE (Ulst) has been proactive in responding to the recommendation to ensure all students have the opportunity to reflect on their individual performance. Steps were initially taken to improve students' awareness of study advisers, and a staff training programme was put in place. Building on this, the newly appointed Dean of Faculty has responsibility for the rollout, from September 2017, of a fully revised scheme for studies advice and support. Staff were able to describe the approaches being adopted to improve students' access to study advisers and monitoring progress. Students spoke positively of the opportunities they have had to meet staff on a one-to-one basis.

6 Progress has been made by QAHE (Ulst) on embedding the affirmations identified in the 2016 report. A working group was established to review student induction and identify best practice for supporting transition to higher education. In addition, QAHE (Ulst) will be introducing, in the autumn term 2017, the opportunity for students to feedback on their experience of induction. Actions have been taken to improve student involvement and engagement in QAHE (Ulst)'s higher level committees, including the provision of training to committee chairs, which is in addition to the existing training provided to student representatives. Staff and students provided examples of improvements made as a result of strengthening the student voice, including dissemination of information by student representatives and the use of 'you said we did' posters, which are displayed across both campuses in London and Birmingham.

7 The Associate Dean of Student Engagement and Performance Enhancement is driving forward strategies for developing learning opportunities and student success. QAHE (Ulst) has identified impact factors for student success, including the identification of at-risk students within admissions, induction and on programme. The Academic Community of Excellence Team is active in communicating and supporting students in their learning journey from pre-enrolment through to course completion. Staff described the approaches and interventions used to ensure student success and students acknowledged the help and support available to them.

8 QAHE (Ulst) is responsible for the marketing of the academic programmes. All marketing material is approved by the University prior to its use. QAHE (Ulst) employs a variety of routes through which students are recruited to their programmes, including recruitment fairs and digital marketing. QAHE (Ulst) makes use of the University's Admissions Manual, which provides detailed guidance of the admissions process, and is routinely updated and checked for accuracy by the University. Entry requirements for international, EU and home students are consistently defined and are easily accessible to applicants. Well-defined admissions processes, training sessions and updates ensure that the University and QAHE (Ulst) consistently and fairly manage applications. Application data is centrally recorded and shared through the computerised admissions system.

9 QAHE (Ulst) makes use of educational agents to recruit students in the EU and overseas. Processes are in place to monitor performance, and QAHE (Ulst) employs a team of staff to visit agents for training and management purposes. These measures have recently resulted in a reduction in the total number of agents used. QAHE (Ulst), in agreement with the University, employs a range of further interventions to evaluate each applicant and ensure student success, including standardised interviews and additional

English language assessment. These interventions are communicated to applicants when they are sent a formal offer letter.

10 Successful applicants are provided with regular support and information through a dedicated application conversion team in order to address any outstanding questions or concerns. QAHE (Ulst) also evaluates student performance against admissions data on an annual basis to enable refinement of its recruitment procedures. Staff were conversant with the application process and students spoke positively of their admission experience.

11 Annual programme monitoring is the responsibility of the University, with appropriate delegation of responsibility to QAHE (Ulst) course delivery teams. The Executive Dean has responsibility for oversight of annual monitoring within QAHE (Ulst). A clearly defined reporting structure is in place to ensure appropriate committee scrutiny and student involvement and engagement.

12 QAHE (Ulst) has recently introduced semester based course reporting, which provides further opportunity for detailed critical evaluation, monitoring and enhancement. In addition, all semester and annual monitoring reports are reviewed by faculty at their annual planning days; module feedback is facilitated through the use of QAHE (Ulst)'s electronic online capture and analysis platform. The outcomes of this process are made available to students through the virtual learning environment and since July 2017 they have been discussed at committee level.

13 There is a range of cohort sizes for the programmes offered; where these are small, this, in turn, impacts disproportionately on the statistics for retention and achievement. The average numbers of students initially enrolled on individual programmes over the three year period for 2014-17 were 45, 20 and 11 respectively. The average retention rates for the same period were 72, 91 and 84 per cent and the average achievement rates for completing students were 72 per cent for 2014-15, and 87 per cent for 2015-16. There were notable improvements for both measures for the 2015-16 academic year (with no comprehensive achievement data being available for 2016-17 as students outcomes were still being finalised at the time of the annual monitoring visit). In addressing the affirmation relating to improving the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities, QAHE (Ulst) is focusing on the attitudes and behaviours that impact on student success and developing strategies to identify students at risk at the earliest opportunity.

Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

14 QAHE (Ulst) was subject in 2016-17 to reaccreditations with both the British Council and the British Accreditation Council; this latter organisation covers QAHE (Ulst) provision on both the London and Birmingham campuses.

15 The University has the sole responsibility for the design, development and approval of the programmes delivered by QAHE (Ulst). Programme specifications are made available in course handbooks and students have access to frequently asked questions on the virtual learning environment, which signpost students to the QAA website for further information on the academic framework. The Learning and Teaching Committee addresses appropriate criteria of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

16 QAHE (Ulst) engaged with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education as a part of its preparation for the successful Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) visit in September 2016; the current Learning and Teaching Strategy and Staff Development Policy

have resulted from consideration of *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* and *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*.

Section 5: 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 Simeon London, Reviewer, and Mike Ridout, Coordinator, on 13 September 2017.

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