



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of QAHE (Ulst) Ltd, October 2018

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 the QAHE (Ulst) Ltd is making acceptable progress since the September 2017 [monitoring visit](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 QAHE (Ulst) Ltd offers Ulster University (the University) franchised undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Business, Marketing, Accounting and Management, and Computing. The BSc Business Studies is no longer recruiting students, with the final cohort expected to complete in 2020. Enrolments have now been accepted for the new full and part-time MSc Professional Software Development programmes, due to commence in October 2018. Total student numbers have remained comparable to the previous year, with 446 full-time students enrolled at the date of the monitoring visit. However, the composition of the cohort has changed from 272 undergraduate and 175 postgraduate learners in 2016-17, to 142 undergraduates and 304 postgraduates in 2018-19.

3 In addition to the six members of the QAHE senior management team, there are currently 30 full-time equivalent academic staff. A number of new roles have been created within the senior management team including Head of Academic Integrity, a Dean of Teaching, Learning, English and Skills, and a Dean of Computing. In addition, a replacement Associate Dean (Ulster University Programmes) has been appointed.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 QAHE (Ulst) is making acceptable progress in continuing to address the resulting action plan from the first monitoring visit in September 2017. It has developed a set of specific action plans as a result of quality assurance processes in course reviews, semester monitoring and annual programme monitoring. Actions have been implemented to enhance good practice in contextualised learning and study skills support. Further strategies have been developed to address the recommendation to ensure that all students have the opportunity to reflect on their academic development through the studies adviser system. The affirmations relating to student induction and student engagement have been implemented and incorporated into the QAHE (Ulst) action plan. The affirmation to improve the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities has made some progress, particularly for postgraduate programmes, although the outcomes are not consistent across the provision and actions have not been evaluated for effectiveness (see paragraphs 10 and 16).

5 QAHE (Ulst) continues to implement actions to support good practice in the creative use of additional learning materials that are contextualised to the campus location and profile of the student body. Discussion of the development of learning materials takes place between course and module coordinators, at staff development days and with the University. Students agreed that they benefit from case study materials based on local or global

organisations that are relevant to the location of their campus in the UK. Progress on the implementation of contextualising materials is subject to review in January 2019.

6 Good practice in the sustained development of study skills, incorporating the use of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), is a continuing QAHE (Ulst) focus. The Dean of Teaching, Learning, English and Skills (TLES) leads the English and Skills department and oversees staff development to enhance student support. A working group has been set up to oversee QAHE skills modules and to review progress in January 2019. EAP lecturers liaise with course directors and module leaders to ensure that relevant skills support is geared to the type of assessment at the appropriate time.

7 QAHE (Ulst) is using strategies to address the recommendation to ensure that all students are provided with formal opportunities for individual reflection on their academic development. Enhancement strategies include more effective communication of the studies adviser system on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students are made aware of their entitlement to personal support from named studies advisers at induction, on common room noticeboards and by email. Staff receive a Code of Practice leaflet detailing the role of studies adviser, and new staff are initially assisted by experienced mentors. The Personal Tutor Champion oversees the process of allocating students to both tutor groups and studies advisers on an annual basis. Students confirmed that they appreciate the additional adviser one-to-one learning support available from their studies advisers.

8 Further progress has been made on embedding the affirmations made in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report published in 2016. QAHE (Ulst) works closely with the University to review student induction. Student and staff feedback at course committees and Staff/Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) is used to inform and revise the content and delivery of induction materials. There is a helpful template of slides for course directors to customise to ensure consistency of induction delivery.

9 Students are represented on the Academic Board and invited to the Teaching and Learning Committee confirming student engagement in higher level committees. A recent revalidation panel of the Graduate Certificate and MBA programmes included an MSc International Business student. Students confirmed that student representative training sessions are not well attended and the Quality Assurance Department is introducing a training video on the VLE as an alternative approach.

10 The third affirmation to introduce processes to improve institutional capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities continues to be a priority. Enhanced student support, provided by the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team, is informed by detailed analysis of student retention and performance data at course level. QAHE (Ulst) uses detailed semester monitoring reports for programmes and individual modules to assist in identifying factors driving success or risk of failure. An early warning system is used to ensure that timely student support interventions are implemented; however, staff confirmed that the latest student retention and achievement data indicates that postgraduate retention and performance has remained an issue.

11 QAHE (Ulst) admissions processes with the University are fair and effective. QAHE (Ulst) has implemented some recent minor changes to the Secure English Language Test (SELT) requirements and English waivers for graduate level entry. Marketing materials for all programmes are updated and approved by the University. Students are recruited through recruitment fairs, digital marketing and educational agents. The prospectus and a dedicated website list clear admissions procedures for home, EU and international students and provide information on entry requirements, fees and scholarships. A shared computerised admissions system tracks applications data, underpinned by reliable and consistently applied admissions processes that are supported by regular staff training.

12 The role of overseas agents is robustly monitored to ensure that students meet the specified criteria and contracts are terminated if students recruited by an agent consistently underperform. International students apply directly to QAHE (Ulst) and where concerns exist are interviewed to assess their motivation to study. Those who do not meet the English language requirements are given the option to obtain International English Language Testing System certification, or undertake a QAHE English test that has been approved by Ulster University for UKVI SELT requirements. Home and EU students are required to take an English language test and attend an interview. All prior academic qualifications are assessed against the programme entry criteria and, where appropriate, checked for NARIC equivalence.

13 Assessment strategy and practice is governed by the Ulster University Assessment Handbook 2017 and University regulations, with student assessment information for assignment briefs outlined in course handbooks. Students are assessed using criteria linked to learning outcomes, with reasonable adjustments made to ensure that assessment is equitable and inclusive. QAHE (Ulst) provides clear and accessible assessment information on the VLE. Student advisers and the ACE team offer support, including timetabled academic skills sessions to enhance student performance in assessments.

14 QAHE (Ulst) has strategies in place to ensure that student assessment work is genuine and avoids academic malpractice. The institutional management of academic misconduct issues is the key remit of the new Head of Academic Integrity, including strategies for avoiding plagiarism, external collusion and contract cheating or 'ghosting'. QAHE (Ulst) conducts student opinion surveys on module assessments with additional student feedback at programme SSCC and course committee meetings.

15 External examiners' reports comment favourably on the validity of assessments, marking and internal moderation at the appropriate level. There is ongoing action planning and Academic Board review of responses to external examiners' comments. The NSS action plan 2017 for Accounting and Management has been addressed comprehensively, including the improvement of the standard of first marking with University tutors, explaining the moderation process to students, and ensuring that the standardisation protocol is followed to enhance reliability in assessment practice.

16 There continues to be a range of cohort sizes for the programmes offered, varying in 2017-18 between four programmes with fewer than 10 students up to a maximum of 65 students on some postgraduate programmes. As reported in the previous monitoring report, such variations have a disproportionate effect on retention and achievement statistics. The average numbers of students initially enrolled on individual programmes over the three-year period for 2015-18 were 20, 11 and 24 respectively. The average retention rates for the same period were 91, 84 and 77 per cent with average achievement rates for completing students of 87, 77 and 62 per cent. QAHE (Ulst) is aware of the factors that result in students leaving early and of the need to target strategies to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities so that the significant decline in retention and achievement figures is redressed.

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

17 Ulster University validated programme structures are aligned with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Programme specifications are articulated in student course handbooks.

18 QAHE (Ulst) continues to engage effectively with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, *Chapter 3: Learning and Teaching* and *Chapter B4: Enabling Student*

Development and Achievement through developments initiated by the Teaching and Learning Committee including staff development activities.

19 The Graduate Certificate and MBA programmes were revalidated in June 2018 by the University, which is responsible for the design, development, approval and revalidation of QAHE (Ulst) programmes. QAHE (Ulst) student feedback during the revalidation of the Graduate Certificate demonstrates student engagement in course development, which contributed to the approval of a new module with a greater focus on business content. QAHE (Ulst) continues to develop its annual programme monitoring procedures that are informed by external examiners' reports, detailed semester monitoring reports, and with action plans submitted to the Academic Board.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

20 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.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Reviewer, and Mr Cameron Waitt, QAA Officer, on 1 October 2018.

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