



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of QAHE (Ulst) Limited, June 2023

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that QAHE (Ulst) Limited (QAHE) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2022 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 QAHE enrolled 1,123 students in autumn 2022; 1,246 students in January 2023; and an estimated 1,328 students in May 2023. The total number of students currently enrolled, including continuing students, is 4,602; all of these are full-time with most of these being on master's programmes and 75% of all new enrolments being on the MSc International Business. All programmes continue to be validated by Ulster University. There has been an upward trend in student recruitment at both the London and Birmingham campuses in the last year with total enrolments from 2021-22 to 2022-23 academic years increasing by approximately 28%, particularly at Birmingham. This is, in part, due to the May enrolment and the Pre-master's route (Graduate Certificate) which is an accessible route into the master's programmes.

3 There are six senior managers and approximately 70 full-time academic staff, plus support staff. Due to the increase in student numbers, a new role of the Dean of Ulster University Faculty has been created with a Deputy Dean at each of the London and Birmingham campuses. QAHE has also changed the role of the module leaders so they can focus on academic elements and brought in support to help with administration.

4 Due to the increase in student numbers, QAHE has expanded its presence in Birmingham by taking floors, with a dedicated entrance and reception area, in a new building in Birmingham City Centre. This will almost double the space they currently have in the building already occupied.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 QAHE is making acceptable progress with ongoing monitoring activity, development and review including resource enhancements to support its expanding higher education provision. The actions from the plan prepared following the previous June 2022 review visit have been completed with evidence provided through written documents and meetings with staff and students. QAHE has maintained particular focus on learning support, developing its internal staff resource in order to offer a variety of progress-monitoring mechanisms, alongside professional services development, continuing its student support initiatives launched during the pandemic.

6 QAHE demonstrates continued maintenance of academic standards and retains a close relationship with Ulster University, its awarding partner, to satisfy the rigour and quality of all awarded qualifications across its provision based on the Amendment and Reinstatement Agreement. Quality and standards in relation to assessment have been

maintained and further developed as seen through the annual monitoring commentary documentation and the Performance Evaluation Committee. Accessible entry routes for master's-level programmes through the Graduate Certificate and learning and teaching continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives have also been introduced which support this.

7 The previous QAHE Higher Education Review, in June 2021, detailed recommendations and several good practice items which have been acknowledged within the annual monitoring submission, and supported through evidence of further dissemination across the academic portfolio and the wider staff team, through consultative committees and presentations at the staff conference.

8 QAHE has made acceptable progress in continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision, and is actively engaged in the enhancement of its provision as both the academic portfolio offer and individual course student numbers continue to expand. A developmental staffing strategy has been implemented evident in the creation of a number of senior staff posts and dedicated academic staff for each programme in the faculty structure. This development illustrates a strategic commitment to the progression of Ulster University's awarding relationship for QAHE, reflective of the mature operational capacity that exists within the shared duties and established quality management systems, and reflected in the minutes of the Ulster University Department Board.

9 The enhancement of learning and teaching experiences, supported through staff development observations, a formalised CPD offer, and systematic monitoring and oversight via a centralised HR system (Compass), illustrates current practice across the QAHE provision. Staff are able to articulate their development needs and both line managers and dedicated professional staff oversee the wider provision of CPD through a programme of workshops and online resources. The introduction of these initiatives has been evidenced and it is noted that metrics relevant to student achievement and other observation data will be considered as part of programme evaluation. This phase is not yet captured in either meeting minutes or monitoring records but is expected to support evaluation and insight into the initiative and its effectiveness, as stated by senior managers and recorded in the minutes of the Ulster University Department Board.

10 An updated format for the QAHE Induction programme and timetables has enabled evidence of the continuing commitment to understanding the needs of the specific student communities across programmes at QAHE, including a broad range of learning and welfare issues. Additional staff resource and practical support channels have been added to reflect the needs of a diverse student community reflecting specific support initiatives now in place across academic study support, student voice liaison and professional services guidance and advice provision, to include careers, registry, assessment preparation and academic study support.

11 Academic study support, in particular, has been formalised further at QAHE with the development of the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team. Staff and students reflect positively on the initiatives in place through ACE to facilitate self-study and group learning support sessions, online guidance and more engagement initiatives for students to highlight the presence of ACE and the types of learning and study support available to them. Further development of this support for learning experiences across all programmes and accessible to all students is securely referenced in both institution and course-level meetings with committee members able to input into the scope and scale of the support on offer to learners making use of data and statistics from across the student journey to guide and direct the next iteration of initiatives. Ulster University is seen to support these initiatives and outcomes indicate a positive introduction to these initiatives with beneficial guidance showing a positive impact on achievement. QAHE reports that the recent assessment

submission rates for the MSc International Business modules have been over 90% for nearly all the modules.

12 QAHE senior managers and academic staff in particular have been strengthened through the addition of support team staff to enhance student opportunities for cohesive induction experiences and early-stage course and assessment guidance. The impact on achievement and assessment outcomes continues to be monitored and student feedback sought to evaluate the support on offer across programmes and cohorts. The monitoring of assessment practice and achievement is viewed positively by awarding body colleagues and will continue to frame the evaluation of study support initiatives in the coming year.

13 Students volunteer for the role of Student Representative and are supported by the QAHE Studies Advisors, both through selection and training, during the initial weeks of term. Staff recognise that this new initiative requires review, and at the meeting with the review team students confirm ongoing work to develop, strengthen support and promote the role of student representatives across all programmes still needs to be developed further.

14 The enhancement of teaching and learning is supported by management through peer observations, which encourage personal reflection and ongoing professional development. Staff are supported to undertake formal professional development as well as the sharing of good practice. Minutes or evaluation evidence of the impact of this focus is not evident in meeting minutes or wider organisational guidance at this time; however, planning for dissemination and a continued range of responsive CPD activities are a central part of both the staffing strategies at QAHE and the wider integration of ACE initiatives.

15 The recent validation processes for new courses and QAHE's inclusion in sector insight groups involved in development of new provision by the awarding partner, demonstrate a good awareness of the formal approach to programme design and the inclusion of external input and internal approval necessary to achieve successful validation. Staff and students confirm that where course design is reviewed and shared, with modules being designed by experts in their field, the provision at QAHE is high quality and opportunities for individual support are plentiful. Students highlighted that some operational staffing changes pertaining to specific modules in certain programmes meant that some programmes and cohorts are yet to consistently benefit from particular specialist lecturers. It is noted that this specific example and student experience is being raised through the appropriate QAHE channels at present.

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

16 QAHE continues to work effectively with the Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) to ensure that all policies and procedures meet expectations and are prepared and operated in line with Ulster University as the awarding partner. Many aspects of the QAHE provision are now delivered with autonomy from the awarding partner procedures due to the emerging capacity and capability of QAHE staff and processes to devise and oversee much of the learning support provision independently. Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that requirements of the relevant reference points are met still remains with Ulster University, however, as the awarding body. The processes put in place by both ensure that the awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ), the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), and the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and are aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements. The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective and with due consideration given to the Quality Code. Quality assurance documentation and guidance for QAHE academic procedures are readily available to students online and through virtual learning environment provision which demonstrates links

to the Quality Code and is used as a central reference point for all staff. QAHE has evidenced effective engagement with external reference points and the Quality Code through its ongoing work with sector bodies including Advance HE, Independent Higher Education (IHE) and within sector-specialist engagement. Ulster University, the partner awarding body, retains ultimate responsibility for the students of QAHE including the quality of the student experience. QAHE should continue the work already started to align its policies and procedures to the Quality Code and other relevant external reference points to make full use of ongoing mapping exercises aligned with guidance from their awarding partner.

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 Karen Chetwynd, Reviewer, and Kevin Kendall, QAA Officer, on 20 June 2023.

QAA2780 - R13476 - Jul 23

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2023
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk