



Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements: desk-based analysis of INTO Queen's LLP, February 2024

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that INTO Queen's LLP (the Centre) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the [February 2023 Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements report](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 All students are international (non-EU), with three intakes per year in September, January and March. As of 2 January 2024, there are 240 students with total enrolments for 2023-24 estimated to be in the region of 305. The Centre currently employs 44 academic staff of whom 30 are full-time and 13 non-academic staff.

3 In June 2023, the Academic Director, who had been the main contact for QAA, was appointed Centre Director and remains as the main contact reporting to the newly appointed Senior Vice-President - who was previously the acting Centre Director, supporting the Academic Director. This Senior Vice-President (Partnerships) has responsibility for the nine Centres of INTO University Partnerships (IUP). A new Academic Director has been appointed, reporting to the Centre Director.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Centre continues to make progress in monitoring, evaluating and enhancing its higher education provision. The review team considered the Annual Monitoring Process Annual Return Form (Educational Oversight), supporting evidence submitted in January 2024 and supplementary documentation received prior to the desk-based analysis. Consideration of the evidence provided indicates that the Centre continues to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives put forward to maintain standards and enhance the quality of students' learning experiences.

5 The Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements review made one recommendation in the 2023 report. This was to keep under review the accuracy and transparency of admissions and recruitment information to ensure that students are clear about the organisation they are joining. As evidenced in the Centre's Annual Monitoring Review Report (AMR Report) in 2024, the Centre has been undertaking a number of actions in response.

6 The Centre has addressed this recommendation by enhancing communication with different stakeholders, prospective students and parents. Additional training and guidance have been provided to agents and the IUP Regional Office including emphasis on the importance of transparent communication and ensuring accurate promotion of the Centre's

programmes and services, especially in explaining the relationships between the Centre and Queen's University Belfast (QUB), to ensure that the expectations of prospective students are realistic. Communication channels have been improved to ensure that students are well-informed about the nature of the Centre and QUB, with offer holders able to contact the Centre's Marketing and Recruitment team to ask any questions they have in relation to their future study. The review and updating of marketing materials ensures that the relationship between the Centre and QUB is clear to prospective students regarding its role as a preparatory centre and the subsequent transition to QUB. The Centre undertakes an annual digital audit, review of marketing materials and checks on course information on systems in order to ensure the accuracy and currency of marketing materials.

7 Students complete arrival surveys on their pre-arrival experience and communication with generally good levels of satisfaction with the arrival experience (88% satisfied or very satisfied), with no students saying they were dissatisfied; and communications (90% satisfied or very satisfied), with only 2% saying they were dissatisfied. 18% of students reported that registration and orientation information was unclear with a small number (3%) reporting that they did not receive some information. 26% of students reported not attending orientation events and 48% reported not knowing about the Get Ready to Study programme. No evidence is provided of investigation into the reasons for this.

8 The Centre Progression team operates a calendar of events during the academic year around progression options, future careers, employability and meeting student ambassadors who are currently studying at QUB. Student feedback has been positive in providing support with the transition to study at the main QUB campus. The Centre offers opportunities for students to engage in social events to help their integration into studies and wider participation at clubs and societies.

9 Teaching, learning and assessment is underpinned by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy (TLAP), which was formally agreed and approved by QUB in May 2020. This Policy is available to existing staff and is presented to new staff as part of their induction. The Policy provides structure to the effective delivery of teaching, learning and assessment at the Centre. There is an internal system for implementing and recording teaching observations. Externally, feedback received from external examiners is cited in the Continuous Actions for Programme Enhancement (CAPE) reports.

10 The nature, level and availability of the pastoral support is outlined in the programme and policy handbooks, during course induction and updated at training courses. The pastoral care provided by the Centre Student Services team includes a Welfare Officer, support with accommodation and special educational needs and disability (SEND) support. Students can access the Student Assistance Programme and the Health Assure App with further support provided by teachers through personal tutoring.

11 Students with declared special education needs are referred to the in-house Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) for assessment and/or onward referral. The Centre's SEND Policy ensures that students with specific learning needs are identified and accommodated with the teaching and learning environment being adapted as appropriate to ensure that learning objectives can be met, performance and progression achieved, and student satisfaction improved.

12 Staff development and training is provided through INTO IUP and QUB. All staff complete mandatory training in areas including Annual Fire Safety; Email Essentials; Freedom of Information; GDPR; Health and Safety Essentials; Health and Safety for Computer Users; Secure Remote Working; Think Difference. Act Differently; Unconscious Bias; Suicide Awareness Training; and Safeguarding Training. Completion of training is monitored by the HR Manager. The Centre has added LinkedIn Learning to the Human

Resources Information System (HRIS), which allows all INTO staff access to 10,000 self-training development courses. Training covers a wide range of business, technology, creative and career building topics. The Centre has run some cross-centre Teacher Training and Development Days including coaching for lesson observations, using artificial intelligence for teaching, support for inclusive teaching and supporting student mental health and wellbeing.

Student data return

13 Total enrolments for 2023-24 are estimated to be in the region of 305, which represents an increase from 276 in 2022-23 and 229 in 2021-22. The data for 2022-23 shows that retention is very good (100%) across all programmes except for the International Foundation programmes in Engineering and Science; Business, Humanities and Social Sciences; and in Architecture which have retention rates of 98%, 95% and 75%, respectively. For Engineering and Science, and Business, Humanities and Social Sciences, this represents an improvement from the 2021-22 data (85% and 86%). For Architecture, however, this has shown a further decline from 85% in 2021-22, but for the combined September and January intakes the retention is 90%. The Graduate Diploma in Management; and the International Year One programme in Engineering show rates of 86% and 96% retention respectively.

14 In 2021-22, the overall pass rate for students was 92%, with the breakdown at each level as follows: Level 3 - 96%; Level 4 - 99%; and Level 6 - 98%. With the exception of five programmes, all pass rates were 100%. The exceptions being: the International Foundation programme in Business, Humanities and Social Sciences (85% September intake and 86% March intake); International Year One Management and Finance (89%); International Year One Engineering (88%); and Graduate Diploma Social Sciences (86% January intake and none in the March intake). In 2022-23, the overall pass rate for students was 98%, which was a significant improvement from 2021-22, with: Level 3 - 96%; Level 4 - 96%; and Level 6 - 84%. With the exception of six programmes, all pass rates were 100%. The exceptions being the Graduate Diploma Management (86%), International Foundation Programme Architecture (75%) and the International Year One Engineering (96%).

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

15 The Centre continues to make effective progress in using external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education. The Centre is responsible to QUB for the maintenance of academic standards relating to its qualifications aligned to external reference points including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). QAA Subject Benchmark Statements are incorporated in the design, approval, assessment and monitoring of programmes and are referenced in programme specifications. English language courses are benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) descriptors. These provide clear benchmarks for student admission, assessment and progression. The Centre continues to engage actively with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and maps its provision to the Quality Code. The Quality Code informs policies developed by the Centre and those of QUB and are embodied in the Centre's current Academic Management Quality Assurance Manual which reflects the Expectations, Core and Common practices, and advice and guidance of the Quality Code.

16 In the period since the last QAA review, the Centre has undergone a reaccreditation

through the British Council as a result of its status as an accredited provider of English language provision under the British Council's accreditation scheme. Under the framework for this, the standards of management, resources and premises, teaching, welfare and care of under 18s were examined to ensure that they meet the required standards. The outcome of the review was positive, with the Centre being reaccredited for a further four years. The formal report from the review is pending but is expected to detail any required actions and the Centre will be required to report against the action plan in six months.

17 The Centre's pathway programmes are subject to periodic review, in line with the policy and timeline requirements of QUB, for the continued approval of educational collaborative provision for a specified period, which is normally five years. During the academic year 2022-23, a periodic review of the International Foundation Programme for Architecture was undertaken. This included review of documentation, including the Centre's Reflective Statement, meetings with a panel of students, programme teaching staff, managers and faculty advisers from QUB. The report from the periodic review outlines a number of recommendations. The Centre responded with actions for improvement and programme enhancements including recruitment of temporary staff to address issues of staff absence and support from the relevant School at QUB. International Year One Engineering is the next provision subject to review and this is scheduled to take place during March 2024.

18 The Centre continues to use input from external examiners as external reference points to assure the standards of its provision and improve the quality of all programmes offered. Following the QUB model, it engages two types of external examiners, although, at the Centre, the role is combined. Subject external examiners ensure that the assessment system is equitable and operates fairly in the classification of students. Programme external examiners ensure that the degrees awarded by QUB are comparable in standard with those awarded in other UK or Irish universities and are consistent with the requirements of the UK Quality Code. Expectations and responsibilities are set out in the Centre's Academic Management - Quality Assurance Manual 2023-24.

19 The Centre's Continuous Action for Programme Enhancement (CAPE) is the mechanism for assurance of the quality and maintenance of academic standards. CAPE enables programme teams to reflect and act upon relevant programme-level information; and enables faculties and committees to make judgements on the analysis of pertinent data, actions to address concerns or disseminate good practice. Detailed comments drawn from each external examiner's report, together with responses by the Centre, are presented in CAPE reports and reviewed by QUB. Reviews of the CAPE reports submitted as evidence in 2023, indicate that reports are generally positive and that the Centre has carefully considered each recommendation made by an external examiner and used those suggestions to improve the quality of its foundation and higher education provision.

Background to the desk-based analysis

20 The desk-based analysis 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 annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

21 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Helen Collinson, Reviewer, and Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, in February 2024. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk