



# Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements: desk-based analysis of INTO Stirling LLP, May 2024

## Outcome of the desk-based analysis

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

## Changes since the last QAA review

2 The Centre delivers a range of pathway programmes at SQCF Level 7-10 and International Foundation programmes at SCQF Level 7 focused on the academic skills and knowledge required for progression in specific subject clusters, including: business, finance, economics and marketing; media, humanities and social sciences; science; sport; computing; and engineering. At the time of the submission of the annual return, there were 181 students enrolled on the international foundation programmes, undergraduate degrees with international year one/two, international diplomas, postgraduate degrees with graduate diplomas, graduate diplomas and pre-master's programmes. There have been no changes in the programme offering since the last academic year.

## Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The review team considered the annual return and supporting documentation, as well as clarifications requested by the team as part of a desk-based analysis. The Centre continues to implement the two features of good practice (paragraphs 4-6) and is making good progress in meeting the two desirable recommendations identified in the 2023 Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements report (paragraphs 7-9). As evidenced in the annual return 2024, the provider has been undertaking a number of actions in response to the recommendations.

4 The features of good practice identified cover the joint venture with the University of Stirling and relate to the robust operational framework - which underpins the management and enhancement of the student learning experience, and the strong focus on student transitions - which underpins the stated aims of the partnership. A formal programme of transition events was scheduled for 2023-24 and others are scheduled for 2024-25. Events to support student transition included lecture theatre tours, master classes on group work, and attendance at university seminars, practical laboratory sessions and taster sessions. In addition, the undergraduate INTO Progression Scholarship has been approved and, with effect from 2024, INTO students progressing to Stirling University will benefit from the same international scholarship as most of the Stirling direct entry.

5 Two new members of staff have been recruited to support student transition and welfare. Academic and pastoral support is routinely provided and all students on academic pathways are allocated Personal Tutors for the duration of their programme of study. English language testing is undertaken on arrival. There is a Study Skills Group and a Personal Tutoring Group in place to support students. Additional IT support sessions are also scheduled for students who may need assistance or want to refresh their knowledge of technology-related topics. Students are supported in the development of skills to produce specific assessment requirements such as posters and videos. The provider also has a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Framework to ensure that students with individual learning needs are identified and accommodated.

6 The joint venture between the Centre and the University of Stirling operates within a governance framework which ensures that the responsibilities for academic standards and quality are appropriately discharged. The University of Stirling (the University) is ultimately responsible for the setting and management of academic standards and the Centre for the delivery of the academic standards. The authority and responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards is outlined in the Joint Venture Quality Assurance Agreement. Teaching, learning and assessment is managed through the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) which provides a forum to facilitate and encourage the development of learning and teaching, pedagogy and also discusses and promotes academic developments and quality enhancement initiatives. The membership of the LTC has been widened to ensure that is more beneficial to staff and students and there is a published schedule of meetings. A new module checklist details the key quality activities to be undertaken by academic and non-academic staff for completion at regular points during the year to ensure the effective management of modules. The discussions that have taken place to support the completion of the checklists are found to have led to more reflective and insightful discussions around academic quality than in past years.

7 The first recommendation was to work with university partners to ensure the effective implementation of the agreed job description for the Link Tutor role, with particular reference to the nature, frequency and consistency of Link Tutor engagement with students. The provider previously had a Link Tutor Group but, following a review of the effectiveness of this Group, it developed a new model of Link Tutor whereby the Centre Director and Academic Director now sit on a wider range of university and faculty committees instead. This revised approach provides access to a range of relevant university stakeholders to identify and explore opportunities for engagement with students. This has enabled the development of an enhanced range of events to support students to progress to higher education (see paragraph 4).

8 The second recommendation was to strengthen staff development to facilitate a greater understanding of external reference points and their utilisation by both academic and professional support staff. The provider held a training event at the start of the 2023-24 academic year to support staff to further develop their understanding of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) within their teaching or professional practice. After the provider noted an increase in academic misconduct by students, it undertook staff training in this area in 2023-24 and is embedding digital literacy into its modules.

9 The provider is committed to the promotion of scholarship, professional development and HEA fellowship to support staff and enhance teaching practice and student experience, and staff training and development on other aspects is provided across the year. For example, staff have completed mandatory training including safeguarding, data protection and GDPR and cybersecurity training. There has been a focus on training in the use of blended learning, web-based learning management system and IT skills development and sessions on the responsible use of artificial intelligence. Other sessions have included

classroom observation training, attendance procedures and suicide intervention events. Staff have also attended University Learning and Teaching Committees to help build communities of practice. The provider is collating staff training requests to build a calendar of future events.

10 Enrolments for 2023-24 are currently 181 compared to the 214 enrolled in 2022-23 and 186 in 2021-22. Enrolments have been fairly consistent over the last few years. Focused conversion work has resulted in July and October intakes increasing by 34% overall on previous years. The Centre will be a 'push' centre for 2024. Push projects provide targets and focused support within key markets identified for their ability to support growth that aligns with University of Stirling goals and ambitions.

11 The data for 2022-23 shows that retention is 100% in 15 programmes. 11 programmes had retention rates ranging from 50% (one out of two students initially enrolled) for the Graduate Diploma in Science and Engineering and 95% (18 out of 19 students initially enrolled) for the undergraduate degree with International Year 2: Business, Finance, Marketing and Humanities. The International Foundation in Business, Finance and Marketing had a larger than usual number of students discontinuing (8 out of the 20 international students initially enrolled) due to non-compliance with UKVI attendance regulations, resulting in a retention rate of 64%. One programme - the Graduate Diploma in Media, Humanities and Social Sciences - had no students continuing with the programme (one student initially enrolled).

12 A comparison of retention between 2021-22 and 2022-23 shows that some programmes have seen an increase in retention. For example, the undergraduate degree with International Year 1: Sport, Science, Computing and Engineering has increased from 86% to 100%. Other programmes have seen a decrease in retention. This applies to the International Foundation in Business, Finance, Economics and Marketing which has seen a decline from 65% in 2021-22 to 60% in 2022-23; the International Foundation in Media, Humanities and Social Sciences which dropped from 100% to 89%; and the undergraduate degree with International Year 1: Business, Finance, Economics and Marketing which decreased from 73% to 59%. No retention rates were available yet for the 2023-24 cohorts.

13 In 2021-22, the overall average pass rate was 75% with 15 programmes seeing 100% pass rates. In 2022-23, the overall average pass rate was 85% with 17 programmes showing 100% pass rates. For the remaining programmes, the pass rate ranged between 57% (four out of seven students) for the International Foundation in Media, Humanities and Social Sciences and 94% (17 out of 18 students) for the undergraduate degree with International Year 2: Business, Finance, Marketing and Humanities. No pass rates were available yet for the 2023-24 cohorts.

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

14 The provider makes effective use of external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education. While the University of Stirling has ultimate responsibility for the setting and management of academic standards, the provider is responsible for the delivery of the academic standards and operates within the University's governance and regulatory frameworks. The mapping within the provider's Quality Handbook relates to previous versions of the Quality Code for Higher Education and would need to be updated when the latest version of the Quality Code is published later in 2024.

15 The alignment of the provider's programmes, modules and awards is mapped to the SCQF framework through the University's programme approval and modification processes.

All modules have a set of learning outcomes that are mapped to the appropriate SCQF level and for pre-master's at Level 9 and 10, depending on the modules and delivery mode. The module learning outcomes are also mapped onto each assignment on the module. A module checklist introduced in 2023-24 aligns to key requirements of the Quality Code on learning and teaching, and assessment. The provider's programmes are validated on a five-yearly basis, with the most recent revalidation process taking place in 2019. Revalidation is scheduled to take place in 2023-24. Proposed new programmes are approved by the University of Stirling's Curriculum Management Committee - a sub-committee of the Education and Student Experience Committee. Approval of new modules or module changes is managed by the relevant University Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee following their endorsement by the provider's Learning and Teaching Committee.

16 The provider continues to use external examiners as external reference points when reviewing the standards of its provision and supporting the ongoing improvement of the quality of its programmes. External examiners are encouraged to comment on the curriculum and on the assessment process and should be consulted on changes to the curriculum and assessment arrangements. External examiner reports are shared with the staff and student body through the INTO Learning and Teaching Committee. The provider continues to use Annual Programme Reviews to assure the quality and maintenance of academic standards, and feedback from external examiners and students is considered as part of the process. As a result of these reviews in 2023-24, there is a focus on reducing the assessment burden for students and on the increased use of feedforward to better support students. Programme review outcomes are collated annually and presented at the Learning and Teaching Committee.

## **Background to the desk-based analysis**

17 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 review/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.

18 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Lorraine Lavery, Reviewer, and Monika Ruthe, QAA Officer, in April 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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