



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of QAHE (Ulst) Limited, June 2024

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) Limited (QAHE) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2023 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 QAHE enrolled 6,467 students and there has been a year-on-year increase of 87% in total student recruitment for the first semester of the academic year 2023-24. Both the London and Birmingham campuses have seen a notable increase in student numbers and the Birmingham campus has expanded, driven by lower tuition fees and lower costs of living. The largest programme is MSc International Business programme with 1,027 enrolled students at the Birmingham campus and 672 at the London campus. All awards are made by the University of Ulster and a new MSc in Computer Science was validated in December 2023.

3 There are 106 academic staff (including those of senior management) at QAHE and then an additional three senior management posts at Ulster University as part of the relationship.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 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 2023 review visit have been completed with evidence provided through written documents and meetings with staff and students. QAHE has continued to focus on learning support, embedding its increased internal staff resource in order to offer a variety of progress monitoring mechanisms, alongside professional services development. Students the review team met offered an overwhelmingly positive view of both academic and pastoral support structures.

5 The QAHE monitoring submission notes that there has been a focus on formative assessment since the previous visit. This has provided benefits to students who spoke positively about the quality and quantity of formative feedback provided. There was, however, some discrepancy between student views of summative feedback. Some students had received feedback through the virtual learning environment, others reported that they had not, and some felt that the feedback was not as useful (in terms of advice on how to improve) as the formative feedback had been. QAHE confirmed that there was an

institutional policy covering both campuses and all programmes relating to the provision of feedback, and that this followed the policy of the awarding body. It was confirmed that the timeframe for returning feedback is 20 days. The review team was unable to ascertain whether the differences in experience reported by the students were campus or programme specific and appeared to cross such boundaries.

6 The monitoring submission highlighted the introduction of assessment videos in support of student assessment. Students the review team heard from at the visit found the videos to be very useful. Students also stated that the assessment briefing documents provided at the start of a module were clear and useful, and the videos, particularly when used later in the term, provided effective and appropriate guidance.

7 The QAHE External Examiner Action Sheet illustrates that QAHE continues to implement and monitor actions in relation to feedback from the external examiners in conjunction with Ulster University as the awarding body. Staff the review team met also commented that the development of marking standardisation meetings, and the recording of them was supporting greater consistency in programme assessment.

8 The review team explored student understanding of the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in assessment. Students stated that its use was not permitted and were clear on the process and consequences regarding inappropriate use and stated that QAHE had highlighted the policy and emphasised its ability to detect the use of AI. Staff the review team met confirmed that QAHE follows the Ulster University policy as the awarding body. It was also confirmed that there is appropriate flexibility permitted to allow the use of AI where it was academically appropriate. While this difference was not highlighted by the students, it is not considered to be an issue, particularly as students were clear on the consequences of poor academic practice or academic misconduct.

9 The review team was informed that student representation mechanisms are working effectively. Students the team met included student representatives who confirmed that they had received some form of induction from the relevant Course Director. As part of the new 'Study Advisors Strategy', student advisors now assist in the oversight of student engagement, ensuring that issues arising from student representation are taken forward. Students commented positively that QAHE was responsive and provided feedback, closing the loop on issues raised. It was noted that performance outcome data was also provided at student meetings, which the team considered to be good practice. A certificate is also provided to those who undertake the role of student representative. It was noted that student representatives are elected for one semester although they can stand multiple times. It was also confirmed that feedback is obtained from representatives on their experience in the role to inform future development of this aspect of student engagement. QAHE aims for two representatives per group to be elected each semester.

10 QAHE supports student engagement and obtains and responds to student feedback through a range of mechanisms including Student-Staff Consultative Committees. Student Voice activities are well supported and promoted, and reports of formal processes are formally considered through institutional committees.

11 QAHE has ensured that support provision has developed in line with the increase in student numbers. Students the review team met spoke positively of the support on offer. QAHE has invested in additional student advisers in the academic support hub and ensure, as part of their Study Advisor Strategy, that there is one advisor per student group. Each group has up to 35 students and as the number of students increases, so does the number of groups and thus, the number of advisors.

12 QAHE has increased the number of tracking points (check-ins with students), the number of Welfare Advisors has increased and there is a new mental health clinical lead

post. The Student Relations team has also increased in capacity which has led to more engagement events for students and to an increased ability to cross-refer students to other appropriate teams. Coupled to this, the number of lecturing staff has increased, as has the number of programme management and administrative staff, and Deputy Course Advisors and Associate Dean roles have been created. The staff team confirmed that the new roles were working as expected and that no changes were required at this stage. They were also clear on the purpose and function of the new roles, particularly in relation to student support and programme management and these roles are clearly articulated.

13 Through the Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team, QAHE has also increased workshops, learning materials and clubs on specific topics, as well as more check-in points. Students the review team met viewed the ACE team and its activity positively.

14 QAHE provides students with an academic timetable for all induction activities. The first part of the induction programme is online, and attendance is monitored. A second induction phase occurs in week 3 and 4, and wider teams, such as Library Services, drop-in classes in later weeks. Students the review team met reported a positive view of the induction activities and commented positively on the provision of information on academic referencing, academic writing and critical thinking as part of the induction programme.

15 In a discussion of learning and teaching, staff the review team met explained that the three types of peer observation employed which occur every semester were working well, and no changes to process or policy were considered necessary at this point. The team also heard that issues or themes arising from peer observation could also be discussed in staff fora ('campus meetings') to the wider benefit of staff. The monitoring submission, additional evidence and discussion with staff also showed that QAHE is very engaged in planning (such as through the Annual Planning Day) and this was clearly viewed positively by the awarding body who commented that it feeds into their processes as well.

16 Staff continue to be able to utilise the QAHE Learning and Teaching HEA module to prepare for an Advance HE Fellowship application to demonstrate teaching effectiveness, innovation and/or impact on student learning. QAHE also has a Lecturer Development Programme that supports staff in moving from teaching at undergraduate to postgraduate level. From the information available, QAHE is clearly focusing on embedding staff development and driving it forward in relation to teaching and learning.

17 The validation report on BSc (Hons) Computer Systems had recommended that optionality in the programme be explored (recommendation 2). Staff the team met explained that implementation of this recommendation had not yet been implemented because it had not been academically or economically viable, but that the current increase in student numbers was bringing them to the point where options are viable and that this was now under review by course teams.

18 The two new Deputy Dean roles at Ulster University (as reported in 2023) - one at each campus - have had a positive impact on the relationship with QAHE and being situated on campus is supporting management activities and the strengthening of the relationship between the two organisations. The relationship is clearly a two-way process, valued by each, and leading to effective collaboration - for example, the annual planning day at QAHE which feeds into the awarding body's own processes. It was reported that the relationship with Ulster will expand to a third faculty in due course (Life and Health Sciences).

19 Students the review team met clearly knew how to raise an issue with QAHE, whether as a student representative or through formal complaint processes. Students commented positively that when issues are raised, QAHE ensures that the feedback on the issue is provided.

20 QAHE has made good progress and continued to embed action in response to the three previous recommendations. In response to the recommendation to introduce a systematic approach to observations of teaching and learning, the teaching and learning observations approach appears to be working effectively and providing further staff benefits through the sharing of information and experiences gained via observation (see paragraph 15 above).

21 In response to the recommendation concerning student engagement strategy, QAHE has an effective system of student representation which is fostering engagement in the oversight of QAHE by students and appropriate training is provided (see paragraph 9 above).

22 QAHE has responded to the recommendation to ensure employer-based supervisors for internships are formally trained and supported to carry out their assessment role within the Level 7 Advanced Practice Module. The review team saw evidence of the work in this area, such as the Advanced Practice: Internship & Professional Development Organisational Supervisor Handbook. All three recommendations are in effect complete and subject to ongoing monitoring internally by QAHE as expected.

23 Student progression data shows that for the majority of programmes, there has been an increase in student performance as a result of the actions of QAHE. The organisation, aware of the increase in student numbers, has ensured that there has been a corresponding increase in lecturer and support staff numbers. In addition, an increase in formative assessment and the use of assessment videos has assisted in maintaining student performance while student numbers increase. The majority of programmes following revalidation have displayed an increase in student performance - for example, the MSc International Business has a pass rate between 92% and 98% for modules in the September 2023 intake. The MBA and Graduate certificate have also performed well. Again, QAHE's positive action through the provision of workshops and further opportunities to develop critical-thinking skills have ensured progress. However, the MSc Marketing programme has not seen the same improvement and QAHE attributes this to anxiety through the introduction of on-campus time-constrained assessments in the revalidated programme.

24 QAHE has introduced workshops in relation to this. The data supplied by QAHE in relation to the 2022 cohort is more variable than the data supplied relating to 2023. In the 2022 data, retention rates are positive - generally between 80% and 100% - and those students who are able to continue on the programme achieve positive results. Data does not indicate students exiting the programmes due to academic failure. As discussed in the meeting with staff and students, there are clearly many avenues of support, both pastoral and academic, which are contributing to positive outcomes.

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

25 QAHE continues to work effectively with the UK 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. Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that requirements of the relevant reference points are met remains with Ulster University as the awarding body.

26 Staff the review team met reported that, as part of any validation or revalidation, they ensure alignment with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and that the ACE team have produced internal guidance on 'levelness' for use by programme teams. Workshops are also provided utilising the Quality Code to set expectations. QAHE has recently been reaccredited for the BSc (Hons) Computing Systems programme with the

British Computing Society and, since the previous monitoring visit, there has been a revalidation of the BSc Computing Systems programme. As part of any validation, QAHE adheres to the frameworks of Ulster University - the awarding body - which are also aligned with relevant external reference points. It was also clear that external examiner reports are shared and disseminated from the awarding body to QAHE. Furthermore, it was clear that action planning and monitoring in response to external feedback was undertaken and valued. QAHE's Learning and Teaching HEA module also utilises the Advance HE's UK Professional Standards Framework.

Background to the monitoring visit

27 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.

28 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Andrew Redford, Reviewer, and Chris McIntyre, QAA Officer, on 18 June 2024.

QAA2855 - R14645 - Jul 24

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2024
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000
Web: www.qaa.ac.uk