



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM VISIT Independent Higher Education UK

INSTITUTION: QA Higher Education, London

ADDRESS: St James' House
10 Rosebery Avenue
London
EC1R 4TF

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Ms Julie Noone

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 7 February 2017

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION ON ACCREDITATION: Continued Accreditation 23 March 2017

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

QA Higher Education (QAHE) was formerly known as QA Business School (QABS). QABS was established and incorporated as a private limited company in October 2010. In July 2014, it changed its name to QAHE. QAHE is part of the QA Limited group, which is a training company. QAHE's senior management team consists of the Managing Director, Executive Dean, Director of Operations, Finance Director, Institutional Relationships Director and a Marketing and Recruitment Director.

QAHE's aim is to provide high quality vocationally-orientated programmes, which support the development of students' knowledge and professional skills, preparing them for the world of work and continuing professional development. There are currently three centres. There is one centre in Manchester which is not accredited by British Accreditation Council (BAC). The other two centres are in London and Birmingham and are separately accredited by BAC. This report relates solely to the London operation.

In 2011, the course provision consisted of Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in Business and Computing, an Advanced Diploma in Management Studies, which was accredited by Edexcel, and the Association of Business Executive's (ABE) Diploma in Integrated Management. At that time, the organisation was in the early stages of recruiting students onto franchised programmes, through an agreement with the University of Ulster. The first students enrolled on the University of Ulster's franchised programmes in September 2011.

In January 2013, a ten-year agreement was signed by QABS and the University of Ulster, which confirmed QABS as an affiliate college. Since that time, the QAHE London has been designated as a branch campus of the University. Formal programme recognition agreements were signed in January, May and September 2013 as well as in January 2014. These agreements covered programmes at Levels 3, 6 and 7.

In 2015, a partnership between QAHE and the University of Roehampton was established. Three and four-year Bachelor of Science (BSc) Business Management degrees were franchised in June 2015. The first cohort of students commenced study in September 2015. Additional undergraduate programmes were franchised in 2016. These were a BSc in Business Management and Entrepreneurship and a BSc in Marketing, which were three and four-year programmes. These were agreed for a September 2016 start. In addition, a BSc in Computing Technologies, of three and four years' duration was agreed to start in September 2016. A part-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) was also included in the agreement, for a September 2016 start. This programme is no longer recruiting students due to a lack of demand.

A London campus of Northumbria University (NU) was opened, in partnership with QAHE, in September 2014. This is based in a second location in Central London. The NU programmes, that are currently delivered, consist of three top-up degrees in Business, Business Enterprise Creation and Management and Applied Computing. There is also a suite of Masters programmes, which includes part-time and full-time delivery. All these programmes were validated between 2014 and 2016.

2. Brief description of the current provision

All the programmes, that are offered, are under a franchise model. The Ulster University provision consists of undergraduate courses in Business Studies, Computer Systems and Accounting and Management. In total, 290 students are registered on these programmes. In addition, there are three postgraduate programmes, which are a Master of Science (MSc) in Marketing, an MSc in International Business and an MBA. There are 80 students studying on these postgraduate courses. The Graduate Certificate is a pre-Master's programme. Students can also enrol on an extended Master's programme in International Business or Marketing, which includes pre-Master study. There are 22 students on these programmes.

The University of Roehampton's provision consists of four undergraduate programmes, which can include a foundation year. There are programmes in Business Management, Business Management and Entrepreneurship, Marketing and Computing Technologies. The last three programmes only have students on the foundation year, whereas the Business Management also has students in years one and two. There are currently 1066 students studying on these programmes. In addition, there is a part-time MBA, with a small number of students. This is currently being taught out.

The Northumbria University's provision consists of a series of top-up degrees in Business, Business Enterprise Creation and Management, and Applied Computing. There are currently 174 students on these programmes.

There is also a suite of Master's programmes, some of which are also delivered in part-time mode. There are 367 students on these programmes.

Across all the programmes, there is about an equal number of male and female students. The majority of students are over the age of 25. There is a strong mix of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Apart from students from the United Kingdom (UK), others come from a variety of locations, including the Middle East, Africa, India, China, the Caribbean, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was conducted over half a day by one inspector. Meetings were held with the Executive Dean, two Associate Deans, the Head of Quality Assurance and other heads of departments. A group of students was interviewed and a teaching session was observed. In addition, various documentation was scrutinised. The information required was readily provided and the institution co-operated well with the inspection process.

4. Inspection history

Full inspection:	7 December 2010
Supplementary inspection:	7 April 2011
Supplementary inspection:	24 August 2011
Interim inspection:	19 March 2012
Re-accreditation:	9 March 2015
Supplementary inspection:	15 December 2015

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

QAHE has developed a partnership with Roehampton University. The first intake of students took place in September 2015. The students were enrolled on either a four or three-year degree programme in business management. This relationship has continued to develop with more programmes being offered, for example in marketing and entrepreneurship and computing.

An increased number of courses is being offered at the second campus in London, where the delivery of the franchised provision, in collaboration with Northumbria University, takes place. These include more full-time Master's courses, including in Web and Mobile Development Technologies and Digital Marketing. There has also been an increase in the provision, which is offered on a part-time basis at the same campus to better cater for mature students, who have been in work for a number of years. Examples of programmes, attracting part-time students, are Cyber Security and Project Management.

In addition, the number of degree programmes, which are offered in conjunction with Ulster University, has increased. A new MBA programme had its first cohort of students in September 2016 and two extended Masters in International Business and Marketing also commenced at the same time. The computing systems course was reinstated in September 2016.

QAHE now develops some of their own assessments, particularly for elements of the Roehampton University provision. These are externally validated by Roehampton University. An Assessment Committee has been established to scrutinise the assessments and to provide support to the staff of QAHE, in order to develop their competence in producing appropriate assessments.

From July 2016, an additional Associate Dean has been recruited. Three Associate Deans are based in the London centre. Each of these three Associate Deans is responsible for managing the relationship with an individual university, with which QAHE has a collaborative relationship. QAHE has also recruited other additional staff, including in the course administration area, where it has now allocated specific roles relating to the different partnership arrangements. Four new staff have been recruited to work in the expanded library. From September 2016, there is also a dedicated study skills tutor, who works with students on a one-to-one or group basis to provide support with English language skills, assessment interpretation and subject understanding. Finally, a Head of Quality Assurance is in post.

In addition, QAHE has strengthened its academic governance. An academic board has been established, which oversees the Ulster University provision. The same arrangement is being put in place for the University of Roehampton. The boards include representation from the universities.

There is a new management system in place, which makes the enrolment process run more smoothly. There is also a new registration process, which enables greater accuracy and data to be used effectively.

In August 2015, QAHE took over an additional floor in the main campus building, to provide more teaching space. The library has been moved to a new floor and now occupies more space. The number of laptops available to students has increased substantially. There are two additional computer rooms as well as two other rooms, where laptops are available. These are also used for the teaching of subjects such as mathematics and statistics. As a result, there are more opportunities for individual study for the students.

At the second London campus, two additional teaching rooms have been set up as well as a multi-purpose room, that can be used for traditional teaching and information technology courses and private work. In addition, the

opening hours at the main campus building have been extended to cover the evening as well as all day Saturday. The second premises are now open all weekend. This has been a gradual process since September 2015. The libraries in both premises also have longer opening hours. These changes at the second premises have been introduced, in part, to cater for the part-time courses, which are now run at weekends.

2. Response to actions points in last report

4.4 The institution must gather student and staff feedback on the question of storage for personal possessions, at the second campus, and action as appropriate

There has been no adverse feedback, from staff or students, at the second campus about storage facilities and the lack of lockers. Students tend to keep their belongings with them and there is a secure room for staff belongings.

11.3 Appraisal procedures must be applied consistently and include peer observation as part of the process

Teachers' performance is regularly appraised through a system of teaching observations, which include peer observations. The peer observations are recorded. The results are not widely shared as they are regarded as confidential and part of the mentoring process. Regular lesson observations are carried out by the teachers' manager. These are recorded. Various templates are in use for this purpose and are not consistent. The results of the observations are used to determine staff development needs and how best practice can be effectively shared. A schedule of observations is maintained for monitoring purposes. In addition to the observations, a general appraisal meeting takes place annually.

11.4 Professional staff development must be more aligned to enhancing academic and pedagogic opportunities, perhaps in conjunction with the University of Ulster

Appropriate staff development takes place. A skills audit has been carried out recently. This provides useful information for each member of staff as to what gaps exist in their development. As a result, appropriate development actions are being taken, for example to help staff gain Fellow or Associate Fellow recognition of the Higher Education Academy. These actions are being taken in conjunction with all three university partners.

A mentoring scheme for new staff is in the process of being set up. Staff can access free courses from QAHE's sister company, QA Learning. The results of lesson observations and the outcomes of the skills audit are used to define the content of the regular staff development days. The skills audit does not include the outcomes of the lesson observations to ensure a full picture of individual staff development needs is available and to ensure effective monitoring and follow-up. Professional development, through academic research, is actively encouraged and supported financially. There is now a Learning and Teaching Committee.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last two reports

QAHE may wish to consider discussing with the University the possibility of semester-long staff exchanges. This could provide QAHE staff with a positive staff development opportunity and also allow them to compare the student experiences in London and Northern Ireland

A variety of informal and formal staff exchanges take place regularly. These include attendance at examination board meetings, staff visits and exchanges and training days. Semester-long staff exchanges are not thought to be viable for practical reasons.

QAHE should respond to comments by external examiners

There is now a systematic process involving written responses to external examiner's comments and an internal process, within QAHE, to change practice and learn from external examiner remarks. External examiner reports from Northumbria University are reviewed in meetings between the staff and the students and feedback is provided to the university. This process is co-ordinated and actions are recorded in an action plan, although the actions arising in connection with Northumbria University are not currently included.

QAHE should continue with the process of implementing the new social programme

A member of staff, who joined in July 2016, has taken over the co-ordination of the social programme. A programme, including a wide range of interesting activities, is arranged, which is appreciated by the students. The activities take into account the various cultures of the students. Efforts are made to ensure they are low cost and some are subsidised. The student representatives are consulted about the social events they would like to see organised. The off-site activities are not subject to a formal written risk assessment.

The points summarised for attention in risk assessment reports should be expressed as an action plan, specifying individuals responsible, deadlines and a review mechanism

An appropriate action plan is maintained containing actions arising from risk assessments.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments The positive response to student feedback is highly effective and very well communicated to the students. There is a robust process in place for the recruitment of staff. There is a new management system in place to make the enrolment process run more smoothly and a new registration process enables greater accuracy and data to be used in a timely fashion. QAHE managers have put in place a rolling programme of quality improvement which is dynamic and pro-active. The website has been redesigned to provide a greater clarity of message. The student interviewing process has been improved. Depending on academic qualification students receive either an admissions or an academic interview. Both types of interview explore applicants' motivation to study with the academic interview also exploring academic aptitude for those applying through a work experience route.				

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments Teaching is good and effective in promoting students' progress.				

4.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments Students confirm that they get very effective personal support at the beginning and throughout their programme of study.				

4.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments None.				

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

Responsive and pro-active management.

There is a strong ethos of care towards the students and, as a result, students are very happy with their overall experience at QAHE.

The library staff are very well qualified.

The library provision is excellent, with good spaces available for group learning and for individual private study.

ACTIONS REQUIRED	Priority H/M/L
None	

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

QAHE is recommended to use the same lesson observation template for all observations for consistency and to provide better performance data, through the grading of the quality of the observations.

QAHE should fully implement the skills audit and consider using it to capture the outcomes of lesson observations. As a result, a full picture of individual staff development needs would be available.

QAHE should consider including the actions arising from Northumbria University’s external examiners’ comments in the centrally maintained action plan.

All off-site social activities should be the subject of a formal written risk assessment.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable None	