BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION
(Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: QA Higher Education

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

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Ms Julie Noone

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 4 June 2020

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 16 July 2020

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

QA Higher Education (QAHE/the Institution) was established and incorporated as a private limited company in October 2010. QAHE is part of QA Limited, which is a privately-owned training company. QAHE provides higher education courses as part of QA Limited's training portfolio. The Institution offers franchised undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in partnership with London Metropolitan University, the University of Middlesex, Northumbria University, Solent University and the University of Ulster.

QAHE currently has four campuses. Two of the campuses are located in Central London and there is a smaller campus in Birmingham, as well as one in Manchester. One of the London campuses is a joint campus with Northumbria University and is designated as the Northumbria University London campus in partnership with QAHE. The provision offered in Manchester does not form part of BAC accreditation.

QAHE's mission is to support its students to fulfil their potential, arming them with the skills to achieve their career aspirations.

QAHE's senior management team consists of the Chief Executive of Higher Education, the Executive Dean, the Dean of Faculty, the Director of Operations, the Finance Director, the Institutional Relationships Director, the Director for Degree Apprenticeships and the Marketing and Recruitment Director. The Chief Executive of Higher Education, as the senior manager, reports to the Executive Board of QA Limited, which agrees the investment and strategic priorities.

In January 2013, a ten-year agreement was signed with the University of Ulster, which confirmed QAHE as an affiliate college and branch campus. Franchise agreements with the University of Ulster were signed in 2013 and 2014. In September 2014, Northumbria University opened a London campus in partnership with QAHE, providing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Business and Computing for full- and part-time study. A further partnership was established with Middlesex University in 2017 for the provision of undergraduate courses in London and Birmingham. Partnerships with Solent University and London Metropolitan University were established in 2019 and 2020 to offer undergraduate programmes in Business and Computing. An agreement with Roehampton University to offer first-degree programmes will end in 2023.

2. Brief description of the current provision

QAHE offers full-time, three-year taught undergraduate programmes and one-year postgraduate programmes through franchise agreements with the University of Ulster. These include undergraduate degrees in Accounting and Management, Business, and Computing, postgraduate degrees in International Business, Marketing, and a Master of Business Administration (MBA). These programmes are offered at one of the London campuses and the Birmingham campus. Middlesex University franchised provision offered in London and Birmingham includes three- and four-year undergraduate programmes in Business Management (Healthcare) and Business Accounting, and a postgraduate MBA.

The Northumbria University London campus hosts 27 courses at Levels 4 to 7 in subjects related to Business, Information Technology (IT) and Computing, Project Management, and Media. Courses franchised from Solent University available in London and Birmingham include undergraduate programmes in Management, Computing, and Creative Industries. Three undergraduate programmes in Business Management that are only available in London are franchised from London Metropolitan University. The University of Roehampton provision at one of the London campuses and the Birmingham campus is no longer accepting applications.

At the time of the inspection, the Birmingham campus had 1,445 students registered on Business and Computing programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. QAHE's London campus has 3,888 students registered, who are following a similar range of Business and Computing programmes. At these two venues, courses are validated by London Metropolitan University, Middlesex University, the University of Roehampton,

Solent University and the University of Ulster. No further students are now being accepted for the Roehampton programmes.

The Northumbria University programmes are only delivered at the Northumbria University London campus. At the time of the inspection, this campus had 1,474 full-time students registered on one-year top-up undergraduate programmes, and postgraduate programmes at Master's level. These courses cover the fields of Business, Computing, Logistics, and Project Management. In addition, 332 students are following similar part-time courses at Master's level, and four students are following a course leading to a postgraduate certificate in Marketing.

The Institution does not recruit any students under 18 years of age, and the majority of its students are from the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU), with an equal number of male and female students. A small number of undergraduate applications are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). All international applications are subject to a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS). Students are drawn from a range of countries, including Bangladesh, India, China, Pakistan, South America and the United Arab Emirates.

The Institution has three main enrolments a year, in January, June and September, and all applications are approved by its partner universities to ensure that students meet the entry requirements prior to any formal offers and enrolments.

3.   Inspection process

The inspection was carried out remotely by one inspector over one day. The inspector held online meetings with members of the senior management team and with a group of students. A comprehensive selection of documentation was made available for scrutiny. The Institution's staff cooperated fully with the inspection process.

4.   Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	9–10 December 2010
Supplementary	23 June 2011
Supplementary	23 August 2011
Interim	14 March 2012
Re-accreditation	16–17 March 2015
Interim	8 February 2017
Re-accreditation	18–20 March 2019

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The senior management team has been expanded and now includes a Director of Degree Apprenticeships and a Deputy Dean for Regions.

Franchise agreements with Solent University and London Metropolitan University were signed in 2019 and 2020 respectively, for the provision of undergraduate degrees.

The degree courses franchised from the University of Roehampton are scheduled to end in 2023 and these courses are no longer recruiting.

2. Response to actions points in last report

1.5 The Institution must develop a formal risk assessment document to support the systematic evaluation of risk and to enhance transparency of risk management.

QAHE has made significant progress with regard to risk assessment and has developed an appropriate formal risk register and risk evaluation process. However, the current risk evaluation does not take account of external risks across the Higher Education (HE) sector. Therefore, QAHE has not systematically evaluated the potential effects of such risks on its provision.

1.6 The Institution must ensure that actions taken in response to regular risk assessments are clearly evaluated and documented.

The Institution's risk assessment process is a recent development, and thus the Institution has yet to produce a formal action plan for evaluation.

2.1 The Institution must develop a formal strategic plan to inform all stakeholders of its key priorities and planned developments.

The Institution has published its significant strategic priorities for development and innovation for consideration by its stakeholders. As a result, stakeholders are informed of its key priorities and planned developments. However, these have not been articulated as a formal strategic plan that includes a review of stakeholder feedback.

6.7 The Institution must ensure that formal teaching observations are consistently used to inform academic appraisals.

A suitable system of regular observations for all teaching staff that effectively inform the appraisal process is in place. This process will help share good practice and areas for development within the teaching team.

15.7 Reference to the BAC complaints procedure must be included in student handbooks.

The BAC complaints procedure is clearly signposted in the student handbook, which is available to all QAHE students.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that teaching observation forms should be standardised to support information collection and analysis across all provision and to inform ongoing improvements.

A sufficiently detailed observation form is now in use with all teaching staff. Observations are used to identify teachers' individual development needs and to inform priorities for the teaching staff as a whole.

The Institution is recommended to develop and build a structured research community to develop its research profile as a development priority.

QAHE has successfully hosted a number of well-received events, including academic conferences, where teachers and guest speakers have shared their research interests with colleagues and students. Teachers are encouraged to develop their research interests, working with QAHE's partner universities. These initiatives are instrumental in promoting research-based teaching and learning.

The Institution should consider introducing procedures for monitoring the quality of feedback on assessments to ensure consistency in the level of detail provided across all the programmes.

Effective standardisation and internal moderation procedures by the partner universities ensure that the standard of marking and quality of feedback are commensurate with the expected standards of each partner.

The Institution should consider clarifying information provided on student accommodation to make it clear that students are required to make their own arrangements.

The website is clear that accommodation is not provided by QAHE. QAHE provides considerable support, through its accommodation office, for students in finding suitable accommodation and publishes a free guide for students entering private rented accommodation.

It is recommended that the Institution ensures that teaching accommodation is allocated appropriately for the size of the group being taught.

QAHE is currently enlarging its premises to ensure that all groups have suitable teaching, study and recreational space.

The Institution should consider providing all students with access to external examiner reports to support the transparency of standards management.

External examiner reports are available on each partner university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), to which all students have access.

4.   Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1   Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: ☐ Met   ☒ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
Comments

The organisational structure, including the relationship between the senior management team and the Chief Executive of Higher Education, is clear, as is the relationship between the Chief Executive of Higher Education and the Executive Board of QA Limited, the parent organisation.

Channels of communication operate efficiently between staff and students, and with external stakeholders through the academic committees. Detailed articulation agreements with external stakeholders have resulted in close, cooperative working arrangements with QAHE's partner universities.

QAHE has developed an appropriate formal risk register and risk evaluation process.

1.5 1.6 Current risk evaluation does not take into account the external risks to the Institution and the risk evaluation procedures have yet to be reviewed or actioned.

QAHE has produced a strategy document for dissemination and discussion.

2.1 However, the strategic priorities for development and innovation have not been articulated as a formal strategic plan.

The Institution's financial management is professionally managed and subject to appropriate external audit.

4.2   General and Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
Comments

The management hierarchy is well understood and ensures the smooth running of the Institution, including in the maintenance of academic standards. Senior management team responsibilities are clearly defined through job designations and comprehensive job specifications. Joint committees with partner universities meet quarterly, work to a standing agenda, inform management decisions and include operational action planning, which is reviewed at the subsequent meeting. Accurate minutes are maintained and circulated as a full record of decisions taken.

The large administrative team is effectively coordinated by the Director of Operations. Policy and procedure documents are suitably summarised for all staff in the employee handbook. Data, including student and staff records, is securely maintained by administrative staff using proprietary software.

Standard HE sector software is used for the electronic submission of assignments, which are internally moderated by partner universities and subject to scrutiny by a university-appointed external examiner, ensuring fair treatment for all the Institution's students. Fee information is provided to all students in a pre-registration information pack.

Staff terms of employment are generous, ensuring the recruitment and retention of highly qualified and experienced staff. Staff roles are defined by detailed job descriptions and an appropriate induction is provided. All new staff have a colleague assigned to them to help them through the first months of their engagement. This is effective in ensuring the best start for all employees. Clearly expressed equality and diversity and complaints policies are available to all staff in the employee handbook.

Staff appraisal involves teaching observations, resulting in an individual action plan that is used to inform the appraisal process. This provides a procedure that is both positive and developmental. Staff are encouraged and supported in achieving Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) to enhance their understanding of the pedagogy of HE teaching and the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). However, the UKPSF is not referenced on the observation form.

Programmes of study are validated by the partner universities and are subject to a high level of scrutiny prior to validation. Learning outcomes, content and assessments are clearly laid out and available to staff and students on partners' websites. Informative summaries of each course are available for prospective applicants on QAHE's website.

Regular Academic Board meetings are held between QAHE and the partner universities, which are recorded formally and include realistic operational action planning, which is reviewed at the beginning of the following meeting. QAHE provides all the materials required for successful course delivery and constantly reviews resource provision to ensure that students and staff have access to the most up-to-date resources.

High-quality course materials are supplied by the partner universities. These materials are appropriately contextualised by teachers to meet the needs of QAHE's students. Student feedback is taken into account when designing programmes of study, which encourages a student-centred approach to course delivery.

4.3	Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

Thorough procedures are in place to ensure that students recruited have the necessary attributes to make a success of their chosen course of study. Entry requirements are transparent in terms of the academic qualifications and English language abilities required for each programme.

The Institution's admissions team is responsible for checking the accuracy of student applications. The marketing team ensures that enquiries receive a reply within a suitable timeframe. The recruitment team works very closely with contracted recruitment agents to ensure that the agents are working with accurate, up-to-date information.

All information on the Institution's website and in its publicity materials is checked by the marketing team for accuracy and is maintained up to date. The information provided gives a very good depiction of QAHE, its courses, locations and features, both in images and text. Information on the cost of courses is clear. This allows prospective students to make informed choices as to the courses that will best suit their academic and career aspirations.

Teaching staff are all qualified to postgraduate level in the subject they are teaching or have relevant expertise in their field. Conferences and seminars allow for the sharing of research activities between staff and students. All staff hold or are working towards FHEA to ensure they have the pedagogical skills to teach at undergraduate and postgraduate level. New staff who have yet to achieve FHEA are funded by QAHE to do so.

Courses are taught well, in line with the course descriptors, and allow most students to achieve their desired qualification. The courses allow students to develop academic and independent learning skills, and use high-quality materials provided by partner universities, complemented by the extensive resources offered by QAHE. Information on assessments is presented in course materials and on each partner university's VLE, and so is readily accessible to students.

Assessments are clearly shown in the partner universities' programme handbooks and relate to programme learning outcomes. Full summative comments on assignments indicate to students where improvements are needed. Propriety plagiarism software is used to identify any instances of academic misconduct. Appeals procedures and mitigating circumstances procedures are dealt with either by QAHE or the partner universities, depending on the context. Up-to-date and research-based teaching materials provided by the partner universities ensure that resources used by QAHE's students are the same as those used by students following the same course at the partner university. The resources can then be adjusted by the course team at QAHE to meet the specific needs of QAHE's students.

4.4	Student Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

QAHE has a dedicated student welfare team at each location, the members of which are very effective at supporting the students and are readily available at all times. Induction procedures are comprehensive, and begin once a student has had an offer, with weekly telephone calls to take the students through the pre-arrival process, followed by regular e-mails. A full induction programme is then provided by the student support teams once the students arrive. Staff are on hand to assist students at any time. Students are very well supported before, on and after arrival.

There are published equality and diversity, safeguarding and radicalisation policies. All staff are required to undergo appropriate online safeguarding and training in preventing radicalisation and extremism, with

regular refresher courses. QAHE has excellent relationships with Prevent duty officers local to its premises. This ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of the Prevent duty, radicalisation risks and channels of communication.

Students have ready access to staff outside the usual teaching hours, and staff have a nominal allowance of two hours a week for student support. Most exceed this by a considerable amount. Staff are conscientious in replying to students' e-mails. Each student is assigned a tutor, who supports them both in academic and personal matters, referring a student to the Institution's welfare team where needed. Effective formative feedback supports students in their studies. Students confirmed that they are well supported in their studies. QAHE has a specialist careers team, the members of which advise students as to future careers or further study.

Academic support is offered for those students who make insufficient progress. However, further support could be offered for those students identified as being in immediate danger of disengagement or failure.

QAHE has a clear complaints procedure and a complaints officer who deals with complaints. Complaints can be escalated to the relevant partner university, and then to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator if necessary. Additionally, students have access to BAC's complaints procedures.

Where a student declares a special educational need or disability, the welfare team has an effective process to make provision for the student, identifying reasonable adjustments that can be made, additional funding that may be available, and by informing teaching staff of the student's additional needs. The welfare team also provides international students with comprehensive support, before and after students' arrival.

QAHE's attendance policy reflects each partner university's attendance policy, which is available to students in the programme handbooks. An electronic registration system for each teaching session ensures that attendance is effectively tracked by the attendance team and absences are promptly followed up.

4.5   Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
Comments

Compliance is based on the findings of the previous inspection and no contrary indications were identified during this inspection.

4.6   Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
Comments

QAHE has effective mechanisms for collecting the views of stakeholders. Student feedback is formally collected through the Staff–Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) and the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). The results of the surveys are collated and discussed at senior management team meetings, and feedback to stakeholders on actions taken is through the SSCC and HE quality reports.

QAHE's quality policies and processes mirror those of its partners. Thus, they are aligned with good practice in HE quality management. QAHE monitors student performance carefully and presents to partners the resulting data and analysis at meetings of university Academic Boards. Performance is measured against performance indicators set by the partner universities and reports are compiled each semester. The Institution assesses the quality of the student learning experience by analysing student progression,

retention and achievement rates over time at programme and module level, and qualitative data from the SSCC and the SSLC. This gives the Institution a comprehensive view of its performance over time.

Re-validation of programmes follows each partner university's procedures, including external representation on validation panels.

Good practice is disseminated throughout the Institution through innovative means such as lunchtime events where staff are invited to present an aspect of their work to colleagues.

4.7   Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.   ☒ Yes   ☐ No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The collegiate approach of the senior management team allows for an integrated approach to the management and development of the Institution.

A close working relationship with the Institution's partner universities ensures that the student experience matches that of students at the partner universities.

A commitment to constant improvement provides the students with access to up-to-date facilities, resources and learning technologies.

The academic and pastoral support for students ensures that they have the best chance of success in their chosen studies and enjoy their time with QAHE.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

1.5 1.6 The Institution must identify in the risk register the potential effects on its provision of risks affecting the whole of the UK HE sector and take any resulting actions.	☐ High	☒ Medium	☐ Low
2.1 The Institution must develop a formal strategic plan that includes a review of stakeholder feedback.	☐ High	☒ Medium	☐ Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

The Institution should include the UKPSF on the teaching observation form used for appraisal.

The Institution should consider providing specialist support for disengaged and non-achieving students.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE