



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION Independent Higher Education (UK)

INSTITUTION: QA Higher Education, Birmingham

ADDRESS: 5th Floor, Centre City
5-7 Hill Street
Birmingham
B5 4UA

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Ms Julie Noone

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 8 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 Relationship 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 Birmingham 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 Executives (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.

2. Brief description of the current provision

All the programmes, that are offered, are under a franchise model. The Ulster University provision, delivered at the Birmingham campus, consists of a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Business Studies. There are 84 students registered on this programme. In addition, there is a postgraduate programme in International Business with 13 students registered. There are 9 students registered on the Extended International Business Programme, which includes pre-Master's study.

The University of Roehampton provision consists of four undergraduate programmes, which can include a foundation year. They 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 has students in Year 1. There is a total of 277 students registered 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 30. Although the majority of students come from the United Kingdom (UK), others come from a variety of locations, including Africa, India, and Pakistan.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over half a day. Interviews were held with a group of senior staff, including the Executive Dean, an Associate Dean, Head of Quality Assurance, Head of Learning Resources and others responsible for specific functions, such as Registry and Student Services. The inspector met with students and observed undergraduate classes. Documentation was scrutinised including the appraisal process, the student activities information and the Data Collection Form. All information requested was made available. There was good cooperation between all staff engaged in the inspection and the inspector. All staff and students involved were very welcoming and positive about the inspection process.

4. Inspection history

Full accreditation:	9 - 10 December 2010
Supplementary:	23 June 2011
Supplementary:	23 August 2011
Interim Visit	14 March 2012
Re-accreditation:	16 - 17 March 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

In 2015, a partnership between QAHE and the University of Roehampton was established. A three and four year BSc Business Management degree was validated in June 2015, which commenced in September 2015. Additional undergraduate programmes were validated in 2016. A BSc in Business Management and Entrepreneurship and a BSc in Marketing, both three and four year programmes, were validated for a September 2016 start. A BSc in Computing Technologies, lasting both three and four years, started in September 2016.

Ulster University is keen to increase their geographical reach and offer courses to international and United Kingdom students at the Birmingham campus. The Ulster University's Master of Science (MSc) in International Business has been offered in Birmingham since September 2012. The Ulster University's Extended MSc in International Business began in September 2016 and the Ulster University's Extended MSc in Marketing has a planned start date of May 2017.

QAHE now develops some of their own assessments, particularly for elements of the Roehampton University provision. These are externally validated by the 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. The first meeting of the Assessment Committee is to be held in London although staff from Birmingham are invited to participate.

There are now four Associate Deans, of which one has specific regional responsibilities and covers activities in Birmingham. 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. 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.

There is now a well-stocked library with over 3,000 books. The number of desktop and laptop computers has been increased and a self-service system has been introduced. The space in the library has been increased.

2. Response to action points in last report

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. This message may need to be further reinforced with the staff in Birmingham, who may regard the peer observations as part of the formal performance management procedure.

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 Training and Learning Committee.

Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

QAHE may wish to consider discussing with the University the possibility of semester-long staff exchanges. This could provide QAHE staff with positive staff development opportunities and also allow them to compare the student experiences in Birmingham 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 examiners' comments and an internal process within QAHE to change practice and learn from external examiner remarks.

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

QAHE have put in place a multi-cultural social programme for students. The activities mainly take place during the day, to take into account the fact that the majority of students are mature students, who have family commitments in the evenings. Multicultural events are held to celebrate, for instance, the Chinese New Year, Ramadan and Diwali. This helps students understand cultural differences within the student population. Other events include celebrating Mother's Day and a Valentine poem competition. The off-site activities are not subject to a formal written risk assessment

3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

3.1 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.

3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments There is a good mix of formative and summative assessment. Students are very positive about the QAHE staff and their educational experience.				

3.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments Very good care is taken to support all students from a wide geographical mix.				

3.4 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

Management are responsive and pro-active.

Students are fully engaged and well-motivated who enjoy their learning.

The campus is supportive, friendly and creates a community identity within the student body.

Students are very positive about the quality of service in the library.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

Priority
H/M/L

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.

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