

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

11 March 2021

Agenda Item 12

COVER SHEET

CONTINUOUS ASSURANCE OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT (CAQE)

Presenter: Ms C Reid

To consider the report on the outcomes from CAQE (Collaborative Provision)
2019/20.

CONTINUOUS ASSURANCE OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT (COLLABORATIVE PROVISION) ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

1. INTRODUCTION

At its meeting on 4 June 2020 Committee agreed that the pilot Continuous Assurance of Quality Enhancement (CAQE): Collaborative Provision process for the 2018/19 academic year be approved. It was also agreed that the pilot CAQE (Collaborative Provision) be adopted as the University's annual monitoring mechanism for ensuring the standard and quality of awards delivered and assessed in partner institutions.

CAQE (Collaborative Provision) aims to:

- enhance Faculty oversight of quality assurance processes;
- reduce the administrative workload with more concise forms and use of benchmarks and metrics;
- enable targeted enhancement activity and action planning;
- monitor articulation to Ulster programmes.

CAQE (Collaborative Provision) arrangements only apply to validated provision. Courses offered under franchised, outcentre or joint collaborative agreements continue to be monitored through the University's internal CAQE arrangements. The University's position with regard to standards management and quality assurance requirements in partner institutions is that they will be aligned, where practicable, with the procedures in place for the University's internal programmes.

2. OUTCOMES FROM THE 2019/20 CONTINUOUS ASSURANCE OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT (COLL. PROVISION) REVIEW

During October 2020 Quality Enhancement (QE) provided Faculties with enrolments, success and progression data for each approved programme of study. Faculties scrutinized the data and where additional information was required, or where the Faculty had concerns about a programme, Course Teams in partner institutions were required to complete an Action Plan. A total of 37 Action Plans were requested from partner institutions broken down as follows:

- BMC 4 Action Plans
- NRC 11 Action Plans
- NWRC 7 Action Plans
- SERC 5 Action Plans
- SRC 4 Action Plans
- SWC 6 Action Plans

When analysing the data cognisance was taken of the unprecedented arrangements for the delivery and assessment of semester 2 modules.

Completed Action Plans, which were signed off by senior management within the partner institution, were reviewed by Faculties with follow-up action taken as required.

No follow-up meetings with senior management in Colleges were required and the relevant Faculty Partnership Manager (FPM) will continue to monitor.

Summarized below, by Faculty, are the main outcomes from the review.

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)

AHSS has partnerships with all 6 Regional Colleges, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and the Health and Social Care Leadership Centre/Western Trust. A total of 2790 students were registered on approved Ulster University programmes in 2019/20. Across colleges (excepting SERC), student numbers are reduced.

The provision within the Regional Colleges is clustered around three main subjects: Social Work, Counselling (Cert and FdSc), and Access Diploma (with exit point of Certificate) with the vast majority of student numbers being located within these main subject areas.

AHSS has the largest provision of Access programmes, with students progressing from these programmes to Ulster UG programmes in LHS, CEBE and UUBS as well as AHSS. COVID-19 restrictions have been particularly difficult for Access students. The cohort is 67% female, and frequently have significant caring roles for children and older adults, with various impacts on work and finances. In addition, the move to online delivery has been particularly challenging for this group who have missed the motivation of face-to-face teaching which has been reflected in higher attrition rates.

Attrition on the Social Work programmes remains relatively low, and despite significant Covid impacts all final year students proceeded to graduation in 2020 as planned.

The Certificate in Counselling Studies and FdSc Integrative Counselling Practice continue to attract substantial numbers of students across all six Colleges. Student placements on the FdSc remain an issue due to Covid and completion will inevitably be delayed in 2021 for the majority of current students impacting on attrition and success data. The majority of graduates from the FdSc find work in the industry, however, plans are ongoing to improve progression to the BSc (Hons) Professional Development in Counselling.

The AB in English and History was withdrawn due to the move to a new provider within SRC (Liverpool John Moores) and the programme is now being taught out. Within NRC the FdA Interactive Design has now been taught out, with the final students completing in August 2020. A pragmatic decision by NRC, this is disappointing, given a positive course team and strong subject links into the Faculty.

The collaborative partnerships with PSNI and NIPS are as a result of tendered for contracts and student numbers are therefore stronger than other validated provision. Attrition is very low as these courses are linked to entry to both the organisations.

Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment

The Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment was the largest faculty in terms of extent of regional validated provision, with the highest rate of articulation to linked courses in 2019/20.

In terms of total enrolments, the Faculty had 1,393 students enrolled on 62 active course codes in 19/20. There was a drop in enrolments on full-time courses, and a rise in enrolments on part-time courses, largely due to an expansion of HLA provision.

A total of 651 (40%) students articulated to the University in September 2020 (570 to full-time courses, 81 to part-time courses).

The Faculty did not have sight of the financial agreements with the colleges in 19/20. If colleges were to forward all per capita fees in addition to the annual course fee, this would have yielded a total of £258,615 plus the annual course fee. With 31 unique courses in operation under 62 active course codes, the expectation is that, at a rate of £6,190 per annum, a further £191,890 in course fees would be paid, totalling an estimated income of £450,505.

There were (and still are) too many courses operating with small enrolments (South West College is particularly prone to this) on campuses which are in close proximity to other providers. The HE in FE market is crowded and colleges will not co-operate in certain areas as they are competing for students. Courses in the Built Environment have contracted in the North West and Northern Region, and some colleges' remit to provide all courses on all campuses led to a thinning out of numbers where consolidation might have improved class size. This is an ongoing issue which the Faculty is actively keeping under review.

There were still instances of 2Y3S in operation and the Faculty is seeking to actively remove this mode as revalidation occurs, while working to promote the interim solution of two years, one semester, until the University elaborates a mode which is more suited for Higher Level Apprenticeships. This is not without its challenges and the Faculty is assured that the revised model is being progressed for resolution in 2020-21.

Any real growth in the colleges in 19/20 was largely in part-time recruitment through apprenticeships. However, this strategy came adrift when the pandemic hit, with many students furloughed or ultimately made redundant. It is unclear whether the DfE initiatives to kick start new activity will have any effect in the current environment. Foundation degree year 1 enrolments in September 2020 were well down on previous levels due to a dearth of apprenticeships and a significant increase in QUB enrolments (QUB took at least 150 extra students into year 1 computing regardless of grades, and an extra 800 overall). This will affect articulation in two years' time.

The Open University has emerged as a more prominent validating body, enabling colleges to offer new Foundation degrees. South West College now has 5 top-up degrees, as well as new Foundation degrees. Some of the new provision replicates the provision validated by Ulster up to last year, but is now validated by Open University. Southern Regional also moved its construction Foundation degree to Open University, but this new award does not map to our own provision for articulation purposes. Discussions are ongoing with the College to seek a solution to this. Belfast Met is to introduce a top-up degree in Cyber Security, again with Open University, with whom they have a Foundation degree in the area. This ongoing consolidation of market share by the OU and represents a significant challenge to the University and, as such, necessitates a dedicated and targeted marketing campaign to promote our offering as the university of choice.

A further concern is that DfE are funding new HLAs based on the OU awards, where they had previously approved funding based on the award validated by the University: the Foundation Degree in Building Services with Sustainable Energy validated by the Open University is a virtually identical replacement for our Foundation degree in Architectural Energy and Engineering which was previously funded as a HLA. While we validate awards, we have no control over how they are used, especially in the context of HLAs. There is an urgent need to establish formal lines of communication between DfE and the University in relation to funding of HLAs based on our validated awards.

Summary of potential actions:

- Encourage consolidation of disparate provision through the revalidation process.

- Review of the current pricing model to look at matters including a floor per course and an uncapped per capita.
- Commencement of a dedicated marketing campaign to influence students to choose Ulster over the alternative college-based OU offering for top-up degrees.
- Establish direct lines of communication with DfE to ensure we know when and how our courses are used in the context of HLAs.

Faculty of Life and Health Sciences

The Faculty of Life and Health Sciences currently has collaborative partnership provision with 9 Colleges. In total, there were 691 students registered on full-time programmes and 335 registered on part-time programmes.

Within the Faculty there are 3 programmes delivered as Subject Networks across a number of the colleges (FdSc Applied & Medical Sciences, FdSc Sports Coaching & Fitness and FdSc Health & Social Care).

CAFRE provision focuses on the Food, Agriculture, Horticulture and Equine subject areas and recruited 474 students in 2019/20 (381 full-time and 93 part-time).

Hong Kong SPACE partners recruit well onto BSc and PgD/MSc programmes in the area of Food and Human Nutrition, recruiting 115 part-time students in 2019/20.

At NRC, NWRC, and SWC the Faculty had concerns regarding small cohort sizes. Action plans were provided and no further action is required at present. There was a concern noted in relation to attrition on programme FdSc Health and Social Care at NWRC. An action plan has been received from the college and actions will be focused on recruitment strategies within schools and towards Level 3 students on programmes at NWRC. No further action is required at this point.

The Faculty would propose that all programmes continue as planned on the revalidation cycle and that no programmes should have an earlier revalidation or suspend intake.

Ulster University Business School (UUBS)

UUBS supports 36 validated programmes across all 6 Regional Colleges, and in qualifications ranging from Access Diplomas to FD programmes. There is one Subject Network (involving 5 of the Regional Colleges) within the provision, in the area of Hospitality and Travel and Tourism. In addition, there is validated provision with HTMi Switzerland for a BSc Hons award. A total of 525 students were enrolled in 2019/20 comprising 443 full-time and 82 part-time students.

Progressing students performed strongly, with 84% of the full-time cohort achieving an exit award in 2019/20 at 2.1 level or better. This is more than comparable with the performance of the students joining Ulster at level 4.

Initial rates of articulation for entry to the 2020/21 year show that 200 students joined UUBS programmes from a partner college, gaining entry on the basis of FdSc, HND/HNC or Access Diplomas. Of the 190 Year 2 students in local Colleges eligible to progress, 123 (65%) progressed to Ulster University.

Review of the metrics across UUBS provision identified one common theme for some of the colleges:

- Low/decreasing enrolment numbers, in Hospitality & Tourism programmes at NWRC, Business & Digital Technology at NRC and in the Leadership and Management provision at SERC.

Additionally, for one College's provision, FdSc Business Services Management at 2 campuses, NR's and EALs were a concern.

College partners were asked to provide action plans, including specific interventions to address the above identified concerns. The success of any interventions will be monitored and reviewed in 2020/21 to inform UUBS's response to identified issues.

The College partnerships form an important contributor to School income and to the achievement of the academic plan for both MaSN and non-regulated targets. The articulation from the College provision is particularly key to the achievement of the academic plan for two Departments (GBE and HTM), where the articulation annually supports up to 1/3 of their projected intake. In addition to the value added in supporting the achievement of the academic plan, if the Ulster Validated fee model (with min/max per capita fees and annual validation fee) as cited on the Finance web site is applied, UUBS validated provision, less the costs of supporting the activity, makes a net positive contribution to the Faculty.

In conclusion, UUBS partnership provision, is performing at a largely acceptable level in this year, albeit with some likely further Covid impact, particularly around numbers progressing. The FPM and Faculty team will continue to explore other ways of continuing to grow and develop this market.

Going forward the Faculty will consider the following non-financial benefits that could be offered to expand collaborative activity:

- Access to UUBS Staff Development opportunities
- Provision of specific staff training
- Access to UUBS L&T Events
- Access to UUBS Guest Lecture series (staff and/or students as appropriate)
- Collaboration with UUBS L&T Research initiatives and Projects
- Partnership with UUBS colleagues to co-develop conference presentations (e.g., QAA Annual Conference, CAB LTSE Conference, etc)
- Guest Lectures offered at Colleges
- Recognition or reward for top performing students (akin to Dean's Award)
- Development of Alumni space and ongoing interventions to support (and recruit to our non-regulated programmes) career development, post FdSc.

3. KEY FINDING FROM CONTINUOUS ASSURANCE OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT (COLLABORATIVE PROVISION)

While there are no specific issues which Faculties wish to refer to Committee there are a number of matters to note.

- The impact that COVID-19 has had on the level entry qualifications (i.e. Centre Assessed Grades) and the related significance of this with regard to entry levels to HEI's in 2020/21 and predicted again for 2021/22.
- A need to review current funding model: There is an urgent need to review the current Ulster funding model which caps the fee payable by partner institutions

regardless of the number of students enrolled on the course. Consideration should also be given to a setting a different fee for HLA provision. There is also concern that the full fees are not being collected by the University with the current model not being fully implemented.

- Increasing competition with new validating partners entering and/or aggressively promoting entry to the sector (i.e. OU, English Institutions such as LJMU, Scottish Institutions such as Edinburgh Napier and Republic of Ireland Institutions such as Dundalk Institute of Technology) continue to pose a threat. Building stronger links and lock-ins (such as the Summer bridging for HND at BMET) with key Colleges, is a way of mitigating this threat.
- Increased MAsN allowances within HEI's in NI and the impact of QUB enrolling an additional 800 MAsN places. This has led to a decrease in enrolments in FdScs in Colleges and a potentially large drop in articulation numbers in 2 years.

4. RECOMMENDATION

That the outcomes from the 2019/20 Continuous Assurance of Quality Enhancement (Collaborative Provision) be approved.