

## ULSTER UNIVERSITY

### REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNITS 5Dii BUSINESS AND 5Gii MBA FRANCHISED PROVISION AT QAHE.

26 June 2018

PRESENT: Professor Paul Carmichael, Associate Dean (Global Engagement), Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (Chair)  
Mrs Helen Collins, Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management  
Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University  
Mrs Shamim Warwick, Senior Lecturer in Business Systems,  
University of Bedfordshire  
Dr Darryl Cummins, Head of Department of Management, Leadership and Marketing, Ulster University Business School  
Mrs Ursula Chaney, Lecturer, School of Nursing, Ulster University  
Miss Jelena Cekmeniova, Student Union Representative QAHE

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr Peter Green, Head of QAHE Partnership, Ulster University Business School  
Ms Debbie Troy, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

## 1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The panel was convened to consider the following franchised provision at QAHE:

- GradCert in Business (FT, London and Birmingham)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA) (*non-executive*) (with GradCert/ PgCert/ PgDip exit awards) (FT, London)

### GradCert in Business (FT, London and Birmingham)

The GradCert in Business was first introduced for delivery at QAHE's London and Birmingham campuses from September 2013. The course is one semester in duration and currently comprises three compulsory 20 credit point modules at Level 6. It was originally developed to support expansion and diversification into international markets and to provide structured pathways to designated Master's degrees. Its aim was to allow students who did not have sufficient academic standing to meet the entry requirements for study at Master's level. Students who successfully complete the programme and achieve a minimum of 50% in all modules are eligible to progress to the MSc in International Business, delivered at QAHE's London and Birmingham campuses or the MSc in Marketing delivered at QAHE's London campus. In 2016, a new integrated pathway was also introduced through two extended Master's programmes with the GradCert incorporated into the MSc in International Business and MSc in Marketing. The GradCert in Business is also offered as a stand-alone course to students who do not meet the requirements for entry to the MBA.

### Master of Business Administration (MBA) (*non-executive*) (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (FT, London)

The MBA (*non-executive*) was first introduced for delivery in full-time mode only at QAHE's London campus from September 2016. It comprises 10 compulsory, 15 credit point modules plus a 30 credit point Business Project. Students who successfully complete 60 or 120 credit

points can exit with a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration respectively.

From the academic year 2018/19, students can also choose to undertake an additional 60 credit points from either *Internship and Professional Development Project* or *Applied Consulting Project* to gain the MBA with Advanced Practice.

## 2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statement for Business and Management (2015) and Master's degree characteristics (2015);
4. Preliminary comments from Panel members and Partnership Manager.

## 3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Panel met with QAHE senior staff, namely Dr Tim Harris, Executive Dean; Mr John Howell, Dean; Dr Craig Duckworth, Associate Dean Ulster University Programmes; Ms Janis Gladwin, Head of Quality Assurance; and Dr Peter Green, Head of Partnership, Ulster University Business School.

It was noted that this was franchised provision and both 'home' programmes had been revalidated and the curriculum approved earlier in the current academic year. The curriculum to be delivered at QAHE mirrored that of the 'home' courses and was not the focus of discussions, rather the institution's understanding and delivery of the curriculum.

### 3.1 Background and Rationale

The Panel enquired how the programmes fitted in with QAHE's overall provision. The Senior Team advised that QAHE currently worked in partnership with five universities, of which Ulster University was one, and through which a suite of programmes had been developed which were accessible, of a high quality and offered good progression opportunities. The first graduates from the University of Roehampton partnership were now coming through and it was envisaged that the Ulster MBA offered a great opportunity for these students and indeed many of whom already had a number of years work experience which was a requirement for the programme. The Ulster MBA was viewed as the pinnacle programme in QAHE's suite of courses. The new proposed Advanced Practice pathway was an excellent addition and enhancement to the MBA.

The Graduate Certificate in Business also played an important part in the strategy in that it opened up opportunities for those students who had fallen short in meeting Master's entry standard. This programme was initially aimed at international students but had increasingly been availed of by domestic students to prepare them for their target programme.

### 3.2 Staff resources

In relation to resources, QAHE currently had some 150 lecturing staff across a range of disciplines including business, computing and accounting, of which 75 were permanent and others worked on a sessional/associate basis. The teaching team for the GradCert both at the London and Birmingham campuses were all permanent supported by a team of reliable long-term part-time staff.

There was a strong consistency in the lecturing team over the past number of years. Course Directors also taught on the programmes which ensured that they maintained a sound oversight.

From a teaching team of 14 staff a number of years previously, staff numbers had increased considerably – increases were driven by programme developments and demands. If any additional staff were required, this would be addressed.

### 3.3 Staff Development

It was noted that a dedicated Associate Dean with responsibility for staff development was in place. All staff participated in four QAHE staff development days annually but were also supported for other development opportunities as identified on an ongoing individual or group basis and to attend other events and conferences.

### 3.4 Pass rates

The Panel noted the pass rates were considerably lower than those students who attended the same course on the Ulster campus but was advised that this reflected the fact that QAHE students required more support. QAHE had a very strong support infrastructure and pass rates for second sits were very good. Student issues were very often welfare related and significant support was provided to support students in both academic and pastoral matters.

The new Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team was now operational and comprised qualified tutors available to provide one to one support as well as group workshops to any students who needed assistance or guidance in any aspect of student life. It was envisaged that this additional resource would greatly assist all students.

### 3.5 Blended Learning

The Panel enquired as to the approach to blended learning and was advised that there was a very strong VLE presence through BlackBoard Learn and students were supported in all aspects of its functions and use. Programmes were very much class based, however, BBL was used in different ways in different modules and the flipped classroom model was utilised in the MBA. Online support and use of the VLE was being continually enriched.

The new Advanced Practice pathway in the MBA programme was also an opportunity for those who wished to undertake the internship in their home country rather than in the UK and online resources would really come into play in such cases to maintain contact remotely. The Team had a very flexible approach to student interaction and engagement and already used a variety of means to do so.

### 3.6 Management of the partnership

The Panel asked how the QAHE and Ulster teams worked together on a day to day basis. Firstly, at a higher level, the Senior Team advised that a good support structure was in place around the partnership which included a dedicated Head of Partnership based in the Ulster University Business School as well joint governance and monthly meetings in this regard.

At programme level, the two teams communicated regularly; the Ulster/QAHE Course Directors had a good working relationship. This was the same for the relevant module co-ordinators. This attention and commitment to the partnership by the Ulster team was very important to its ongoing success.

The Head of Partnership attended all QAHE examination boards and staff/student Consultative Committees. A Department Board which met once per semester via video conferencing, involved course directors and module co-ordinators from both QAHE and Ulster.

Over the years of the partnership, the relationship between the two institutions had developed considerably and QAHE now had much more input into all aspects of the curriculum and its development and delivery.

The Panel noted that QAHE had relationships with other partners and asked how Ulster fitted within this strategy in terms of continuance. The Senior Team advised that Ulster was its longest established partner and considerable work had been put into it to date. Furthermore, from a market perspective, QAHE were able to recruit internationally onto Ulster programmes. Longer term opportunities existed for QAHE to move from franchised towards validated provision.

The Ulster MBA was the only programme of its kind offered by QAHE and really appealed to applicants who were attracted by the Ulster brand.

### 3.7 Student Support of and Feedback

The Senior Team advised that a very strong ethos existed around the provision of feedback and this was provided both in groups and individually. Students were also provided with opportunities to provide staff with feedback through module feedback forms and Staff/Student Consultative Committees.

### 3.8 Course Design

The Panel welcomed the introduction of the *Business Enterprise* module into the Graduate Certificate programme and was advised by the Senior Team that the rationale was to ensure that students were equipped to undertake the MBA modules. Entrepreneurship remained the focus of the module, however, some of the higher level knowledge across a range of subjects had also been introduced to address any gaps prior to progression to the MBA.

### 3.9 Projected intakes

The Panel noted the significant increase in projected intakes to the MBA in 2019/20 and was advised that this was due to the new Advanced Practice pathway, as well as a renewed vigour in the partnership and a broader effort to take the partnership forward.

The Senior Team advised that, given the large proportion of international students, it was difficult to confirm a set minimum intake for each course and this was a matter which had already been discussed with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). The key issue for the Team was to ensure the student and academic experience were not compromised if numbers did fall slightly below targets and that any such instances would be reported through the relevant channels.

## 4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of four students from across both the GradCert in Business who had undertaken the course as part of one of the Extended Master's, and the MBA.

During discussions, the following was noted:

- The GradCert had been good experience and had prepared students well for the Master's.

- More support on academic writing would be welcomed.
- Responses were mixed in relation to the number of text books available – some had no issues and others found that they were not able to get a book in the library that they needed as all copies were already out on loan. This was often as a result of competing assessment deadlines across courses/modules.
- There was no expectation for students to purchase text books as there were normally sufficient library copies.
- QAHE was noted as different to a University as it delivered courses from a number of different institutions. This was positive from the students' perspective.
- The quality of course delivery was very good.
- Students chose the course at QAHE because of its professionally experienced staff and Ulster's very good reputation. Professional experience of teaching staff was greatly valued by the students as students benefitted from real life and current industry related knowledge and skills.
- The GradCert progression rate of only some 30% for a particular cohort was raised and the quality of the students on the course could be detrimental to the whole group.
- Prospective applicants to the GradCert should perhaps be scrutinised further to ensure that only those who were capable and suitable were admitted onto the course.
- Students were aware of the ACE team and they had been very helpful in terms of help with assessments.
- More emphasis on communication skills specifically for business, for example, delivering presentations and business terminology, would be welcomed.
- Views were mixed in relation to students' English language skills – some felt that this should be of a certain standard prior to entry and that it was simply a matter of hard work to be successful.
- Students were not aware of any differences in programme success between students whose first language was or was not English.
- Support from staff had been excellent and they always encouraged students to do well.
- Staff were always accessible and all students were very positive in this regard.
- Lecturers provided good support in preparing students for delivery of presentations.
- The MBA course offered a broad range of modules across a number of subject areas and was a very enjoyable course.
- Not having undertaken the GradCert, an MBA student stated that the most appropriate modules to prepare for the MBA would be around an introduction to some of the core subjects, for example finance.
- Students viewed internship and work based learning opportunities as very important and an enhancement to programmes.
- In the MBA, visits to large employers and key organisations would really enhance the course and student experience, for example, to see operational management in practice.
- Students were generally clear on what was required to pass assessments and were told explicitly the requirements for each module. The Panel queried if this included that both assessment components were required to be passed – there were mixed views in this regard.
- Assistance was provided in relation to CV and interview preparation, however, all students would very much welcome opportunities to engage directly with employers and attend recruitment fairs. All were of the view that QAHE should be more proactive in communicating such opportunities to students.

The Panel thanked the students for their engagement and wished them well with the studies and future careers.

## 5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

### 5.1 Graduate Certificate in Business

The Panel noted the projected student intakes set out in the documentation and success rates highlighted by students and their understanding of the purpose of the Graduate Certificate in Business. The Panel asked the Course Team to provide some additional information and clarification on each of these matters. The Team stated that the main aim of the GradCert programme was to equip students with the necessary skills (study skills, research skills, academic writing and referencing) to prepare them for further study at Master's level. It also provided a means to build confidence in preparation for study at Level 7. Some students required to undertake bridging to bring them up to the standard for Master's level study and the GradCert provided this. The GradCert was aimed international students, 'home' students who did not attain an undergraduate classification of 2:1 or higher and those who were returning to higher education after a long gap. The target student market had a mixed demography for both courses and programmes were reviewed in line with changes in student profile – changes to both programmes were already evident in the reviewed programme structure and content.

The Panel noted differing student views on preparedness for further study having undertaken the GradCert. There were mixed expectations as a result of the wide range of student backgrounds but it was important that the GradCert was a course which prepared all students, irrespective of their background.

The Panel sought clarification on whether the GradCert in Business was viewed as a stand-alone course or bridging to a designated Master's programme and was advised by the Team that it was designed for both purposes. Students were given the choice at enrolment, however, only a very small proportion undertook the course as a stand-alone qualification.

## 5.2 Intakes and pass rates - GradCert in Business

The Team advised that Panel that the intakes for September 2017 had been approximately 55 students for the London campus and 17 to Birmingham. In relation to the January 2018 start, it had been 18-20 for London and 2 to Birmingham. These breakdowns had not been set out in the documentation. Currently at week four, there were 21 students on the London campus and the course was not running in Birmingham.

When asked for confirmation of the pass rate for those recruited in September 2017, it was confirmed that all who undertook the stand-alone programme had passed and from the remaining students there had been a number of early leavers. The rate of progression was 38%. The Team stated that induction clearly articulated to students the expectations of the course and former students were invited to speak to new students in this regard. The Panel noted that this referred back to staff and student perceptions of the course and that this must be clear to all parties.

## 5.3 Academic Writing and Study Skills

Differing views on the level of support in relation to academic writing skills were noted during the student meeting and the Panel sought clarification from the Team on how such skills were developed to equalise all students. The number of hours for the development of study skills and academic writing had increased on the GradCert through the merging of two previous modules. Academic writing was covered from the basics to ensure that all student profiles were covered. Group work was also a significant part of assessment within the course and provided good opportunities for international students to improve or build on their English language skills

Academic writing commenced with diagnostic testing in week 1 and based on this the module content would be tailored to the needs of the student group to ensure that all abilities

were getting the support to reach the required standard. Student groups were relatively small and this current process was manageable. They were encouraged to work together in pairs or small groups and staff ensured diversity in all group tasks.

#### 5.4 Resources

The Panel reported the varying student views on the availability of library resources and core texts. They asked if students were expected to purchase any core texts or was it the expectation that all books would be available through the library. The Team advised that it followed Ulster's policy and practice in this regard. Students were made aware that the expectation was that they would purchase one text per module, however, as this did not generally happen, additional copies of core texts were purchased by the library, many of which were also available as e-books.

As franchised provision, QAHE students had full access to the Ulster library and its resources and were provided with a full library induction. They also had access to other libraries through the SCONUL scheme.

#### 5.5 ACE Team

The Panel asked the Team to provide some further details on the ACE Team and was advised that this newly introduced resource provided students with assistance on research skills, academic writing, guidance for returners to education, accessing the Portal, essay writing and other pastoral issues including coping strategies and time management. As well as one to one support, the team also delivered workshops to groups of students, the next one covering the topic of referencing. The ACE Team provided an additional service over and above that already available in every module.

#### 5.6 Careers and Employability

The Panel advised the Course Team of the perceived gap in terms of student awareness of and engagement with employment/recruitment fairs. This was acknowledged by the Team but staff informed the Panel that they had now moved away from an outsourced model to a fully staffed in-house service comprising a team of eight to include a full-time information officer at each campus as well as a full-time professional careers consultant. This was continuing to embed and the benefits of which would continue to become more apparent to students going forward. To date this had included a weekly student newsletter, increased access to online resources, a careers pod and private consulting rooms. The potential also existed to use Facebook and Twitter as was done at Ulster.

The Panel enquired if employers tended to approach the institution and the Team confirmed that this was the case as well as guest speakers from industry visiting to address students.

#### 5.7 Projected intakes - MBA

The Panel noted the significant increase in the projected intakes to the MBA from 2019/20 and was advised that this was due to the introduction of the new Advanced Practice pathway. It was the view that this would greatly enhance the programme and provide an opportunity to attract additional numbers. The potential also existed to develop new markets through in-country agent networks and the trend was very much an upward one.

When asked the extent to which Ulster featured in the promotion of the programmes, the Team advised that the Marketing and Admission Team worked across multiple partners. QAHE was able to offer and deliver a wide variety of programmes and work out how best to tap into specific markets. Ulster programmes and the Ulster branding was used widely to

promote these courses to prospective students and the QAHE Marketing and Recruitment team worked very closely with their counterparts at Ulster in this regard.

## 5.8 New Advanced Practice pathway - MBA

The Panel noted the proposed new sequencing of the Advanced Practice pathway which was now to be prior to the Business Project and two other modules. This would require three modules, namely *Business Project*, *Digital Transformation* and *Strategy* to be delivered twice in order to accommodate students who undertook the pathway and those who did not. The Panel sought confirmation that this additional delivery could be resourced and assurance was provided by the Team.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The facilities available for students and, in particular, the availability of e-resources;
- ii) The ACE team;
- iii) The small group work;
- iv) The flexibility, commitment and enthusiasm of the staff and the support provided to students.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programmes be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018/19 to 2022/23 inclusive) subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office **by 18 July 2018** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

### Maximum Intakes

#### Graduate Certificate in Business

	Mode of Attendance	Year 2018 Sept Intake	Year 2019 Jan Intake	Year 2019 Sept Intake	Year 2020 Jan Intake
Maximum cohort size for each site recommended by Faculty	London FT	50	50	50	25
	Birmingham FT	25	25	25	15

#### MBA

	Mode of Attendance	Year of 1 <sup>st</sup> Intake	Year of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Intake	Year of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Intake	Year of 4 <sup>th</sup> Intake	Year of 5 <sup>th</sup> Intake
Maximum cohort size for each site recommended by Faculty	London FT	45	45	45	45	45

### Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;

### Recommendations

- i) That it is made explicitly clear to students that where an assessment comprises more than one component, both must be passed and that no compensation exists between each (section 4 refers);
- ii) That the aims and expectations of the Graduate Certificate in Business are made explicit in all marketing and promotional material (sections 4, 5.1 and 5.2 refer);
- iii) To provide a summary table for the Graduate Certificate in Business, covering the last three years, to show intakes and progression rates and, if available, numbers relating separately to the stand-alone course and those for the extended Master's courses (section 5.2 refers).

## 7 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel, in particular, the external members, and the Course Team for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process.

**DT 29.06.18**