

QA Higher Education: Access and Participation Statement

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INTRODUCTION

QAHE fully recognises the transformative potential of participation in Higher Education and the enhancements it brings to the economic and personal well-being of both the participants themselves and for society as a whole. As a result, QAHE fully embraces the need to contribute to widening this participation.

QAHE has been particularly successful in attracting mature and returning learners back into education and those who seek to, or by necessity need to, combine study with employment.

It also recognises the need to increase the percentage of female learners attending courses at QAHE, particularly those studying on technology-related programmes as well as increasing the percentage of Black students and those with disability on programme at QAHE. There is also a need to address the performance gap exhibited by QAHE's current Black students.

CREATING ACCESSIBLE HIGHER EDUCATION

QAHE firmly believes that for Higher Education to be truly accessible, the programmes on offer, their pattern of delivery, their entry criteria and the admissions process also have to be highly accessible, student friendly and supportive of applicants that fall into widening participation categories.

This belief is supported by QAHE's actions in a number of ways:

- Active promotion of 4-year as well as 3-year programmes, allowing students to join with a reduced level of prior academic attainment;
- In agreement with our partners, an admissions process that recognises work and life experience when making admissions decisions;
- Delivery of programmes across a two weekday schedule or at evenings and weekends, allowing applicants to manage successfully their study and other major life commitments;
- A very supportive admissions process, involving regular one to one communication with applicants as well as extensive guidance on how to complete their application;
- In agreement with our partners, the use of testing to allow applicants to demonstrate competence in English and Maths without resort to formal qualification.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Fundamentally, QAHE's strategic approach is to begin with developing an accessible Higher Education offering that is attractive to widening participation students and then to identify and leverage existing community networks to provide access to different groups of potential learners to promote and encourage wider uptake of Higher Education. Once on programme, QAHE's approach is to provide a supportive and inclusive learning and teaching environment to maximise the opportunities for success for widening participation students and to support their progression into employment.

GOALS AND SUCCESS INDICATORS

QAHE has established a series of goals for each stage of the student lifecycle.

Access Goals

- To maintain its success in attracting mature and returning learners as well as those from low skilled backgrounds
- To narrow the participation gaps identified with respect to female learners, those of Black and Asian origin and for those with disability

Progress towards these targets will be measured by monitoring the make-up of successive QAHE intakes against published HESA benchmarks.

Success Goals

- To reduce the engagement gap between widening and non-widening participation in assessment and uptake of academic and non-academic support services
- To narrow the progression and attainment gap between widening and non-widening participation students

Progress towards achievement of these objectives will be measured through regular analysis of student performance data. Concurrently, access and utilisation of support services, academic and non-academic, by widening participation students will be monitored to ensure that the support mechanisms that are in place are effective and are being utilised.

PROGRESSION GOALS

- To ensure parity of engagement with career and employability services between widening participation students and the general QAHE student community and increased parity in career outcomes

Records of service utilisation will be analysed on the basis of different widening participation criteria. QAHE's placement service is similarly able to monitor and analyse utilisation of its services on this basis. Post-graduation employment surveys will allow QAHE to monitor the progress of its widening participation student relative to the wider student community.

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE ACCESS PHASE OF THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

Recently, QAHE has taken positive measures to formalise its approach to outreach activities through creation and dedicated resourcing of an outreach team. This is a positive step as it will promote a more systematic and enhanced approach to outreach which is closely aligned to the goals outlined earlier.

Existing outreach activities have involved establishing the outreach team, support for access to HE events together with involvement with educational agents' events and activities that target under represented communities.

The outreach team is to target:

- Female students, particularly those with an interest in digital technology
- Mature students returning to education
- BME communities

Identification of existing organisations and/or individuals with pre-existing links and networks into QAHE's target communities lies at the heart of the strategy of the new outreach team. Rather than attempting to create its own links and networks which can be challenging and potentially ineffective, QAHE aims to leverage existing community networks by building relationships with key individuals and organisations including community and religious leaders, business and networking clubs as well as local colleges offering level 3 qualifications.

QAHE's outreach team will work closely with national and local charities and disability support organisations to understand the barriers to disabled student access to HE with a view to increasing the number of successful applications for study.

QAHE wishes to increase community interest in digital technologies with the objective of encouraging an increase in both the number of ethnic minority and female applicants for technology-related degree programmes and is in the process of developing a series of technology taster events targeted at these communities.

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE SUCCESS PHASE OF THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

Learner support

The Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) Team was established in October 2017. The establishment and resourcing of this represents a very solid commitment by QAHE to ensuring that all learners are given the best possible support and opportunity to be successful and it currently comprises 7 full time team members. Team members are not allocated a teaching load and their time is dedicated to supporting learners outside of scheduled classes.

Amongst a wide range of activities, the ACE Team support students with their academic studies outside of classes, developing academic reading, writing, research, VLE (Virtual Learning Environment), time management skills, together with general support and encouragement for learners. In addition, the academic and support services teams can call upon the ACE team proactively to reach out to learners who are viewed as being at risk of failure or significant disengagement.

The initial focus of the team has been on working to improve retention rates but as the team matures, and it has become more embedded in the academic culture of QAHE, its role is expanding to include working to improve overall student attainment.

Staff development and engagement with the HEA

QAHE has a comprehensive staff development process overseen by a Dean. In addition to its own internal staff development programme, QAHE has a number of initiatives in place with its university partners. Examples of this are the programmes in place to increase HEA membership among its faculty and to facilitate existing Associate Fellows and Fellows to progress to higher levels of membership. It actively engages with development events provided by the HEA and has taken steps to engage more widely with the academic community through its learning and teaching conference.

These initiatives help QAHE's faculty remain in tune with best practice and through this to maintain a high quality learning and teaching environment.

Learning and teaching committee and its projects

QAHE's Learning and Teaching Committee is currently engaged in a number of initiatives that are contributing to enhancing the inclusive nature of learning and teaching. They include projects to develop learner digital skills as well as an integrated academic writing

project to investigate the cultural barriers different students group may face in relation to academic writing in order to enhance language teaching within QAHE. Additionally, in order to improve the effectiveness of student communications, a project was carried out to explore student preferences which led to the construction of a communication app.

Enhanced contact hours

Prior to commencing delivery of its 4-year degree programmes in business management and information technology, QAHE took the deliberate decision to increase classroom contact hours by a third above those required by the University. This was in direct response to the nature of learners joining the Foundation Year programme, the majority of whom are returning learners, have long study gaps and are studying in a second language.

Enhancement of learning resources

Learners at QAHE have access to significant online academic libraries and resources provided by its academic partners. However, through its own physical and digital libraries QAHE provides significant additional support to its learners:

- A growing portfolio of accessible e-resources specifically targeted at level 3 learners not available through QAHE's partners;
- Developing and leading an initiative to develop the information literacy of students;
- Staff development to improve the capacity of academic staff to support the development of information literacy with learners;
- A right time right skill delivery pattern of library sessions for undergraduates designed to deliver skills at the time students need to use those skills e.g. utilising electronic libraries at the point student commence an assessment;
- Employment of teaching librarians to support these initiatives.

Student welfare

The Student Welfare team provide students with confidential advice and support services aimed at helping each and every student extract the maximum benefit from university life whilst studying with QAHE. Advice and guidance is delivered in a confidential and supportive environment and on a one to one basis as appropriate. This support takes place alongside a wider programme of awareness events and initiatives that seek to reach out to every student community who may not actively wish to engage with the service.

Services include health and wellbeing, counselling, disability and learning difficulty advice (including DSA application support and dyslexia screening) as well as Housing, financial and personal concerns. In addition the service provides support and advice on academic well-being (including study support), safeguarding, learning adjustments and mental health.

Where student needs extend beyond the team's areas of expertise the Welfare service will signpost and support students to access externally support.

The service is delivered at weekends and during evenings to ensure the full QAHE learning community are able to access the service. Awareness and promotion of the service occurs early in the student journey with target communications sent to students ahead of enrolment to encourage disclosure of learning difficulty or disability. Prospective students are encouraged to make contact with the Welfare service ahead of arrival to allow any support needs to be identified and solutions put in place before formal study commences. Once students enrol they will be introduced to the full range of support services available to them via induction activities and awareness building workshops during the early weeks of the semester. These activities aim to bring the service to students and recognises that the strong male and mature student profile of the student community make self-presentation less likely.

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE PROGRESSION STAGE OF THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

Though the majority of QAHE's students are already in some form of employment, study at QAHE is seen as a major opportunity either to accelerate career progress within their current occupation or as a way of redirecting their career into new areas. QAHE is fully committed to supporting the career aspirations of its students, particularly those of its widening participation students.

QAHE has taken a number of steps to enhance the careers and employability support it offers to its students. In early 2018 the service was transitioned from being an outsourced 'bought in' service to one delivered by full time and freelance QAHE staff. To support this transition and the service goals the FTE has increased from 2 to 5, with a dedicated Head of Service and a dedicated Internship and Placements Manager. This is both to support growth in the number of degree programmes offering internship opportunities as well as to support the overall quality and breadth of service. Dedicated careers spaces have also been created on campus which act as the hub for promotion of the services on offer which have also been significantly enhanced as part of the new service offering.

In March 2018, QAHE re-launched its on-line career and employability support (QAHE Careers Online). This was enhanced through making content more accessible off campus via launch of an accompanying free app allowing students to access content without the need for a PC.

The QAHE Careers Service is creating strategies to develop strong and lasting relationships with students, ensuring students see value in extending their relationship with the team beyond graduation. From September 2018, QAHE will invite students to engage with the careers team at the beginning of each year on programme to set year-long employment goals aimed at supporting their employment ambitions post-graduation.

QAHE will also invite students to attend a pre-graduation careers review session in the final semester of their studies to ensure that students have met, or are likely, in the short-term future to meet, their post-graduation employment goals and to put in place individual post-graduation strategies to support them as needed. These review sessions will ensure all progressing students are aware of the support they can access after they graduate which includes face to face/remote one to one sessions with a professional careers consultant and a dedicated graduate workshop programme.

Going forward students will be asked to join the new QAHE Alumni after they graduate. The alumni to alumni mentoring scheme will facilitate mentors to play an active and supportive role in a graduate's professional life by sharing their experience and expertise with their mentees.

The Careers Service will enhance its ongoing careers support to help graduates gain long term employment and employment into higher skilled work where desired. This support will be offered to all students. However, QAHE are particularly keen to add value post-graduation to those students from widening participation backgrounds and will work in conjunction with employers who wish to support such initiatives to develop tailored programmes that support students to transition from their studies into employment. QAHE will particularly encourage graduates from widening participation backgrounds to access an on-campus business clinic facility which will include IT facilities and specialist skill development software and resources.

CAPTURING THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

In order to assess the effectiveness of its learning and teaching and its student support initiatives QAHE engages regularly with its student body to seek its view. Through student representation on its Learning and Teaching Committees and its academic boards it is also seeking early input from students to help develop existing initiatives and to help identify and shape new ones.

QAHE carries out a number of student surveys in order to obtain students' views on their learning and teaching, student experience and services. These include a post induction survey, an early semester student experience survey and an end of semester module survey. Final year undergraduate students participate in the University partners' NSS survey and postgraduate students complete the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. The results from all surveys are analysed by relevant managers and by the

Senior Management Team to monitor the effectiveness of learning and the student experience and to gain insight into areas for further improvement.

Student representation on QAHE's academic committees and boards as well as the overall staff student consultative process is starting to be felt in a very positive way through a number of student led developments. These have included active participation in the redesign of a programme as well as promoting a review of how skills sessions are scheduled and delivered to ensure that support is tailored and delivered at the time it is most needed by students.

Actions taken in reaction to student feedback are reported back via student representatives and in meeting minutes which are posted onto the relevant university's VLE. To increase visibility of feedback a 'You said – we did' campaign was implemented across the campuses.

Collectively these initiatives contribute to an atmosphere in which students feel listened to as well as a system within which students have an element of influence over how they are taught.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

In line with its university partners QAHE believes that the initiatives it has in place and that are planned to support access, success and progression for all students, including those that fall into a widening participation sub-group or have protected characteristics, are legal and fair and are compatible with its obligations under the 2010 Equality Act.

Measures to promote equality and diversity, in the context of both staff and students, are in place. In the case of the former these are embodied into the human resource policies and procedures established by QA Group, under which QAHE falls. At the present time equality and diversity in relation to students is guided by the relevant policies of its university partners. However, it recognised that as part of the process towards gaining taught degree awarding powers QAHE will require its own overarching policy. Steps are being taken to develop this policy.

CREATING A COHESIVE AND TOLERANT STUDENT COMMUNITY

QAHE strongly believes that learners are more likely to remain on programme and thrive if they feel an accepted part of a cohesive but diverse student community. Whilst outreach can create a diverse community, it does not necessarily create a cohesive diverse community in which learners are tolerant of each other differences, view this as strength and engage in effective peer learning.

Tolerance and mutual respect are values that QAHE supports and encourages within its learner community. It has, in response to student feedback, actively begun to promote a culture of inclusivity. QAHE has developed and run induction sessions that focus on Equality, Diversity and Cultural Awareness.

Going forward, QAHE is launching its own student magazine, led by students and supported by staff. One of the aims of this magazine is to promote inclusivity within QAHE's student community, giving the student body opportunities to learn about different cultures. In addition, the Student Ambassador role is being expanded to make inclusivity a key focus.