

# SERC's Submission to Independent Review of Education Northern Ireland

## Context

In June 22 the College was made aware of a progression issue from local Schools completing Level 3 OCN NI qualifications as part of their 6<sup>th</sup> form studies. The issue was around the offering and restrictions it presented when applying for a Foundation Degree validated with the local Ulster University (UU). The Level 3 OCN NI qualification has gone through regulation and has UCAS points attached which will be accepted by other HEIs in the mainland UK.

The qualification identified has UCAS points which led to confusion to applicants for the UU FdSc Hospitality and Tourism Management with Specialisms provision offered by the College. It is important to note that UCAS points are only a guide and entry requirements are determined by the validating university.

Ulster University does not accept qualifications from OCN NI at Level 3 for entry under their general entry requirements, thus inhibiting the learners' progression from Level 3 to Foundation Degree or Degrees depending upon their subject and awarding organisation choice.

Both the School and the learner were not aware of this issue prior to applying for the programme.

Figure 1 shows the Level 3 qualifications that are currently not suitable for entry for the Ulster University. These include OCN NI, City and Guilds and NCFE. The Ulster University general entrance requirements can be found at: [University Entrance requirements - Ulster University](#)

## Level 3 Qualifications NOT suitable for entry

Unfortunately there are a number of Level 3 qualifications that the University does not accept as meeting general entry requirements.

Qualifications delivered by OCN NI, City and Guilds or NCFE are not suitable for entry.

In addition to this, a number of Pearson and OCR qualifications do not meet the entry requirements.

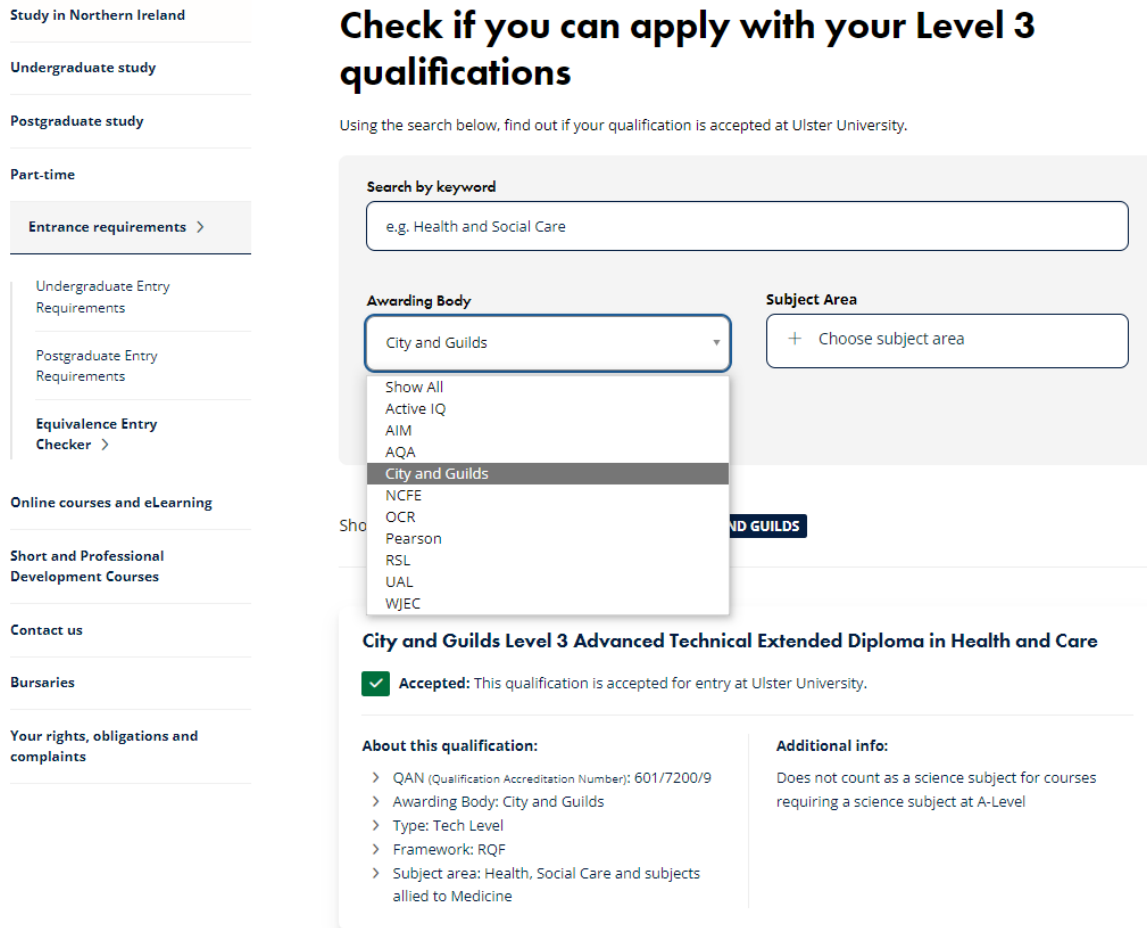
These are detailed below.:

- > [Pearson Qualifications Not Accepted for Entry](#)
- > [OCR Cambridge Technical Qualifications Not Accepted for Entry](#)

In general terms, qualifications that do not provide granular grading and do not contain external assessment cannot be considered equivalent to A-Levels.

In determining suitability of a qualification for entry, the University also considers the purpose of the qualification, the type of assessment, and the content to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary skills to progress to Higher Education.

Ulster University has since updated their website removing the statement. However, they have introduced a qualifications checker which does not list any OCN NI qualifications, lists only 2 out of 13 NCFE/ CACHE qualifications, and 1 City and Guilds qualification as being acceptable for entry. The qualifications checker can be found at: [Equivalence Entry Checker - Ulster University](#). Figure 2 shows the return for City and Guilds qualifications and the awarding body list.



**Check if you can apply with your Level 3 qualifications**

Using the search below, find out if your qualification is accepted at Ulster University.

**Search by keyword**  
e.g. Health and Social Care

**Awarding Body**  
City and Guilds

**Subject Area**  
+ Choose subject area

City and Guilds  
Show All  
Active IQ  
AIM  
AQA  
City and Guilds  
NCFE  
OCR  
Pearson  
RSL  
UAL  
WJEC

**City and Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Health and Care**

**Accepted:** This qualification is accepted for entry at Ulster University.

**About this qualification:**

- > QAN (Qualification Accreditation Number): 601/7200/9
- > Awarding Body: City and Guilds
- > Type: Tech Level
- > Framework: RQF
- > Subject area: Health, Social Care and subjects allied to Medicine

**Additional info:**  
Does not count as a science subject for courses requiring a science subject at A-Level

Figure 2- Ulster University- Qualifications Checker (Accessed 22.03.22)

For Queen’s University Belfast, no reference is made to any qualification awarded by OCN NI and City and Guilds. NCFE/ CACHE qualifications are considered individually on their merits. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are not accepted on their own for admission. Other qualifications require clarification through the admissions team. The Queen’s University Belfast entry requirements can be found at: [General entrance requirements | Study | Queen's University Belfast \(qub.ac.uk\)](#). Further guidance for other qualifications is available at: [Other qualifications | Study | Queen's University Belfast \(qub.ac.uk\)](#)

<b>CACHE Level 3 Qualifications</b>	-
Applicants offering these qualifications are considered individually on their merits. Overall academic background is taken into account plus the nature of the course applied for.	
<b>Essential Skills, Level 2, Application of Number</b>	+
<b>National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ)</b>	-
NVQs are not acceptable on their own for admission to undergraduate degrees.	
<b>Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) FET/FETAC</b>	+
<b>Other qualifications deemed equivalent by the University</b>	-
If you are taking qualifications which differ from those listed here, please contact the Admissions and Access Service for advice.  e: <a href="mailto:admissions@qub.ac.uk">admissions@qub.ac.uk</a> t: +44 (0) 28 9097 3838	

Figure 3- Queen's University Belfast Extract from "Other qualifications" guidance (Accessed: 02.03.23)

## Impact

The impact of the disparity between approved School offerings and the restrictions on entry requirements for validated Foundation Degree provision is identified below:

- Learners may be forced to achieve a further Level 3 programme over 1 or 2 years to achieve the appropriate level to enter the programme - thereby delaying their progression,
- Alternatively, they may decide to not continue into Higher Education and pursue an unskilled employment route,
- The qualification will be accepted by other HEIs in the mainland UK, which could contribute to the "Brain Drain" from NI,
- Schools are delivering these approved and regulated qualifications, but local universities are limiting the learners' ability to progress to local HE providers such as FE Colleges for Foundation Degrees, which is working against our Widening Access and Participation strategies,
- The qualifications in question allow progression on to higher programmes validated by other awarding organisations such as Open University and Pearson,
- Colleges will be forced to review their choice of validating university as this has implications on MaSN recruitment as well as PT HE and HLA programmes.

As part of the Draft Recommendations of the HE in FE Review it states that *"If Foundation Degrees will remain the preferred HE qualification at sub-degree level but other qualifications at levels 4 and 5 can be delivered where certain criteria apply Universities and Further Education Colleges should collaborate further to make the FD as 'fit for purpose' as possible"*. By not recognising these regulated qualifications from specific awarding organisations Ulster University is not embracing the ethos of making the Foundation Degrees "fit for purpose" as a Foundation

Degree should provide an ability to enter into HE from alternative routes instead of a purely academic route. This creates a significant barrier to progression.

## Conclusion

With local universities not accepting vocational based qualifications from NI based awarding organisations, such as OCN NI and referring to them as “other” is disadvantaging the learner. The universities also require 40% external assessment to be recognised. The current situation does not create “**parity of esteem**” between vocational qualifications and the traditional qualifications offered by Schools.

CCEA Regulation is the accreditation and regulator for qualifications offered in Northern Ireland. The OCN NI qualification in question had gone through this regulatory process and is approved for use. This raises significant questions about the effectiveness of the NI Regulator for Vocational Qualifications and the recognition and power of its role from local universities’ perspective. These regulated qualifications are recognised by universities in the mainland UK, which can impact on the need for the learner to leave NI in order to progress to higher levels of study. This needs to be reviewed, providing opportunities for learners to progress with these unrecognised qualifications to Foundation Degrees and Degrees validated by local universities.

The College feels that this situation needs to be reviewed to prevent future vocational learners being impacted by the disparity and non-regulation of regulated qualifications.

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