

Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: University of Bradford in Dubai

February 2014

Executive summary

The University of Bradford's (the University's) School of Management has been delivering an Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programme in Dubai for 16 years. Originally a closed executive programme for the Emirates Airline, it became an open programme to applicants in 2009 following the establishment of the University's Middle East Regional Office (MERO). MERO is based in the free zone of the Dubai Knowledge Village (DKV) and serves as a hub of the University International Office with responsibility for student recruitment in the region and administrative support for staff delivering University courses in Dubai. Oversight of MERO operations resides with the Head of MERO, who is based in Bradford and reports to the Director of International Development.

The University currently offers two programmes in Dubai: the EMBA, delivered by the School of Management, and a Master's (MSc) in International Health Management, delivered since 2012 by the School of Health Studies. Both courses are delivered in weekend block teaching for three days every four to six weeks. Both courses are taught by University staff and supported by online tutorials. There were 162 students registered on the EMBA course and 12 registered on the MSc in International Health Management in 2013.

Although the University has a cap on EMBA numbers in Dubai to ensure the quality of the student experience, it intends to increase the number of students on the MSc in International Health Management to up to 30 students per annum, recruiting from a wider range of Health Service employers. The University is also planning to deliver an MSc Nursing Studies (International) and a BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (International), and has been working closely with regional agencies and health providers in the region to facilitate this future development. The University stated that submission for the required Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation from the Commission for Academic Administration (CAA), the federal quality assurance agency charged with licensing institutions and accrediting their programmes, is being considered for spring 2014. In the meantime, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has already approved the MSc Nursing Studies (International) for delivery from September 2014 and at the time of the review visit, the BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (International) was also under review for delivery in September 2014.

Students appreciate the block-teaching fly-in/fly-out delivery model as they value being taught by staff from the University and it allows them to accommodate study with full-time employment. Students also appreciate being able to liaise with the staff located at MERO, who are perceived as responsive to their needs. However, students, particularly those registered on the EMBA programme, have expressed a view that MERO could be enhanced and extended from an administrative centre into more of a campus for

students to study and access online resources. This is less of an issue for students on the MSc in International Health Management because they have access to the physical and electronic library resources of the Dubai Health Authority medical library, as part of the Memorandum of Understanding that the School of Health Studies has signed with the Dubai Health Authority.

All programme aims and learning outcomes for courses delivered on-site in Dubai are identical to the courses delivered in the UK, with some customisation, for example case study material. A single EMBA programme specification applies to all pathways that are delivered in the different regional centres of the University in Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila and Perugia. Since the curriculum delivered in Dubai is essentially identical to that delivered in the UK, the setting of academic standards is a product of the mainstream UK programme approval process.

Report

Introduction

1 The University of Bradford (the University) sits within the Leeds/Bradford City region, a multicultural centre for commerce, industry and finance. It traces its roots back to 1832 with the formation of the Mechanics Institute in response to the need in the city for workers with skills relevant to the workplace. Continuing to respond to the education needs of employers, the Bradford Technical College was formed in 1882 and was subsequently replaced in 1957 by the Bradford Institute of Technology, which in 1966 was granted a Royal Charter to become the University of Bradford. To this day, the University's Strategy echoes this heritage with a commitment to its guiding principle of 'Making Knowledge Work'. The student population has grown from 2,000 in 1966 to over 10,000 people today, including a postgraduate population of over 2,000.

2 The University has been delivering an Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programme in Dubai through its School of Management for 16 years. Originally a closed executive programme for the Emirates Airline, it became an open programme to applicants in 2009 following the establishment of the Middle East Regional Office (MERO) in the free zone of the Dubai Knowledge Village (DKV). The School of Management is 'triple accredited' by the three main business school accreditation bodies worldwide: the European Foundation for Management Development's European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the Association of MBAs (AMBA). Less than one per cent of business schools worldwide (approximately 60) have this level of accreditation by international professional bodies.

3 In 2012, after obtaining the required approval from the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), and with the support of the Dubai Health Authority, the University started also delivering an MSc in International Health Management through its School of Health Studies. In the academic year 2013-14 there were 162 students registered by KHDA in Dubai on the EMBA course, recruiting primarily non-Emirati citizens from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the wider Gulf region, and 12 students were registered on the MSc in International Health Management, primarily female Emirati citizens recruited from the Dubai Health Authority.

4 The establishment of the Dubai branch is underpinned by the University's International Strategy and Partner Strategy. Its operations and course provision are also supported by the School of Management Global Campus Strategy, the School of Health Studies International Strategy and the International Office Recruitment Plan, all working to the same goal of increasing the number of students going to the University and the number of strategic partnerships overseas. Historically, the University has pursued its international strategy through collaboration with other higher education providers. However, the longevity of the EMBA programmes in Dubai, and the strategic importance of the region for attracting international students to Bradford, motivated the University to establish MERO as an administrative hub for course provision and recruitment in the region.

5 MERO provides administrative support to the Schools for the delivery of the EMBA and the MSc in International Health Management in Dubai, and acts as a gateway for applicants from the region. MERO also has responsibility for liaising with local and regional government, managing and monitoring local and regional agents, and establishing relationships across the region, including through ongoing engagement with alumni and business. MERO local staff comprises one Office Manager and two International Admission Officers. Oversight of MERO operations resides with the Head of MERO, who was appointed in 2008 with the responsibility to lead student recruitment activities in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa, and provide managerial support to the MERO's

operation in Dubai. The Head of MERO is based in Bradford and reports to the Director of International Development.

6 Both courses currently offered in Dubai are delivered in block format taught over three days in weekends every four to six weeks by flying-out University faculty members. The students are further supported by online materials and tutorials through the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). Ongoing contact with students takes place through discussion boards on the VLE, as well as via video conferences, phone calls and email. The EMBA programme in Dubai, recruiting one cohort per year, is studied part-time in two to six years' duration and is part of a suite of MBA programmes delivered in the University's centres in Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila and Perugia. These programmes follow the same delivery pattern, with identical learning outcomes, credit value and volume as the programme delivered in Dubai, allowing for a consistent student experience and facilitating student mobility across different locations. The MSc in International Health Management can be studied in one year full-time or two years part-time, with the delivery model designed to allow students to enter a rolling programme in September and February of each year.

7 In terms of future developments in the region, the University states that although it has a cap on EMBA numbers in Dubai to ensure the quality of the student experience, it intends to increase the number of students on the MSc in International Health Management to a maximum of 30 students per annum, recruiting from a wider range of Health Service employers. The University is also planning to deliver an MSc Nursing Studies (International) and a BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (International) and has been working closely with the Dubai Health Authority and other agencies and health providers in the region to facilitate this future development. The University stated that submission to the Commission for Academic Administration (CAA) for the required Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation is being considered for spring 2014. In the meantime, KHDA has already approved the MSc Nursing Studies (International) for delivery from September 2014, and at the time of the review visit, the BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (International) was also under review by KHDA for delivery in September 2014. The attention being paid to meeting local demand through the provision of courses in health studies and by seeking the cooperation and support of the Dubai Health Authority and other health providers in the region is a **positive feature**.

Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

8 The University operated a robust process for due diligence and partner checks in setting up MERO, using external consultants in the due diligence process. The University's legal advisers, Eversheds LLP, provided due diligence and expert advice on a number of procedural, regulatory and cultural aspects, such as the regulatory framework and education environment in the UAE and in Dubai; options on how to establish and manage the University in Dubai including termination and exit options; human resource concerns; and student relations. The British Embassy and the British Council were also approached for advice, in addition to meetings with other higher education providers with an existing presence in Dubai.

9 The University Council in December 2007 approved the recommendation to submit an application for a licence to operate a branch campus in Dubai. The licence was granted by KHDA in 2008 and has been renewed annually since. The University has robust risk management processes in place covering all aspects of business and academic activity, with the University Council having ultimate responsibility for ensuring that these processes are implemented at all levels in the University. The Academic Strategy and Performance Committee, the main University planning and resources management committee chaired by

the Vice-Chancellor and reporting to the University Council, is charged with the ultimate responsibility for overseeing implementation of the University risk management policy. An Academic Risk Management Framework establishes the process for the management of risk related to academic provision, including that provided overseas. In establishing the MERO, the School of Management, with the support of the International Office, prepared a proposal and business case which was scrutinised by the Academic Strategy and Performance Committee before being submitted for final approval to the University Council.

10 The commercial license and lease to operate a branch campus office in DKV has been approved by KHDA. Sponsorship agreements required for staff are managed by the Human Resources Directorate, assisted by University legal advisers. Adherence to the terms and conditions for the review and renewal of the licence is managed by the International Office through the Head of MERO. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), as Academic President for the Middle East Regional Area, oversees the application for the renewal of the educational services permit annually. The Dubai office coordinates all quality returns to the Ministry of Higher Education in Dubai and KHDA.

Making the link work

11 The oversight of the EMBA course delivered in Dubai is the responsibility of a dedicated team of Bradford-based staff as part of the Global Campus organisation behind the EMBA. The team comprises a Global Campus Manager, who has oversight of all collaborative and overseas programmes for the School of Management, a dedicated Programme Coordinator, who is a member of core faculty, and a Course Administrator.

12 The Global Campus is an overarching umbrella structure that provides administrative support to all School of Management international activity, including student exchange, collaborative provision and research partnerships. This means that there are separate administrative units for overseas and home campus provision. The UK and Dubai programmes also have different programme leaders and administrators. However, the programme is the same, and the separated administrative units and different programme leaders and administrators work to the same processes. Within the School of Health Studies, the MSc in International Health Management is coordinated and overseen by a Programme Coordinator who is responsible for programme planning, delivery, evaluation and development for both the Dubai and Bradford-based programmes.

13 Programme coordinators for both programmes ensure consistency between what is offered in the UK and in Dubai, contribute to teaching in Dubai, and provide academic and pastoral support to students. They represent, together with the programme administrators, the first point of contact with students, and with MERO-based staff, visiting the Dubai office regularly. The Head of MERO also visits regularly every five to six weeks, and Dubai-based staff visit Bradford for training purposes every year.

14 Academic and administrative staff from the School of Management and academic staff from the School of Health Studies conduct induction sessions over a number of days in Dubai for each new cohort of students in advance of the first teaching block. Induction is led by the Programme Coordinator supported by the MERO staff and, for the School of Management, also by the programme administrator. Induction is comprehensive and covers a wide range of aspects including the programmes structures; the roles of key academic, administrative and support staff; expectations for academic writing, including referencing and plagiarism awareness; assessment, marking and feedback policies; and access to the University's central library and IT facilities and other learning support services available on the VLE.

15 The programme administrator involvement in the induction process in Dubai is a **positive feature** and provides a professional and human face for the administrative arrangements involved in starting the EMBA programme. However, the University is **recommended** to review the structure and staffing levels of the Dubai office to consider the permanent location of the Head of MERO in Dubai to ensure presence and contact with students.

16 Students appreciate the weekend block-teaching fly-in/fly-out delivery model as they value being taught by staff from Bradford and it allows them to accommodate study with full-time employment. Students also appreciate being able to liaise with the staff located at MERO, who are perceived as responsive to their needs, and they generally feel well integrated with the Bradford campus. However, some students, particularly among those registered on the EMBA programme, have expressed a view that MERO could be enhanced and extended from an administrative centre into a campus for students to study and access online resources. This appears to be less of an issue for students on the MSc in International Health Management because they have access to the physical and electronic library resources of the Dubai Health Authority medical library, as part of the Memorandum of Understanding that the School of Health Studies has signed with the Dubai Health Authority. The University is **recommended** to review the availability of student study and support facilities at MERO to provide more of an academic campus experience for students in the region, in light of University plans to expand its offering in the region.

17 Programme coordinators brief module leaders prior to delivering their module in Dubai with a view to highlighting any current issues affecting the cohort, and training sessions focusing on raising awareness of cultural differences are provided for faculty teaching in Dubai for the first time. For the MSc in International Health Management, staff delivering modules for the first time in Dubai shadow those with more experience. Both Schools are supportive of staff teaching overseas, regarding this as an opportunity to increase knowledge of the region and thus enriching research and teaching at the home campus as well.

18 Ultimate oversight of admissions resides with the programme coordinators and admissions office in Bradford. Candidate applications are forwarded from MERO to the respective Schools, where they are scrutinised by programme coordinators in Bradford. The University admissions policy is available through its website and is reviewed regularly by the Learning and Teaching Committee. All applications and offers are recorded on the University student record system and are audited by the central admissions team. Programme entry criteria are included in the relevant programme specification and published in prospectuses. English language skills are assessed and tested in the admissions process. For admission to the EMBA programme, candidates must have at least three years' postgraduate work experience, and must also show evidence of numeracy and literacy competencies. Telephone interviews are conducted to check the suitability of applicants, especially for borderline cases, and to assess English language skills and the appropriateness of the prior business experience of EMBA applicants.

19 Academics involved in programme delivery in Dubai consider that the calibre and profile of the Dubai cohort is similar to that in the UK, with most having left formal education on average 10 years before. The EMBA cohort in Dubai may, however, need more academic support than their colleagues studying in the UK because they are less familiar with UK academic practice. The main difference between the MSc in International Health Management students in Dubai and the UK is that the Dubai cohort is primarily female.

20 In 2010-11, a review of the MBA suite of programmes resulted in a significant redesign of the EMBA, offering students, regardless of their home location, the opportunity to undertake study at other locations delivering the University EMBA. Students are encouraged

to undertake block electives or core modules at other locations, providing them with the opportunity to network with other students and faculty, and to gain experience of different cultures. This gives students the opportunity to study on a truly global programme. Several Dubai EMBA students have attended block electives at the University's Bradford campus. Likewise, Bradford-based students have travelled to Dubai to undertake a module. However, recognising that not all students can take up the opportunity to take electives in different regional centres, the School of Management consults with students when selecting the electives to offer in Dubai in an effort to meet their interests as far as possible.

Quality assurance

Academic standards and quality of programmes

21 From the documentation submitted and meetings with senior management, academic and administrative staff, there was evidence that the University retains oversight of academic integrity, quality assurance and quality enhancement of all courses delivered in Dubai. This oversight is reinforced by using UK campus staff to teach and deliver modules on all programmes, generally following the principle that whoever leads the module in Bradford will lead the module in Dubai. All staff delivering Dubai programmes are members of the University's teaching staff, approved through the University's appointment process and subject to performance review. Exceptionally, non-Bradford-based adjunct staff have been employed to teach in Dubai as associate members of staff.

22 The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the courses delivered in Dubai are clearly stated in the programme specifications, and the course delivered in the UK is mapped exactly to the course delivered in Dubai. All programme aims and learning outcomes for courses delivered on-site in Dubai are identical to the courses delivered in the UK, with some customisation of case study material, although evidence from students suggested a patchy and individual approach to the contextualisation of case studies and material, especially for the EMBA programme. The EMBA programme specification applies to all pathways delivered across the globe in the different University's regional centres. All these pathways are also managed by the School's Global Campus Department to ensure consistency of approach, development and application of regulations. Both programmes delivered in Dubai are governed by the same learning, teaching and assessment strategies applying to the programme delivery in the UK, although delivery patterns differ.

23 Since the curriculum delivered in Dubai is essentially identical to that delivered in the UK, setting academic standards is a product of the mainstream UK programme approval process. The University's processes of programme approval, modification and review are managed by the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The courses operating in Dubai are formally approved and validated and there is evidence of mapping to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The University appoints independent external experts to sit on the Programme Approval Panel for every new programme delivered at the home campus and overseas centres.

24 The programmes delivered in Dubai follow the same quality monitoring processes as the programmes delivered in the UK, with monitoring through a process of Programme Enhancement Planning. This process requires that student, faculty and external examiner feedback is examined alongside a variety of performance data to identify plans for continuous improvement. Dubai programmes are evaluated alongside their comparable programmes in the UK and elsewhere. All programmes are subject to scrutiny during the Periodic Review process which is undertaken every five years by a University Programme Review Panel, which also includes independent external experts. In its latest review of the

EMBA in 2013, the School of Management consulted with external experts from other higher education institutions and industry, as well as with students and alumni. The School of Management holds triple accreditation by AMBA, EQUIS and AACSB, and the University states that these accreditation exercises provide the School with further key tools to ensure continuous improvement and review of its strategy, portfolio and processes.

25 External examiners are the same for the programmes as a whole where these are delivered, and Examination Boards in the UK consider exam papers of both UK and Dubai-based students together. External examiners are required to complete and submit an annual report to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), who acts under delegated authority from the Vice-Chancellor. External examiners' reports are responded to through a dedicated post in the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office. Actions to be implemented in response to external examiner recommendations are included within each Programme Enhancement Plan. There is no evidence that external examiner reports are regularly shared with students in Dubai, although they are seen by student representatives. It is **recommended** that the University moves swiftly towards the implementation of its policy of making external examiner reports available to all students.

Assessment and certification of awards

26 The Academic Quality Handbook sets out the University's process for the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies. The University states that programme-based assessment strategies employ a range of methods that aim to explicitly develop the learning of students, and provide them with timely feedback at key points in the learning process underpinned by the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

27 The assessment procedures for the Dubai programmes are set out in the University's 'Regulations Governing all Postgraduate Taught Courses' and 'Administrative Regulations Relating to Assessment'. All assessment processes in Dubai are managed by University staff. The University's Module Leader is responsible for designing and moderating the coursework assignments and examination papers. A sample of coursework, assignments and examination materials are sent to the subject external examiners in the UK for approval, ensuring parity of standards across locations and collaborative partners. Students are assessed at the end of each semester. Assignments are submitted online and checked for academic misconduct through the online plagiarism testing tool adopted by the University. Invigilation of on-site examinations is managed by MERO staff in accordance with the University guidelines and regulations. When examinations for the same programme take place in different locations, measures are put in place to have them as far as possible at the same time, despite the different time-zones.

28 To guide staff in their assessment role, University marking criteria were approved by Senate in 2011. The Centre for Educational Development provides bespoke staff development workshops related to assessment and also includes assessment within their staff development seminar series. Standardised feedback templates are used for the provision of feedback to students, although some students expressed views on the consistency of feedback. The School of Management is currently addressing the need to provide students with feedback within the published timescale of four weeks.

29 The University takes full responsibility for the production of certificates and transcripts. Upon successful completion of their studies, all student are issued with a certificate and transcript by the University indicating the location of study. Students manage their own transcript via a secure online website with the capacity for students to share their transcript with employers, for example using the document share facility. The University is intending to work with KHDA to ensure that certificates are attested at the point of award. In 2011, a Dubai Council Resolution established that qualifications granted by

KHDA-approved institutions and certified by KHDA will be recognised by the public and private sector in Dubai for all purposes. Currently students graduating from foreign providers operating in the free zones of Dubai need to apply to KHDA to have their qualifications certified.

Information on higher education provision

30 The University has systems and processes in place to ensure that publicity and marketing materials, including the prospectus, are fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy. At School level, all marketing materials are approved by the Director of Marketing, working closely with the University's International Office. Details concerning the Dubai EMBA are incorporated within the overarching MBA prospectus.

31 The Student Handbook for the EMBA and MSc programmes delivered in Dubai is based on the UK MBA and Master's Handbook, but adapted for Dubai students. The enrolment and induction material provided to Dubai students is extensive and in line with the experience and documentation provided in the UK home campus. MERO advertising is approved centrally and also checked by KHDA.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the attention being paid to meet local demand through the provision of courses in health studies, seeking the cooperation and support of the Dubai Health Authority and other health providers in the region (paragraph 7)
- the programme administrator involvement in the induction process in Dubai, which provides a professional and human face for the administrative arrangements involved in starting the EMBA programme (paragraph 15).

Recommendations

The University of Bradford is recommended to take the following actions:

- review the structure and staffing levels of the MERO to consider the permanent location of the Head of the MERO in Dubai to ensure presence and contact with students within an enhanced Dubai campus (paragraph 15)
- review the availability of student study and support facilities at the MERO to provide more of an academic campus experience for students in the region in light of University plans to expand its offering in the region (paragraph 16)
- make external examiners' annual reports available to all students and ensure that students are aware of these reports (paragraph 25).

University of Bradford's response to the review report

The University of Bradford has been delivering an Executive MBA programme in Dubai for over 16 years and has more recently, with the support of the Dubai Health Authority, commenced the local delivery of an MSc in International Health Management.

In addition to the 'triple accreditation' by the three main business school accreditation bodies which is enjoyed by under one per cent of business schools worldwide, the University welcomes the very positive outcome of the QAA review of its provision in Dubai.

The University is particularly pleased that the QAA review report captures features of good practice, notably:

- the attention being paid to meet local demand through the provision of courses in health studies, seeking the cooperation and support of the Dubai Health Authority and other health providers in the region
- the programme administrator involvement in the induction process in Dubai which provides a professional and human face to the administrative arrangements involved in starting the Executive MBA programme.

We are responding positively to the recommendation contained within the report concerning the availability of external examiner reports. Additionally the University is also reviewing the Dubai office structure and the availability of student study and support facilities.

QAA731 - June 14

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557 000
Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786