



Review of UK transnational education in Cyprus: University of St Mark & St John and University of Nicosia

November 2015

Executive summary

The University of St Mark & St John (the University), an independent Church of England voluntary college formed from the combination in 1923 of the constituent colleges of St John's in Battersea and St Mark's in Chelsea, was granted taught degree awarding powers in 2007 and university status in 2012. The University offers undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, with a focus on business, education, social sciences and sport.

The University of Nicosia (UNIC) (formerly Intercollege), a private sector higher education institution founded in 1980, offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes from sites in Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca, across a range of disciplines including business, education, humanities, social sciences, sciences, and engineering. Under the partnership UNIC, through UNIC Online, offers three programmes validated by the University: a Master of Business Administration, approved in 2011, a BA (Hons) Business Studies, approved in 2012, and a BA (Hons) Accounting, approved in 2013, all delivered online. There are currently 950 students enrolled on the programmes.

The partnership was established under the University's previous strategic plan, which had clear targets to extend its collaborative provision and to increase the number of international partnerships. Since then, following a change in strategic direction focusing on the development of onsite home provision, the University decided to terminate the partnership, considering that UNIC Online, as a private for-profit organisation, no longer provides a good strategic fit with the University. Student enrolment to the programmes ceased in October 2014. Teach-out could continue until 2024, given the University's 10-year maximum registration period and the ability of students to opt in and out (provided non-engagement does not exceed two years).

In its 2012 follow-up report to the 2010 QAA Institutional Audit, which reached judgements of limited confidence in standards and the quality of learning opportunities with respect to the University's collaborative provision, QAA concluded that the University had addressed the essential recommendation. Revised structures and processes were in place but needed time to be fully embedded. The present review found that further work is required by the University to ensure that its revised procedures are fully implemented. The review team makes a range of recommendations, notably concerning institutional management and oversight, particularly in relation to annual programme review.

Introduction

1 The University of St Mark & St John (the University) is an independent Church of England voluntary college founded by the National Society with the constituent colleges of St John's in Battersea (established in 1840) and St Mark's in Chelsea (established in 1841). The two colleges combined in 1923 on the Chelsea site and moved to the current location in Plymouth in 1973. The academic provision was validated initially by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), then by the University of Exeter between 1991 and 1995.

2 In 2007, taught degree awarding powers were granted by the Privy Council, and the college became the University College Plymouth St Mark & St John. Full university status was achieved in 2012, and the name changed to the University of St Mark & St John. Under its previous strategic plan, the University had clear targets to extend its collaborative provision and to increase the number of international partnerships. The partnership with the University of Nicosia (UNIC), through UNIC Online, was set up under this strategy. Following recent changes to the University's strategic direction, the University undertook an internal review of its international collaborative provision, resulting in the decision to terminate the partnership with the University of Nicosia. The University states, and UNIC Online senior staff acknowledge and recognise, that the University's new institutional strategic plan is focused on the development of onsite home provision, and that the relationship with UNIC Online, as a private for-profit organisation, no longer provides a good strategic fit with the University and its values.

3 The University of Nicosia, formerly known as Intercollege, is a private sector higher education institution founded in 1980. Recognised and approved by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) as a provider of higher education and operating in accordance with Cypriot legislative requirements, UNIC offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across a range of disciplines, including business, education, humanities, social sciences, sciences, and engineering. UNIC has more than 6,000 full-time students, and campuses in Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca.

4 The University's partnership with UNIC is through UNIC Online, which is branded as UNICAF and wholly owned by EDEX. The collaboration, set up under a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) dated 2011, is for a Master of Business Administration, approved in July 2011, a BA (Hons) Business Studies, approved in February 2012, and a BA (Hons) Accounting, approved in March 2013. Students were first recruited in 2012, 2012 and 2013 respectively. The programmes operate under validation arrangements and all delivery is online. Currently, the partnership is governed by a replacement MoA completed in 2014, which provides for the last student admissions to the programmes in October 2014 and expires in 2017. Thereafter, the University has undertaken to ensure that all registered students have the opportunity to complete their University programme.

5 A rolling schedule of enrolments onto the programmes has been operating. Currently, a total of 950 students are registered, comprising 744 postgraduate students and 206 undergraduates, the largest cohorts being on the MBA (Finance) and MBA (Management) pathways (79 and 326 respectively) and BA (Hons) Business Studies (Management) (76). More than 95 per cent of students are from Sub-Saharan Africa.

6 Following a QAA Institutional Audit in 2010, the then University College Plymouth St Mark & St John received judgements of limited confidence in the soundness of its current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and in the quality of learning opportunities available to students, both in relation to its overseas collaborative provision. The review team considered it essential that the University College establish secure and systematic institutional oversight of such provision, including the monitoring of compliance with its stated operational and institutional requirements. It was considered

advisable that the University College monitor whether the extent of the planned delegation of authority to faculty level was compatible with sound institutional management of the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities offered through collaborative provision.

7 The QAA follow-up report of 2012 concluded that the University College had addressed the essential recommendation via a number of measures, including revisions to regulations and procedures to strengthen them, reappraisal of the consideration of risk in the due diligence process, and a clarification of the accountability of key roles in the approval and monitoring of collaborative partnerships. The University had put in place revised committee structures and processes designed, in part, to strengthen faculty and institutional monitoring of collaborative provision, though the new arrangements required time to be embedded fully.

8 The transnational education (TNE) review team found that, with respect to the approval of the partnership with UNIC Online, effective procedures for the scrutiny of risk in the due diligence process were applied. However, further work is required by the University to ensure that, overall, its revised procedures are fully implemented to provide sound institutional management and oversight, particularly in relation to annual programme review.

Set-up and operation

Developing, agreeing and managing arrangements for setting up and operating the link

9 Partnership approval processes are set out in the Collaborative Provision Regulations and Procedures contained in the University's Quality Assurance Framework. Proposals can arise from a range of sources, including those generated internally by University staff, or as a result of an approach from an external institution or organisation.

10 Intercollege (as it then was) was approved as a collaborative partner of the University College in 2011. Appropriate, proportionate and robust due diligence and risk assessment processes were applied to both the business case and academic approvals. A proposal, together with a due diligence report and risk assessment, all completed within the prescribed templates, were presented for initial consideration by the Academic Development Committee (ADC), which imposed conditions for approval in principle, including Academic Board approval of amendment to the University College Regulations to incorporate the MBA as a bonafide University College award and the resolution of contractual and marketing matters.

11 A subsequent institutional and resources visit to Intercollege, led by the (then) Principal and Vice Principal (Resources), took in both the Larnaca and Nicosia sites and included meetings with Intercollege senior managers and administrative and technical staff. The panel reported comprehensively on Intercollege's legal and financial status, mission, in-country approvals, insurance, health and safety arrangements, management structure, quality assurance systems, academic portfolio, resources including IT and computing, staffing, and student support services. Following confirmation that the initial conditions had been met, further consideration of the proposal, due diligence report and risk assessment and scrutiny of the institutional/resources visit report, the ADC granted approval in principle.

12 The partnership approval event was held at the University, with a video link to Intercollege, an arrangement in line with the University's processes in place at that time with respect to programmes to be delivered wholly online. The panel, which included an external academic, received appropriate documentation and met Intercollege senior and teaching staff and students. Discussion focused, in particular, on online delivery and the panel sought

clarification of matters within this specific context: incorporation of key skills and case studies into programme design; assessment strategy; student experience and support; managing student expectations about minimum study time; equal opportunity issues; disability support; technical infrastructure and capacity; access to e-books and e-journals; staff development; and the conversion of materials to online mode. The panel recommended approval, conditional on the provision of the institutional learning teaching and assessment strategy clarifying the institution's strategic approach to, and investment in, staff development and resourcing of online learning.

13 While a teaching and learning strategy for flexible, distance and blended learning was subsequently provided by UNIC Online, there is no documented evidence that the approval condition was formally signed off, and the University was unable to locate evidence of the Academic Board's approval of the partnership. It was unclear to the review team whether the University's processes in place at that time required Academic Board sign-off of partner approval. The current position is that Academic Board sign-off is required under the University's processes.

14 The original MoA, signed by the Principals of the respective institutions, was for a five-year term, with five-yearly reviews. It sets out clearly the obligations and responsibilities of each party and prohibits subcontracting of delivery. As explained below, this agreement was replaced by a new MoA in 2014.

15 Ongoing monitoring of the partnership is undertaken at the biannual meetings of the Partnership Board, which comprises the Academic Link Tutor (as chair) and UNIC Online senior managers and programme directors. The Partnership Board discharges its functions in line with its terms of reference, considering strategic issues affecting the partnership, and operational matters with a strategic dimension; it also monitors the provision of resources at partner level and the quality of the student experience. Key matters arising are reported through the Academic Link Tutor annual report which, under University regulations, informs the broader annual monitoring process, though as noted below in paragraph 31, the University was unable to locate records of faculty consideration of annual reporting or University oversight with respect to the UNIC Online programmes.

16 University regulations provide for flexibility in the partnership review process, each review being organised in a manner that recognises both the scale of the partnership and the nature of the provision. Where applicable, interim reviews are undertaken by the Dean of Faculty. At the five-year renewal point, Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) appoints a review panel generally reflecting the composition of the original approval panel, including an external member. The process incorporates a document-based review and a visit to the partner to meet staff and students and tour programme and institutional facilities. The review report is submitted to the ADC, which makes a formal recommendation to the Academic Board, for decision on the renewal or termination of the partnership. University senior staff confirmed that the partnership with UNIC Online is due for its first review in May 2016, in accordance with the original MoA timescales.

17 As noted above, the University has decided to terminate the partnership with the University of Nicosia, through UNIC Online. A new contract, signed in October 2014, sets out in similar terms to the original MoA the arrangements for UNIC Online's continuing delivery of the programmes over a three-year period ending in 2017, and provides that only those students enrolled by October 2014 are recognised as University of St Mark & St John students. Current students have been informed of the termination and given assurances that they will be able to complete their University award.

18 Senior staff indicated that the agreement may be renewed in 2017 following partnership review, although it is unclear how this outcome could be achieved given the

University's view that UNIC Online no longer provides a good strategic fit. Alternatively, student registrations could be transferred to a new awarding institution (should a willing institution be found), though senior University staff considered this outcome unlikely. Senior staff stated that, should these options fail, the University guarantees to undertake teach-out, ensuring that any remaining students have the opportunity to complete their award. Since the University stipulates a 10-year maximum registration period, and the substantial numbers of students currently registered are permitted to opt in and out (provided periods of non-engagement do not exceed two years), teach-out could well continue to 2024.

19 The review team concluded that the current MoA provides adequate safeguards for students over its three-year term. However, while the team had no doubt of the University's good faith in recognising and accepting its responsibility for ensuring that students who wish to complete their University award beyond 2017 can do so, the MoA provides no associated guarantee, stating only that the University will use 'reasonable endeavours' to enable students to complete their programmes. Should the University take on responsibility for teach-out in 2017, the challenges presented would be considerable, since the University does not currently offer equivalent or similar programmes online. Senior University staff stated that the University is prepared to address this eventuality.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

20 The contract between the University and UNIC Online provides that responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of the award(s) rests with the University and UNIC Online; however, the agreement does not state where ultimate responsibility for academic standards lies. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that written agreements with collaborative partners state explicitly that ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the University.

21 Collaborative programme approval, which must be preceded by partnership approval, follows standard University processes, with some additional elements reflecting the nature of collaborative arrangements.

22 The MBA, BA (Hons) Business Studies and BA (Hons) Accounting, all designed by UNIC Online, were approved by the University in accordance with its processes, for delivery by UNIC Online in 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively. In each case, following approval in principle by ADC, an approval panel constituted in line with University requirements scrutinised documentation and undertook comprehensive investigation of programme design, delivery and assessment, with appropriate consideration of the online-specific aspects of delivery, learning resources, assessment and student support. The events were held at the University, with videoconferencing contributions from Cyprus, in accordance with University processes at that time. The validation of additional MBA pathways in 2012 was conducted in line with University processes.

23 Programme specifications for the three programmes are completed fully in the University's template in most cases. However, with respect to the BA (Hons) Business Studies, the programme specification as currently drafted records that students are able to complete the relevant Certificate intermediate award by demonstrating 15 of the 17 specified programme learning outcomes. The review team **recommends** that the University review the BA (Hons) Business Studies programme specification to ensure its accuracy and completeness.

24 Learning, Quality and Standards Committee (LQSC) granted final approval of all the programmes, although the MBA approval conditions are not formally recorded as signed off.

25 The University's processes require that, as a new programme is approved, an associated annexe specifying the new programme is added to the institutional MoA. This process ensures that all new programmes are bound effectively by the provisions of the agreement which, as noted above in the case of the UNIC Online agreement, sets out the obligations and responsibilities of each party. The BA (Hons) Accounting Annexe was attached to the institutional MoA signed in October 2014. There is no evidence of this annexe being attached to a completed MoA prior to this date, and the first students were enrolled in April 2013, with the first intake in June 2013. Consequently, for a period of time between June 2013 and October 2014, some students were exposed to the risks arising from incomplete contractual documentation covering their programme. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that all relevant contractual documentation is fully in place before students are admitted to collaborative programmes.

26 Until the close of 2014-15, UNIC Online programme directors were in place for each of the programmes. At the visit, the review team was informed that the programme director role has been withdrawn and all associated functions and responsibilities transferred to the office of Academic Affairs. Former programme directors continue to undertake a student-facing role, providing a channel of communication into Academic Affairs and back to students. It was unclear to the review team, and in meetings staff were unable to articulate clearly, how this revised framework would ensure effective academic management and oversight of the programmes. The University is **recommended** to ensure that UNIC Online operates an effective framework for the academic management and oversight of the programmes following the withdrawal of the programme director role.

27 The University Academic Link Tutor visits UNIC twice each year, his visits coinciding with meetings of the Partnership Board and module assessment boards, which he chairs. The review team heard from staff that there are strategic meetings between senior managers of the respective institutions in Plymouth, London and Cyprus and regular communications between the UNIC Online data officer and the University registry.

28 Under the University's procedures, collaborative programme monitoring follows standard University processes, providing that annual programme reports, compiled by the programme leader and submitted to the Head of Department, draw on module reports, staff-student liaison committee minutes, and external examiner reports and responses; and report on student recruitment, retention, progression and awards, staff development activity, and examples of good practice. Programme reports inform departmental reports, which in turn inform faculty summative reports and the Head of Quality and Academic Standards' Annual Monitoring Report to AQSC.

29 The University described the annual programme reporting processes that operated for the UNIC Online programmes until the close of the 2013-14 annual cycle. These processes comprised external examiner reporting, requiring a response from the ALT; ALT annual reporting to the faculty management team; and discussion at the biannual meetings of the Partnership Board, chaired by the Academic Link Tutor and attended by UNIC Online senior staff and programme directors.

30 The review team found that appropriate responses are made to external examiners. ALT reports, requiring confirmation that the programmes operate effectively and as agreed at validation (as to delivery, assessment and moderation, quality assurance processes, resources, staffing, the student voice and recruitment and admissions), are produced in line with University requirements.

31 However, while meeting minutes indicate that oral programme reports are presented to the Partnership Board, there is no record of written programme reports, and both University and UNIC Online staff confirmed that these had not been produced.

Partnership Board minutes provide minimal or no information on the content of the oral programme reports, and little associated discussion of them is recorded. As noted above, key matters arising at Partnership Board meetings are reported through the Academic Link Tutor annual report which, under University regulations, informs the broader annual monitoring process. However, with respect to the UNIC Online programmes, the University was unable to locate records of departmental and faculty consideration of annual reporting or of institutional oversight of external examiner reporting and annual review.

32 The review team concluded that, as at the close of the 2013-14 reporting cycle, annual review of the UNIC Online programmes had not operated in line with University processes. In the absence of documented programme reporting, core elements of the annual review had not been adequately addressed, notably student recruitment, retention, progression and award data; student evaluation of programmes and responses; and resulting action planning.

33 Following an internal review, the University has recently put in place a revised annual monitoring process. This sets out revised timelines for the completion of programme and departmental reports for 2014-15 and their consideration at faculty and institutional level in October/November 2015. Senior staff stated that the University has recognised the need to establish robust systems for gathering, reporting, analysing and using data, including data on student progression, completion and evaluation of modules for the UNIC Online programmes. They indicated that a data template, which forms part of a revised annual programme reporting template, has been developed. At this early stage of the first year of operation of the revised processes, it was not possible for the review team to evaluate their effectiveness in practice. The review team **recommends** that the University keep under review the continued operation of its revised annual monitoring processes for partner provision, to ensure full and effective institutional oversight.

34 University processes provide for programme review at regular intervals of not more than six years, conducted by a panel chaired by a senior academic of the University and including at least one external member; scrutiny of documentation including a briefing paper completed in the University template; and a review event incorporating meetings with teaching and academic staff and past and current students. AQSC maintains oversight of review outcomes and follow-up action.

35 Processes for periodic review of collaborative programmes, while based on the standard processes, are dependent in their detail upon the scope, longevity and location of the provision, subject to AQSC approval of the specific arrangements. Staff confirmed that the UNIC Online programmes are due for first review in April/May 2016.

Assessment

36 The University's assessment regulations apply to the programmes, in accordance with University requirements. University assessment policies, procedures and practices are clearly set out in institutional documentation.

37 Assessment strategies for the UNIC Online programmes, reflecting the University Assessment Policy and set out in programme specifications, detail a diverse range of formative and summative assessments designed to enable students to achieve the programme learning outcomes and to provide an array of experiences reflecting professional and business contexts. Assessment includes reports, case studies, strategic and business plans, dissertations, essays, work folders, oral presentations, reflective summaries and multiple-choice tests. Students are clearly very happy with the online assessment information provided to them and confirm that they are clear about what is required.

38 UNIC Online tutors are responsible for setting assessment briefs, for approval by the University via the Academic Link Tutor, and for marking and internally moderating assessed work. Defined samples are despatched by UNIC Online to the external examiners for their scrutiny. The University's normal procedures for the conduct and recording of results of examinations and other assessments apply. While the third-marking of assessments (as permitted under the University's regulations) had been undertaken on some occasions to resolve discrepancies between first and second markers, the most recent external examiner report available for the review, for BA (Hons) Business Studies, confirms that marking is appropriate and consistent.

39 Feedback to students on their assessments is completed in a standard template against defined criteria and uploaded online, a feedback system described by one external examiner as 'well worked out'. Students are generally satisfied with the feedback they receive.

40 External examiners are appointed by the University specifically to the UNIC Online programmes, after consultation with UNIC Online. All appointments are currently in place, and external examiner reports and responses are available for the MBA and BA (Hons) Business Studies programmes. The first reporting round for the BA (Hons) Accounting programme, which first recruited in 2013-14, will be for the 2014-15 academic year, because the University does not require external examiners to report on FHEQ Level 4.

41 The University operates the same external examining arrangements for all programmes leading to its awards, irrespective of location of delivery. The handbook provides clear and detailed information on external examiners' appointment, induction, rights and responsibilities. External examiners have the option, though not the duty, to scrutinise assessment briefs and marking schemes before issue to students; there is no express requirement for these to be sent to external examiners. An external examiner has expressed the view (with which the review team concurs) that assessment practice would be enhanced by the introduction and implementation of a requirement for all assessment briefs and marking schemes to be sent for external examiner scrutiny before issue to students, noting that the provision of developmental feedback on assessment briefs by external examiners is good practice.

42 The UNIC external examiner reports for 2012-13, while confirming that students attained the learning outcomes and that assessment tasks were fair, raised significant concerns about marking and plagiarism issues requiring urgent attention. More specifically, the reports identified a lack of consistent marking schemes compatible with the University's requirements, and of a coherent and applied policy on plagiarism, specifically on the use of plagiarism-detection software. The reports also comment on the need for consistency of feedback, in form and intensity, and a lack of evidence of a range of assessment methods.

43 All the matters raised were addressed to the satisfaction of the external examiner, who in 2013-14 reported that the programme team had responded positively to their comments, that internal assessment was now consistent with expected standards, and that marks awarded were appropriate and in line with grade descriptors. The reports commend the University for its successful approach to addressing plagiarism issues. Feedback to students is described as written in a helpful and motivating style. Actions taken on further matters for consideration arising from the most recent external examiner reports, including the timing of feedback to students and adjustments to the use of plagiarism-detection software, are reported in the associated responses from the programme team.

44 Assessment boards operate in line with University procedures. Module assessment boards (MABs) are chaired by the Academic Link Tutor and are usually held twice per year, either at the University or at UNIC, with UNIC Online staff involved in delivery and learning

support in attendance. There is appropriate consideration of external examiner reports and, while external examiners have frequently been absent from recent boards, their additional comments have been received and presented. The UNIC Academic Link Tutor attends progression and award boards, as chair of the MAB.

45 University regulations, guidelines and procedures on cheating, plagiarism, extenuating circumstances, appeals and complaints, which are set out in online module materials, apply to the programmes. UNIC Online applies the procedures locally and there is a right of final appeal to the University. Students said that, should they need to use these processes, support would be provided by Student Services.

Quality of learning opportunities

46 Until student recruitment ceased in October 2014, UNIC Online had responsibility for student admissions, following University processes. A large team of trained Admissions Advisers made one-to-one contact with prospective applicants, advising on entry requirements and financial and other matters. Offer letters were issued by UNIC Online. Applications from prospective students with non-standard qualifications (including accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)) were referred to the University, via the Academic Link Tutor, for consideration and approval.

47 University documentation describes a system of student representation at UNIC Online, comprising student representatives elected online by their peers (one per programme per level); attendance by representatives at four-monthly online programme committee meetings; and six-monthly online staff-student liaison meetings, with minutes circulated to students through the learning platform. However, this system is not operating as described. UNIC Online staff stated that staff-student liaison committees are not being held, and it became apparent to the review team that any programme committee meetings that are held are irregular or infrequent, and not always recorded. No programme committee minutes were available to the team. Students whom the review team met are not aware of a student representation system, either through the circulation of meeting minutes or otherwise.

48 UNIC Online MBA students took part in an online survey based on the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) in 2014. UNIC Online produced a detailed report analysing the responses of the 50 students who had so far responded. UNIC issues online module evaluation forms to students at the end of each module. University processes entail analysis and discussion of module evaluation at programme committee meetings and Partnership Board meetings, and regular updates to students on action taken posted on the learning platform and reported to the programme committee and staff-student liaison meetings. While staff-student liaison meetings are not being held and programme committee records were not available, the review team was able to confirm from relevant minutes that the Partnership Board discusses student evaluation of modules and actions taken or to be taken. Students confirmed that they receive and complete module evaluation forms but are unsure as to any resulting action. The University is **recommended** to work with UNIC Online to explore ways in which the student engagement framework can be fully and effectively implemented at UNIC Online.

49 All teaching staff are approved by the University before appointment. UNIC Online senior staff explained that staff are recruited from applicants based locally. If they subsequently leave Cyprus, which sometimes occurs, they are able to continue in their employment as UNIC Online tutors. Newly appointed tutors receive an induction from Academic Affairs and are appraised during the first 12 months. An appraisal system for all teaching staff has been developed but not yet implemented.

50 UNIC Online staff have staff development opportunities provided by EDEX; through completion of the Oxford Certificate for Effective Online Tutoring; and through completion of the PGCE for staff with fewer than four years' teaching experience. Staff development activity is monitored by the Academic Link Tutor (ALT) and reported in the annual ALT report.

51 All the programmes are delivered wholly online and comprise 15 to 30 credit modules, each delivered over six to eight weeks, with regular assessment points. Learning is asynchronous (with some synchronous real-time communication where possible), students studying modules in a defined sequence built into the online delivery system. The language of delivery and assessment is English. Students submit completed assessments online. Where assessments are completed online, UNIC Online's systems provide for identity checking. The ALT monitors and reports on the effectiveness of assessment administration.

52 Students are clearly very happy with the quality of the online learning materials and resources, the assessment information, and the accompanying online tutor support. The review team viewed sample online module spaces and considered these to be well organised, user-friendly and easily navigable. Academic and non-academic interactions between students are encouraged, including through the use of online discussion forums. Student evaluation via the online postgraduate survey referred to in paragraph 48 confirms the helpfulness of online peer-to-peer discussion and support. Individual student progress is tracked, and recorded in the staff space within the Student Information System (SIS).

53 Students said that on starting the programme they had received comprehensive and helpful guidance on the use of the online technology, through the online Student Guide, and it was clear that they had no difficulty in using the system. They indicated that ongoing technological support is readily available and operates effectively, any problems being remedied swiftly and efficiently. Academic support is provided by individual module tutors, and students have access to personal advice and support from a team of designated, trained student advisers within Student Services. Students are satisfied with the range of available support.

Information on higher education provision

54 Under the contract, UNIC Online is responsible for ensuring accuracy in marketing, publicity and other promotional material in any media. All website and printed material, including the use of the University's name and logo, must be approved by the University Marketing and Promotions Department before publication. The contract stipulates standard forms of words relating to the nature of the relationship and the description of the programmes.

55 Online and printed information intended for publication was initially approved at programme validation. All updated materials are checked at programme level and signed off by the UNIC Online's Chief Academic Officer before being submitted to the University, via the ALT, for final approval. The ALT undertakes ongoing checks on the accuracy of published information. Students confirmed that information provided to them pre-entry was accurate and helpful.

56 Following the termination of student recruitment, UNIC Online has removed references to the University from its website and ceased the production of associated printed material. Current students have been informed of the termination and given assurances that they will be able to complete their University award.

57 Current students access learning and assessment materials and other module information, including the credits allocated to individual modules, via the UNIC Online VLE,

which is well designed and easily navigable. Students confirmed that module information, including assessment requirements, is comprehensive and helpful. The online SIS provides a discrete staff space containing student records, and a separate student space providing a range of largely financial and administrative programme information. Academic programme-specific information is available to students via module links on the VLE (for instance to the University complaints and appeals procedures) and via a bespoke, password-protected website.

58 The University produces certificates and transcripts and issues these to students. With respect to the UNIC Online programmes, neither certificates nor transcripts refer to the teaching institution or location of delivery, and certificates do not refer to the existence of transcripts.

Conclusion

Positive features

The review team did not identify any particular positive features.

Recommendations

The University is recommended to take the following action:

- ensure that written agreements with collaborative partners state explicitly that ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the University (paragraph 20)
- review the BA Business Studies programme specification to ensure its accuracy and completeness (paragraph 23)
- ensure that all relevant contractual documentation is fully in place before students are admitted to collaborative programmes (paragraph 25)
- ensure that UNIC Online operates an effective framework for the academic management and oversight of the programmes following the withdrawal of the programme director role (paragraph 26)
- keep under review the continued operation of its revised annual monitoring processes for partner provision, to ensure full and effective institutional oversight (paragraph 33)
- work with UNIC Online to explore ways in which the student engagement framework can be fully and effectively implemented at UNIC Online (paragraph 48).

University of St Mark & St John's response to the review report

The University welcomes the report on the outcomes of QAA's recent review of transnational education in Cyprus and Greece, which included the University's collaborative provision managed by UNIC Online in Cyprus. The report provides an overview of the current status of the University's collaborative provision with UNIC Online, reflecting the decision of the University to terminate the partnership in 2013. The University is pleased to note the recognition of student satisfaction with both the comprehensive information available to them and the arrangements in place for online assessment and feedback. The recommendations made have been noted and the University has developed an action plan to address these.

QAA1505 - Mar 16

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk