International Quality Review of Emirates College for Advanced Education

April 2021

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an International Quality Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Emirates College for Advanced Education. The review took place from 25 to 27 April 2021 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

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International Quality Review (IQR) offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review benchmarks the institutions' quality assurance processes against international quality assurance standards set out in Part 1 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).[1]

In International Quality Review, the QAA review team:

- makes conclusion against each of the 10 Standards set out in Part 1 of the ESG
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- comes to an overall conclusion as to whether the institution meets the standards for International Quality Review.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.[2] A dedicated section explains the method for International Quality Review[3] and has links to other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the Glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/en/training-and-services/iqr

Key findings

Executive summary

The Emirates College for Advanced Education (ECAE) is located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). ECAE was established in 2007 and commenced teaching its first group of undergraduate students in September 2007 and its first group of postgraduate students in October 2007. Since its establishment, ECAE has served the Abu Dhabi, Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) by providing cohorts of trained teachers to be employed as English Medium Teachers (EMTs) at ADEK schools.

The main campus of the College is located in Abu Dhabi city; however, ECAE started using Teachers Training Institute as a branch campus in the Emirate of Ajman after Committee for Academic Accreditation (CAA) approval in December 2018.

There are currently 119 students at the College - 37 are studying on the bachelor-level programmes (which have ceased recruiting), 11 are studying for a postgraduate diploma; 54 are studying at master's level, and 17 are studying for a PhD.

The College operates within the UAE regulatory framework for its qualifications, with academic programmes and their programme outcomes mapped against the Quality Framework Emirates. All programmes are approved by ADEK and are accredited by CAA prior to recruitment. The College has mapped the ADEK criteria against the European Standards and Guidelines to ensure that all programmes align with international as well as local quality assurance criteria. The CAA also reviews programmes every five years. The College makes comprehensive use of its Board of Trustees, who represents the community that the College serves and provides a broad range of experience across primary, secondary, higher and vocational education.

ECAE's Strategy and Institutional Plans were most recently revised in 2019. Its mission and vision are:

Mission

- Transforming education through specialized, research-informed academic and professional development programs in a collaborative, state-of-the-art learning environment.

Vision

- Leading educational transformation in and beyond UAE Values: In our endeavour to achieve our strategic vision and mission at all levels, we practice our values that remain our guiding principles with each other, our students, partners, and all stakeholders, at all times.
- Respect - We care and consider with courtesy, appreciation, and fairness.
- Collaboration - We engage and support with synergy, innovation, and shared goals.
- Transparency - We communicate and act with openness, honesty, and inclusiveness (while preserving confidentiality).
- Professionalism - We behave and impart with commitment, ethics, and passion.
- Integrity - We inspire and proclaim with honesty, accountability and ethics

Strategic priorities and goals

ECAE has cultivated a range of partnerships and secured stakeholder involvement especially within the UAE. Key partners include the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Khalifa

University, alongside schools including British School Al Khubairat, Al Yasat Private School, Aldar Academies, local employers such as EAT (Etihad Aviation Training), and special needs organisations like Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Special Education operated by The New England Center for Children (MRC/NECC), UAE Special Olympics and the Al Mubarakah Foundation. Key stakeholders include the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK).

These relationships enable ECAE to develop its curriculum offer to meet local, regional and international needs, inform appropriate subject-specific research and enhance student progression. The College mapping of the ADEK criteria against the European Standards and Guidelines contributes to the enhancement of quality in an international context.

In August 2016, ECAE's mandate was changed in line with ADEK's vision and UAE's strategic priorities to ensure optimum utilisation of the human capital and resources available in the Emirate: ECAE was instructed to cease recruiting to the Foundation Program and its bachelor's programmes, and continue offering its existing Master of Education programme and the Postgraduate Diploma. Later in 2018, the College completely shifted its focus to become a graduate and research-based higher education institution in the UAE.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which ECAE meets the 10 ESG Standards, the review team followed the handbook for International Quality Review (April 2019). The review process is evidence-based, and the review team was provided with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence by the College. During the two-day online review visit, which took place from 25 to 27 April 2021, a total of six meetings were held, comprising the Chancellor, his senior management team, teaching faculty, support services staff, students, and alumni.

The review team concludes that Emirates College for Advanced Education meets the 10 ESG Standards and has identified five areas of good practice and two recommendations.

QAA's conclusions about Emirates College for Advanced Education

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at Emirates College for Advanced Education.

European Standards and Guidelines

Emirates College for Advanced Education **meets** all of the 10 ESG Standards and Guidelines.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Emirates College for Advanced Education.

- The strong college-wide culture for quality improvement and enhancement, through the inclusive leadership demonstrated by the Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department and supported by the Vice Chancellor, which proactively drives quality forward at the College (Standard 1.1).
- The way that the College has harnessed existing processes and capitalised on them in enhancing students' learning opportunities during the migration to online delivery during the COVID pandemic (Standard 1.3).
- The resourceful, reflective approach of the College to staff development opportunities and their impact on the student learning experience and research-informed teaching (Standard 1.5).
- The role the community of practice forum plays in supporting staff in enhancing their teaching and learning (Standard 1.5).
- The thoughtful, committed, collaborative engagement of the College with students through the delivery and ongoing enhancement of support services (Standard 1.6).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Emirates College for Advanced Education.

Desirable

- The College should publish an explicit extenuating circumstances policy, including criteria for applications and processes for making decisions (Standard 1.3).
- The College should make publicly and explicitly clear the circumstances under which it may make short-notice changes to the terms and conditions of study and how it would safeguard the interests of students in alignment with the College's student-centred philosophy (Standard 1.4).

Explanation of the findings about Emirates College for Advanced Education

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

Standard 1.1   Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Findings

1.1   ECAE's Strategy and Institutional Plan was most recently revised in 2019 in line with government direction and changes in institutional focus. ECAE is committed to continuous quality assurance and enhancement by evaluating its academic programmes, courses, faculty, students, as well as administrative services. The College does this effectively through systematic and continuous evaluation, review and monitoring of all aspects of operational and academic activities. Its approach to quality assurance is a two-fold process with external and internal perspectives. Externally, through national accrediting bodies such as the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), Abu Dhabi, Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) - who are the ultimate authority - to gauge and assess the ECAE's quality assurance efforts. This approach is complemented internally through the work of the Senior Executive Management Team (SEMT), Internal Audit and the Board of Trustees who carefully monitor, evaluate and review operational and strategic activities according to the defined quality standards.

1.2   Policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. ECAE has a comprehensive Quality Assurance Manual that is reviewed and updated regularly and which sets out its methodology and supporting policies and procedures. The Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) department of the Vice Chancellor's Office coordinates the institutional effectiveness activities of the College.

1.3   The ECAE Strategic Plan is a clear visual document with multiple layers. The vision of the institution is to transform education through specialised research-informed academic and professional development programmes in a collaborative, state-of-the-art learning environment. The Plan has five priorities: People, Learning, Knowledge Creation, Excellence, and Global Excellence, which lead to three key planned outputs, broadly covering research, professional skills development, niche and integrated academic and training programmes to meet societal needs. ECAE's policies underpin and are designed to support its strategic plan and staff at all levels of the organisation recognise their role in achieving the strategic vision supported by robust policy implementation.

1.4   The current quality assurance framework, as defined in the Quality Assurance Manual, is designed and implemented at ECAE through its Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement and Effectiveness Model (ISEIE Model). The ISEIE Model is shared with staff through a Faculty Handbook, which includes a specific section outlining the quality assurance framework and how it applies to their roles. It also makes explicit that student feedback on programmes regarding teaching quality is sought through surveys evaluating teaching, course content, practicum, research project, and advisers and this was confirmed by students who appreciate the value the institution places on their feedback in driving ongoing improvement.

1.5   The IRE department of the Vice Chancellor's Office is an effective guardian for quality assurance, and coordinates the institutional effectiveness activities of the College. The IRE department provides objective and thorough research to facilitate decision-making and establish procedural guidelines for activities. Its scope includes student evaluations of programmes, teaching and learning activities, faculty and staff feedback on the institution

(services and facilities) and alumni evaluation of their experience at ECAE and the contribution of their academic programmes to individual professional success. The IRE department also produces and administers useful employer satisfaction, departmental surveys and benchmarking activities. All institutional research data is compiled into a comprehensive Fact Book which is effectively used for monitoring performance, institutional planning, and for reporting. The Quality Assurance Manual is reviewed by the IRE department on an annual basis and updated as required to be compliant with the MoE standards, ADEK regulations as well as international quality assurance standards. Similarly, ECAE has a range of supporting policies covering research, teaching, learning and the student experience, including specific policies around academic honesty, student grievances, disciplinary and appeals policies. During the visit, the review team heard how the work of the IRE department extends past its guardianship of quality into developing and enhancing quality practices. For example, following engagement with international quality agencies it has introduced Quality Champions in each department. These Champions are nominated individuals whose specific role it is to identify and share new and emerging good practice that can enhance the teaching and learning experience for students and staff.

1.6 External reviews and accreditations by ADEK, CAA and the MoE demonstrate that ECAE is a mature higher education organisation with systematic processes in place for robust quality assurance of systems that form a cycle for ongoing improvement which contributes to the accountability of the institution. The IRE department serves as a liaison and institutional focal point for all accreditation and external quality assurance related activities. The IRE department starts the review cycle internally approximately six months prior to the submission of the Self-Study/Self-Evaluation Report to the accrediting body. Internal stakeholders are engaged and informed of all relevant requirements and evidence needed to meet the criteria. If the accreditation is at the institutional level, then IRE department completes the whole process with some collaboration from other departments.

1.7 The Senior Executive Management Team (SEMT), consisting of the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor - Academic, the Deputy Vice Chancellor - Support Services, Head of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, Deputy Vice Chancellor - Continuing Education Centre, Head of Strategic Planning and Business Development and the Director for Internal Audit (who is a non-voting member), all collectively monitor, evaluate and review operational and strategic activities according to the defined quality standards. The supporting quality assurance framework, including the IRE department, Internal audit and robust oversight of the Board of Trustees, support SMET in its operational governance and management of the institution on a daily basis.

1.8 The strong College-wide culture for quality improvement and enhancement, through the inclusive leadership demonstrated by the Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department and supported by the Vice Chancellor, proactively drives quality forward at the College and is considered by the review team as an area of **good practice**.

1.9 ECAE has in place robust processes for quality assurance that enable the MoE and national accrediting bodies the CAA and ADEK to meet the statutory requirements prescribed by the UAE Ministry of Education. Quality assurance policies, procedures and processes, enabled by a clear institutional mission and strategy, underpin and drive forward effective quality assurance and enhancement activities at the College. In conclusion, the review team found that the quality assurance processes were operating effectively and that, overall, the review team concludes that Standard 1.1: Policy for quality assurance is **met**.

Standard 1.2   Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Findings

2.1   ECAE has appropriate mechanisms, policies and procedures in place to enable the design and development of programmes. The College methodically aligns the learning outcomes of programmes with the National Quality Framework Emirates and these are presented in a user-friendly format to prospective students in the institution's published Graduate Catalogue. As part of this process, all programmes are designed to align with institutional strategy.

2.2   ECAE currently run 13 accredited programmes and each one is designed with a balance of leading-edge theory, practice and research in order to develop the educators of tomorrow. They adhere to established rules and procedures governing the approval of new and revised academic programmes in order to further its mission and accomplish its strategic goals and courses are developed according to the Curricula Development and Approval policy. This policy contains and outlines key programme design development considerations, including market research and analysis, including scoping through consultation with key customers and external stakeholders. It charts the entire process through to accreditation, validation and marketing. The policy is reviewed every four years and in response to student input.

2.3   The design and development of programmes is led by a task force consisting of the Program Chair, faculty members and the Head of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. An associated Rationale, Learning Outcomes, Structure and Statistics document provides comprehensive detail on programme design and development rationale, intended learning outcomes and the structure and content of each course. All programme learning outcomes are developed to be in line with ECAE's mission but are also aligned to the National Quality Framework Emirates (NQF Emirates) requirements and validated against the summary level descriptions.

2.4   ECAE degree programmes are designed to meet the growing need for practitioners to improve the quality of services in the fields of education and special education. Each programme learning outcome is rigorously mapped against the NQF Emirates and moderated by peers, and prospective students are able to access the Graduate Catalogue where plenty of useful information relating to programme learning outcomes, structure and content are presented in a user-friendly format. Similarly, ECAE is careful to design programmes that enable smooth student progression, as evidenced by students during the review and in trend survey data showing levels of student satisfaction with academic advice offered during their progression within the programme. Where it may be appropriate to close a programme, for example due to a change in government priorities, the College ensures students are able to complete their programme of study by teaching out and communicating effectively the arrangements with students.

2.5   Validation and revalidation activities are undertaken by the Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee which effectively engages and utilises the skills of those who have

subject expertise in the programme area, but who have not been involved directly in its development or revision.

2.6   ECAE has developed and implemented clearly defined processes, roles and responsibilities for programme design and approval in line with institutional strategy, together with appropriate oversight of processes. The evidence provided for the review team confirm that programmes meet the set objectives and intended learning outcomes and the effective way these are documented and communicated. The review team concludes that Standard 1.2: Design and approval of programmes is **met**.

Standard 1.3   Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Findings

3.1   ECAE's Strategy and Institutional Plans describe a culture of careful design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes. Collaboration with key stakeholders, including students, is a key element of the College Vision.

3.2   The graduate Student Handbook and Catalogue are the main documents that detail the student learning journey, and include information about student rights and responsibilities, academic conduct, support services and the complaints procedure. There is a specific handbook for doctoral students. The catalogue and handbooks also outline the programme goals, learning outcomes, course descriptors and course assessment.

3.3   ECAE outlines its view of students as 'partners in the learning experience' and as bringing professional profiles to their member of the institution through collaborative and peer learning. The College encourages the involvement of students in the development of the institution through student representation in a range of committees, including Student Affairs, Graduate Studies and Academic Programs and Curriculum and the Strategic Planning Committee. Students also contribute to the development of programmes by participating in surveys as well as engaging with teams in revising and creating programmes by attending programme and curriculum committees.

3.4   ECAE emphasises interactive learning, the development of critical thinking skills and the use of learning technology in its delivery strategy. In response to the introduction by the Ministry of Education of online teaching and learning in order to address the challenges of COVID-19, ECAE brought forward a plan for the introduction of blended learning for the delivery of all graduate programmes, with effect from 2020-21. ECAE sees the delivery of blended learning as a means of supporting students, most of whom are employed and have other personal and family commitments, and to cope with expected institutional expansion.

3.5   A programme of blended learning development sessions was also offered to support staff. The movement to a blended learning approach was evaluated through focus groups to consider its effectiveness and impact and inform future planning. This embracing of a blended learning approach has enhanced the professional skills profile of students, for instance, students have been empowered to publish articles in peer-reviewed journals and actively participate in research dissemination at international conferences.

3.6   During the COVID pandemic, ECEA adopted a Distance Learning Policy to cover changes in teaching and learning. The review team saw evidence that ECAE was well prepared when the pandemic hit; the College was able to easily switch to blended online teaching, learning and assessment as it already had in a place a digital online learning system with virtual classes being held across the two campuses of Abu Dhabi and Ajman. The College regarded this migration as an opportunity to enhance the delivery of its programmes and invested in and developed its IT resource while consulting with students to ensure that additional resources aligned with their needs. Students whom the team met felt the migration to online blended learning during the pandemic was successful and effective, with proactive academic and technical support and provision of realistic online equivalents to face-to-face sessions. For instance, students have been provided with 24-hour access to the College IT team, open access to faculty and academic support teams, consolidated by programme-specific social media groups. Laboratory work and experiments were filmed and

distributed and material support for home experimentation provided. The review team considers the way that the College has harnessed existing processes and capitalised on them in enhancing students' learning opportunities during the migration to online delivery during the COVID pandemic is **good practice**.

3.7 All graduate programmes incorporate a significant component to research methodology to ensure students graduate as professional researchers. All students are working in their profession, and programmes are designed to help bridge academic and professional activity by achieving a balance of theoretical and practical expertise. Students are engaged in the ECAE research community through participation in ECAE conferences locally and internationally, research seminars, and working on funded projects. Academic staff share their work and engage students as paid research assistants, giving them the opportunity to align research to their professional activities.

3.8 Students stated that they are encouraged to think critically, and they become more independent as the course progresses with tasks becoming more student led. The syllabus supports this trajectory into more autonomous learning through the provision of opportunities for students to shape the syllabus. For instance, students are given the opportunity to request learning topics and sessions that are not within their prescribed curriculum. The Student Services department considers requests from students for these activities and, where possible, try to provide facilitation, support and guidance. Students and faculty whom the team met appreciated the ability to request activities outside of the prescribed curriculum as it allows for 'real world' learning, while maintaining a link to the curriculum. Faculty further stated that it gives them the opportunity to listen to students and address learning needs that arise from their professional activities outside of the College.

3.9 All courses are formally assessed using a range of methodologies, including research papers, independent research projects, case studies, oral presentations, group-led discussions, document analysis and examinations, each aligned to test learning outcomes at postgraduate diploma, master's and doctoral levels. Examinations are designed to test learning outcomes and are administered through a learning management system with published grading scales. The examination procedures include provision for special arrangements for people of determination. The College Catalogue, the Student Handbooks and the Doctoral Student Handbook include definitive information about assessment.

3.10 The College's assessment strategy has changed due to student feedback on the volume and type of assessments they undertake. ECAE has responded by increasing the role of formative assessments and has introduced embedded assessments in programmes. Students welcome this balance of formative and summative assessment and feel that they are given informative, timely and helpful feedback that enables them to progress. In compliance with MoE requirements, the College conducts face-to-face examinations.

3.11 The move to blended online teaching, learning and assessment at the start of the COVID pandemic presented ECAE with a number of challenges. Staff and students met by the team reported that some students missed the opportunity to be interactive while online. In response to this, ECAE implemented faculty training to ensure effective online learning by encouraging engagement, highlighting interactive pedagogies and promoting the use of break-out rooms to facilitate teamwork. Another key challenge was students' reluctance to keep their camera on. This was particularly prevalent with some female students. In response, ECAE gave students the option of keeping their camera off, and instigated paired activity and peer learning to ensure continuing engagement and activity. Another challenge faced by the College is to do with supporting a diverse student profile that mainly consists of mature students who are in full-time work and have family and other significant responsibilities. In order to help students with competing external pressures progress, the College created a provision within the library that helps to identify and support students in

need through writing and study skills. Other strategies instigated in response to student feedback include the reduction of credit modules, offering one-to-one support to increase student retention and the provision of additional classes. The review team considers the College's committed thoughtful and sensitive engagement with students throughout the student journey as **good practice**.

3.12   The Ethics and Research Committee oversees academic integrity and students have access to ECAE's policy on academic integrity. There are arrangements to inform students of principles of academic integrity and how to avoid offences, with the use of Turnitin. There is software embedded within the programmes to allow students the opportunity to check plagiarism on their drafts via Turnitin with further support provided to the students by the Learning Support Hub. Assignments are submitted via Dropbox with staff expected to check the reports on the uploads made.

3.13   The Learning Support Hub offers academic support to students on both campuses. Students are provided with individual support to cope with the workload of courses and to complete their assignments. Workshops are also delivered for students on a regular basis to enhance their academic writing skills. In addition, faculty refer any students who need support to the Learning Support Hub to mitigate any anticipated risk. This is undertaken in conjunction with the academic advisers who monitor students' performance via their Grade Point Average (GPA) and their attendance reports. The College has a procedure for low attendance that includes meetings with academic advisers and regular communication and support with faculty. Once students are identified as being 'at risk', the Learning Support Hubs alongside the faculty put into place an individualised plan. This is co-ordinated by the graduate committee with support from assigned academic advisers in conjunction with the student.

3.14   Students commented that they have weekly meetings with academic advisers; they are flexible with timing and can approach them with any topic and find them extremely helpful. The team was informed that the academic advising scheme was surveyed each year by students with the data overseen by the graduate committee who are responsible for developing and evaluating action plans.

3.15   Students have stated that they have approached the College to ask for extensions on projects to enable them to meet their obligations. Students are given the opportunity for an extension with the decision initially looked at by the lecturer then passed to the graduate chair who makes the decision for an extension in collaboration with the lecturer. To ensure consistency, the Dean meets with the graduate chair to confirm the decision. ECAE explained that it does not have a formal extenuating circumstance policy currently in place; however, if students have any extenuating circumstances, such as medical issues or bereavement, they are given the opportunity to re-sit an exam or postpone an assignment submission, as indicated within the Student Handbook. Students met by the team were unsure about how extenuating circumstances are granted and on what grounds, explaining that they thought that faculty made the final decision. College staff confirmed that judgement for extenuating circumstances is not made by individual faculty, but will always involve a programme chair alongside faculty. To ensure a more consistent approach, the team **recommends** that the College should publish an explicit extenuating circumstances policy, including criteria for applications and processes for making decisions.

3.16   The quality and effectiveness of ECAE degrees and programmes are assessed by monitoring the level of achievement of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). A number of direct and indirect evaluation methods are used. Direct evaluation is done by course-embedded assessments, exams and quizzes, faculty assessment of students' action research, faculty evaluation of courses, research projects, pre-exam and exam board reviews, and so on. Direct evaluation activities are the responsibility of faculty and Division

Heads. Indirect evaluation activities include student evaluations of course and faculty, alumni feedback, employer surveys, committees' review reports and so on. The IRE department coordinates indirect evaluation tools by administering various surveys, analysing data and generating reports as well as monitoring committees' feedback and the action plans.

3.17   The review team concludes that the delivery of programmes encourages students to be active learners with assessments that allow them to demonstrate the achievement of stated learning outcomes. The review team therefore confirms that Standard 1.3: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment is **met**.

Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Findings

4.1   The admission policies for each programme and type of degree are aligned with the requirements of CAA. The programmes are approved by ADEK and accredited by CAA and the MoE. There is clear information on admissions requirements published on web pages, supplied to graduate recruiters through the Admissions Office and through definitive documents, including the Graduate Catalogue. There is an institutional admissions policy which meets government requirements.

4.2   Applicants have the facility to raise questions or concerns through an online portal. Students who met the review team expressed full satisfaction with the quality, accuracy and helpfulness of the admissions information published by the College and the orientation arrangements provided for all new students on enrolment.

4.3   The review team noted a statement in the College Catalogue, that: 'The College reserves the right to make changes without prior notice to the information contained in this publication, including the alteration of various fees, schedules, conditions of admission and credit requirements, and the revision or cancellation of particular courses or programs.' The review team received an assurance that the College, in practice, would only make such changes at the direction of the national authorities or in the interests of students and with their support. The review team appreciated that that assurance was in line with the evidenced commitment of the College to the interests of students but that the circumstances under which the College would make short-notice changes should be explicitly defined or published. The review team **recommends** that the College should make publicly and explicitly clear the circumstances under which it may make short-notice changes to the terms and conditions of study and how it would safeguard the interests of students in alignment with the College's student-centred philosophy.

4.4   There is a control process for approval of changes to programme arrangements approved by CAA. The institution has modified and tightened admissions requirements in recent years following the introduction of new graduate programmes.

4.5   The Transfer Credit Policy sets out the terms of academic transfer, with the Division Head and the Program Chair making decisions on a course-by-course basis. Graduation completion requirements are determined in the Graduate Completion Policy. The externally supplied student record system is the source of electronically generated transcripts and there are standard arrangements for the issue of certificates.

4.6   The College has a largely female demographic but is interested in widening participation from other groups. The leadership team is working with the Ministry of Education and other partners to improve special needs facilities in order to attract and support applications from people of determination.

4.7   The College has ample access to admissions, retention, progression and achievement data through the IRE department. There are routine checks to ensure the accuracy of admissions data, with systems to corroborate the data input through the online application system. A dashboard gives access to data to all managers and acts as a means of making data transparent and open to verification.

4.8   Student retention rates have varied between 67% and 78% since 2016-17. The College notes that the major risk for student withdrawal is the challenge of combining study with full-time work and family commitments. The review team found that the College is aware of the challenge of student retention and makes a resourceful effort to help students coping with personal commitments, including modifications to credit loads and the provision of personal support.

4.9   There is a procedure for academic appeals under the oversight of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor - Academic. The SED states that students may raise an appeal against disciplinary action related to academic and non-academic issues according to the procedures set by the College. Student grievances are handled according to Student Disciplinary and Appeals and Non-Disciplinary Academic Appeals policies. The IRE department is the custodian of complaints made by students on the online feedback system. At present, ECAE has not had any academic complaints made via the IRE department and complaints procedure in place. The academic appeals process has an informal and a formal stage. Students can approach a faculty member informally to discuss their concern. If this offers no resolution a second marker is involved. If this does not resolve the issue the appeal becomes formal, an appeals committee is set up to review the grade and the final decision communicated to students.

4.10   The review team concludes that the admissions processes are robust and that Standard 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification is **met**.

Standard 1.5   Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Findings

5.1   ECAE has established procedures for the recruitment, appointment and appraisal of teaching staff, which are set out in the faculty and staff handbooks. These detail recruitment, development, workload, reward, management and employee responsibilities. HR policies and procedures are overseen by the Abu Dhabi Human Resources Authority (HRA).

5.2   ECAE is required by HRA to align all staff and faculty to the recent Abu Dhabi government changes of unified grade jobs, salary scales and benefits across all entities. In response to the HRA, the College has aligned its HR policies with the new laws that have prompted a review and amendment of its current HR policies.

5.3   The HR team oversees the appointment of new staff with planning undertaken at the beginning of the year to ensure targeted recruitment which is aligned to faculty requirements. ECAE uses both local and international recruitment agencies through which applicants can access the College's recruitment portal and the Abu Dhabi government portal. The recruitment process is automated with a focus on qualifications, specialisations, background and research. ECAE also collaborates with other local universities and offer part-time and secondment opportunities.

5.4   Applicants to ECAE follow a rigorous screening and interview process before a successful applicant receives a formal offer of employment. Part-time faculty must meet the same qualifications for appointment as full-time faculty. Faculty roles include professor, associate professor, assistant professor and lecturer; they undertake academic advising, research and scholarly activities on top of their standard faculty lecturing. The teaching staff are drawn from a diversity of international backgrounds with 44% male and 56% female. Eight per cent of the teaching staff have served for four years or more. New staff receive a general orientation that is supplemented by a 'buddy system' where new staff are paired with an experienced member of staff with an example given of a transition mentor being provided for incoming researchers.

5.5   Faculty all undergo an annual performance review process and cycle that covers three main areas of their academic work (teaching, research and service) as well as assessing their performance in relation to their agreed objectives midway through the year and at the end of each academic year with their line managers. Professional development opportunities feed into the annual performance review and contribute to targets and action plans for the following year. They are linked into UAE priorities within the ECAE framework and are available to all staff.

5.6   The institution offers opportunities for both internal and external training and development activities in response to requirements identified in annual performance review. Faculty are supported in developing their pedagogic skills at faculty level and through the Research office. Initiatives include monthly presentations, development opportunities, funded attendance at international events and conferences, skills development via workshops and lectures. Regular, scheduled peer observation of teaching is also regarded by staff as an opportunity for professional development. Staff describe it as being a collaborative activity with mutual learning benefits.

5.7   ECAE encourages faculty to develop their research portfolio by a range of means. For instance, there is funding for conference attendance and an internal research grant for which faculty can apply with applications reviewed by the Research and Grants Committee. In addition, there are professional development activities relating to specific academic programmes; recent examples include international conferences on Educational Neuroscience and on Educational Measurement, Evaluation and Assessment. Faculty are further supported by the Professional Development Services with international exchange programmes open to PHD students. This is further supplemented by ECAE's Fellow in residence. The Research Office organises research seminars where faculty and/or visiting scholars discuss their studies. ECAE also organises international conferences, for instance on Educational Neuroscience and Educational Measurement, Evaluation and Assessment. Staff met by the review team stated that they are able to utilise their research as part of their teaching, with students concurring they see evidence of faculty research and involvement in conferences in their learning.

5.8   The review team considers the resourceful, reflective approach of the College to staff development opportunities and their impact on the student learning experience and research informed teaching as **good practice**.

5.9   The community of practice was instigated at the start of the COVID pandemic as a support platform for faculty and for staff development. It is open to all ECAE staff. The review team was informed by staff how the community of practice embodies the key commitments of ECAE; it is collaborative and reflective, it promotes the sharing of common purpose and the sharing of learning opportunities. During the COVID pandemic, the community provided an invaluable support for staff and now it is embedded. It has been further developed by drawing in contributions from other partners such as local schools, national and international collaborations. Staff report that it enables the sharing of good practice and ideas with internal and external colleagues and partners, and enables the development of curriculum content. In this way it is an expansive learning system and has become a powerful driver for international partnerships, such as The Open University, Glasgow University and the University of Singapore. Staff met by the review team also reported how the community of practice has been invaluable in providing constant support for teaching and learning, particularly during the migration to blended learning during the COVID pandemic. They emphasised its value in enabling a mutually supportive culture, with peer observation of online activity and consistent guidance and formative feedback. The role the community of practice forum plays in supporting staff in enhancing their teaching and learning is **good practice**.

5.10   The team concluded that ECAE has a rigorous process in place to recruit and support staff by creating an open learning culture and providing them with appropriate developmental opportunities to ensure they are effectively equipped and up-to-date within their relevant field. Standard 1.5: Teaching staff is therefore **met**.

Standard 1.6   Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Findings

6.1   The main campus of the College is located in Abu Dhabi city. ECAE subsequently started using the Teachers Training Institute as a branch campus in the Emirate of Ajman after CAA approval in December 2018: The campus was established to provide accessible and efficient services for students living in the northern emirates. The operations at Ajman campus are governed by the Campus Coordination Manual.

6.2   In January 2020, ECAE moved the main campus to a new location in Abu Dhabi owned by the Ministry of Education. The new main campus is self-contained and consists of a main building with various classrooms, multifunction rooms, science laboratories (physics, chemistry and biology), computer laboratory, gym/sports hall, cafeteria, clinic, meeting rooms, prayer rooms and a library. Undergraduate programmes are offered during the day and graduate programmes in the evenings.

6.3   Across both campuses there are a wide range of student support services covering all aspects of the student journey. The library has opening hours from 8am to 8pm with online and remote access to resources and learning support. There is comprehensive IT and laboratory support, including equipment to support educational neuroscience students and faculty. The study spaces are being enhanced through a programme of renovation. There is a Learning Management System supporting online and blended teaching and learning provision. Turnitin is used to support checks on academic integrity. There is an externally provided student record system and students have the use of various self-service functions such as access to grades and teaching schedules. There are English language support services, wellbeing services, including health and counselling, and careers and alumni support.

6.4   Students are supported by Academic Advisers, who promote academic progress. Each Academic Adviser supports several students through regular sessions and the Academic Adviser liaises with academic and student support staff. There is also a doctoral academic advice scheme. Both schemes are subject to periodic evaluation. Staff are selected and trained according to standard HR policies and procedures.

6.5   The College engages in close and ongoing consultation with students on the development of student support and learning resources, involving them as partners. Students are included in consultative committees, including the Student Council and the Student Affairs Committee, consulted through regular surveys and they are included in discussion about the drafting of policies.

6.6   Students receive an orientation to the support services. The review team saw evidence of the attentiveness and flexibility of support services in response to the needs of students, many of whom also have full-time employment and family commitments. For example, IT Services provides 24-hour support and specific help for students with special software requirements, providing accessible contact points and monitoring student views and feedback closely. The library also provides out-of-office services. The careers support includes opportunities to help students who wish to consider alternative career options. Students told the review team about the provision of gender segregated recreation rooms in response to their requests. The College has introduced sessions to help students with healthy eating and responded to COVID-19 by introducing an online gym facility.

6.7   The institution is working with the MoE and other partners to develop facilities to accommodate the special needs of people of determination.

6.8   There are regular surveys of student satisfaction about student services, which record high levels of satisfaction with arrangements, and the effectiveness of action plans to address student and staff issues, with the Vice-Chancellor and the management team closely monitoring the results, assisted by the IRE department. The monitoring systems enable the management team to keep a watch on the consistency of provision across campuses. Students spoke well of the attentive support that they received from the service departments and the faculty. The review team commends the thoughtful, committed, collaborative engagement of the College with students through the delivery and ongoing enhancement of support services as **good practice**.

6.9   The review team concludes that Standard 1.6: Learning resources and student support is **met**.

Standard 1.7   Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Findings

7.1   Information management is governed through the marketing and communications department and line managed by the Vice Chancellor and the senior management team. Published information such are handbooks and policies are reviewed by the academic department with oversight by the IRE department to ensure accuracy of documents and templates.

7.2   The IRE department is the custodian of information and departments have delegated responsibility for departmental-specific information. The IRE collects and dissemination information from various sources, the information is then distributed by the Marketing and Communications department before it is distributed and publicised. The Marketing and Communications department has overall approval of what is published online.

7.3   ECEA describes comprehensive arrangements for the distribution of responsibilities for the management of information and data to inform decision-making and strategy, including Academic Support, Human Resources and Facilities Management, Finance, Research, Strategy and Business Development and Institutional Research and Effectiveness. There are arrangements to safeguard the confidentiality, accuracy and credibility of data and regular reviews for definitive documentation including catalogues and handbooks. The accuracy, credibility and consistency of information is ensured by the IRE department and Marketing and Communications department before distribution or publicity. The student records policy prescribes arrangements for collection, retention, confidentiality and disposal.

7.4   The ECAE factbook presents facts and information in numerical form based on the reports submitted to the Central Higher Education Data Store (CHEDS) under the oversight of the MoE; the ECAE Annual Report records the achievements of the previous academic year.

7.5   The Academic Committee considers academic online data that is to be published with the Marketing department.

7.6   ECEA gathers information from various sources to inform decision-making and strategic planning, with each department being the main custodians of information who feed into the IRE department.

7.7   Management has access to an online dashboard with live data that has access restrictions; student data is crosschecked for accuracy to ensure it is complete. Student and applicants' information is captured online to allow the Admissions department to crosscheck all the data inputted is accurate.

7.8   ECEA undertakes annual Alumni and Graduate Destination surveys via the Alumni online portal to monitor student employment outcomes and destination. ECEA also contacts employers regarding graduate data. This information feeds into the IRE department who then distributes the information to relevant departments for comments and actions.

7.9   The review team was provided with evidence that the IRE department is central in ECEA's information management process. The IRE department utilises data to inform decision-making and ensure information is accurate. The review team concludes that ECEA has sound and clear arrangements in place and that Standard 1.7: Information management is **met**.

Standard 1.8   Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up to date and readily accessible.

Findings

8.1 There is a comprehensive range of information available on the institutional external and internal web pages. The College Catalogue, the Faculty and Student Handbooks and the Doctoral Student Handbook include full, definitive information about programmes of study, institutional organisational arrangements, student rights and responsibilities, academic integrity and student support services. There is web-based information about accreditation requirements, admission criteria, and programmes of study, including programme/course outlines with details of learning outcomes and assessment.

8.2 The institution plans to introduce an Arabic version of the website. Alumni have access to a portal to maintain their employment profiles. Students gave the review team positive feedback on the quality of published information. The review team found the website both accessible and easy to navigate.

8.3 The College has a full structure for the editorial control of public information. The College website is managed and updated by the Marketing and Communications department in collaboration with the IT department, and the Vice-Chancellor has ultimate oversight of marketing and communications. There are policies for the editorial control of published material co-ordinated by the Marketing department. ECAE maintains guidelines and protocols for all communications involving the media related to the College. Departments have their own spaces on the ECAE portal to create and share content as per ECAE communications protocols and guidelines. Each division/department is required to work with the IT and Marketing departments to regularly review the content that appears on the portal and ensure that it remains accurate, consistent and updated. The IRE department acts as custodian of information about academic matters, including handbooks and policies, with departments having information custodians with delegated responsibilities for the accuracy and completeness of information in their areas.

8.4 The review team concludes that Standard 1.8: Public information is **met**.

Standard 1.9   Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Findings

9.1   As described earlier in this report under Standard 1.1, the current quality assurance framework as defined in the Quality Assurance Manual is designed and implemented at ECAE through its Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement and Effectiveness Model (ISEIE Model). The ISEIE QA model is defined in four stages: Plan, Implement, Assess, Improve.

9.2   A number of direct and indirect evaluation methods are utilised for ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes. The Curricula Approval and Revision policy acts as a basis to ensure adherence to established rules and procedures governing the approval of new and revised academic programmes in order to facilitate decision-making.

9.3   The Curricula Approval and Revision policy requires each established programme, regardless of the type, to follow the same development cycle as that for new programmes. Formal review of a programme is required to take place at a maximum of three years after the initial validation or previous review. These steps are systematically outlined in the policy and follow ECAE's design principles and procedures. Once revised, a programme becomes subject to robust revalidation to ensure that it meets all criteria, is fit for purpose, is fully supported, and can be implemented and quality assured both by ECAE and CAA.

9.4   Direct evaluation activities are the responsibility of faculty and Division Heads, including professional support departments using a range of methods, for example course-embedded assessments, exams and quizzes, faculty assessment of students' action research, faculty evaluation of courses, research projects, plus pre-exam and exam board reviews. Indirect evaluation activities include students' evaluations of course and faculty, alumni feedback, employer surveys, student retention and progression data and committee review reports. The IRE department coordinates indirect evaluation tools by administering various surveys, analysing data and generating reports as well as by monitoring committees' feedback and action plans in accordance with the stated list of procedures.

9.5   The IRE department creates, publishes, distributes and collects important evaluation data through surveys involving staff, students and external stakeholders in a five-phased process. The head of the IRE department shares previous year's questionnaire with senior leaders and Heads of Departments to review and, where necessary, change questions relevant to their units. Once surveys are closed, analysis reports are generated to show trend and recent scenarios and shared with curriculum and management teams where a corresponding and clear faculty action plan is generated in response. In addition, the College collects student opinions through a wide range of committees and informal interactions and assures the student voice is well heard at all levels within the College regarding ongoing monitoring and periodic reviews.

9.6   All programmes are reviewed externally by ADEK and CAA within one year of the graduation of the first cohort. This involves ECAE developing a self-study that addresses the standards outlined in CAA's Procedural Manual for Renewal of Program Accreditation as well as ADEK Regulations for Reauthorization of an Existing Program. ADEK issues a No Objection Letter after its review of the programme Reauthorization Application. CAA sends a team of external reviewers and a CAA commissioner for an on-site visit that follows an

assessment report outlining requirements and suggestions to be addressed/adopted by ECAE. The external review is complete once all requirements are satisfied and the programme receives full accreditation for being 'fit for purpose'.

9.7   The review team concludes that ECAE has clear and wide-ranging processes in place to monitor and review its programmes regularly to ensure continuous improvements to the quality of its academic provision. Therefore, Standard 1.9: Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes is considered as **met** by the review team.

Standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Findings

10.1   ECAE considers external quality assurance reviews as an important step towards the attainment of College operations, and values such interactions and requirements in improving quality for the institution. The College is required to embark on external quality assurance review every five years for both CAA and ADEK.

10.2   Using the quality assurance manual as a guide for the process and with the IRE department leading and overseeing the relevant activities, the College engages effectively with external agencies. ECAE departments, including non-academic departments, are often involved in the process with relevant actions plans scrutinised accordingly. After a review visit, the accrediting and/or external body sends its assessment report to ECAE with requirements and suggestions related to various processes and departments, allowing them to respond with further information and explanations as required.

10.3   The response report is submitted by the IRE department upon the Vice Chancellor's approval. The accrediting body reviews the submitted response report and approves the accreditation application if satisfied. Otherwise, it recommends further action from the College and once all requirements and suggestions are fully met by the College, accreditation is granted by that body.

10.4   The IRE department serves as a liaison and institutional focal point for external quality assurance related activities. These activities are cyclical and repeated at defined intervals stipulated by the respective accreditation bodies. Cycles are typically repeated once every five years with both CAA and ADEK. In addition, ECAE works with international quality assurance agencies to carry out mid-cycle reviews, which is required within three years of a successful Institutional Quality Review, and the College uses the findings to support its ongoing internal and external quality assurance activities.

10.5   Action plans, including those developed by ECAE professional support departments, often result from various quality assurance activities and inform the budget and financial planning of these departments. ECAE financial statements are audited on an annual basis and reviewed on a semi-annual basis by an independent external auditor who reports directly to the Board of Trustees.

10.6   Based on the evidence provided, it is clear that ECAE carries out effective and robust consideration of the regular cyclical monitoring and continuing use of external contributors to quality assurance and enhancement processes as set out in the ESG Standards. Therefore, the review team concludes that in this respect, Standard 1.10: Cyclical external quality assurance is **met**.

Glossary

Action plan
A plan developed by the institution after the QAA review report has been published, which is signed off by the head of the institution. It responds to the recommendations in the report and gives any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice.

Annual monitoring
Checking a process or activity every year to see whether it meets expectations for standards and quality. Annual reports normally include information about student achievements and may comment on the evaluation of courses and modules.

Collaborative arrangement
A formal arrangement between a degree-awarding body and another higher education provider. These may be degree-awarding bodies with which the institution collaborates to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies. Alternatively, they may be other delivery organisations who deliver part or all of a proportion of the institution's higher education programmes.

Degree-awarding body
Institutions that have authority, for example from a national agency, to issue their own awards. Institutions applying to IQR may be degree-awarding bodies themselves, or may collaborate to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of degree-awarding bodies.

Desk-based analysis
An analysis by the review team of evidence, submitted by the institution, that enables the review team to identify its initial findings and subsequently supports the review team as it develops its review findings.

Enhancement
See **quality enhancement**.

European Standards and Guidelines
For details, including the full text on each Standard, see www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area

Examples of practice
A list of policies and practices that a review team may use when considering the extent to which an institution meets the standards for review. The examples should be considered as a guide only, in acknowledgment that not all of them will be appropriate for all institutions.

Facilitator
The member of staff identified by the institution to act as the principal point of contact for the QAA officer and who will be available during the review visit, to assist with any questions or requests for additional documentation.

Good practice
A feature of good practice is a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to the institution's higher education provision.

Lead student representative
An optional voluntary role that is designed to allow students at the institution applying for IQR to play a central part in the organisation of the review.

Oversight
Objective scrutiny, monitoring and quality assurance of educational provision.

Peer reviewers
Members of the review team who make the decisions in relation to the review of the institution. Peer reviewers have experience of managing quality and academic standards in higher education or have recent experience of being a student in higher education.

Periodic review
An internal review of one or more programmes of study, undertaken by institutions periodically (typically once every five years), using nationally agreed reference points, to confirm that the programmes are of an appropriate academic standard and quality. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers. It covers areas such as the continuing relevance of the programme, the currency of the curriculum and reference materials, the employability of graduates and the overall performance of students. Periodic review is one of the main processes whereby institutions can continue to assure themselves about the academic quality and standards of their awards.

Programme of study
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies.

Quality enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.

QAA officer
The person appointed by QAA to manage the review programme and to act as the liaison between the review team and the institution.

Quality assurance
The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the necessary standards, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.

Recognition of prior learning
Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college and university, and/or through life and work experiences.

Recommendation
Review teams make recommendations where they agree that an institution should consider developing or changing a process or a procedure in order to improve the institution's higher education provision.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document
A self-evaluation report by an institution. The submission should include information about the institution as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of its quality systems.

Student submission
A document representing student views that describes what it is like to be a student at the institution, and how students' views are considered in the institution's decision-making and quality assurance processes.

Validation
The process by which an institution ensures that its academic programmes meet expected academic standards and that students will be provided with appropriate learning opportunities. It may also be applied to circumstances where a degree-awarding institution gives approval for its awards to be offered by a partner institution or organisation.