Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education, December 2022

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1   From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the College) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the December 2021 annual monitoring report.

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2   Since the annual monitoring review in December 2021, Al-Maktoum College has enrolled 102.5 full-time equivalent students - a small increase in student numbers. Teaching continues through a blended learning approach, both face-to-face and online.

3   In September 2022, the College launched the MPhil in *The Middle East in a Global Context* programme, in partnership with Trinity College Dublin. The College has also agreed a partnership with Abertay University, with the launch of three new MSc Programmes, which will be delivered collaboratively. In July 2022, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) granted the College approval to deliver the HNC/D in Human Resource Management, which is intended to run from September 2023.

4   Since the last review in December 2021, the College has increased its academic staff with one additional part-time internal teaching fellow with responsibility for teaching across the Higher National (HN) programmes, and two full-time lecturers teaching across all MSc and HN programmes. A new senior academic position of Director of Academic Programmes has also been appointed. All academic appointments are specialists in their areas of expertise.

5   The College continues to work with its main awarding body, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), alongside its partnerships, and programme awards jointly undertaken with Trinity College Dublin, University of Dundee and Abertay University.

Findings from the monitoring visit

6   The team concludes that the College is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the December 2021 annual monitoring report. Actions emanating from the three recommendations in the 2020 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)) have been further embedded and evaluated. There were no further actions identified in the December 2021 annual monitoring visit and matters which were ongoing have been appropriately addressed.

7   The College has a detailed action plan which is reviewed on a monthly basis. If there are changes after the monthly review, these are notified to staff and students and the revised version is replaced on the College's website. The College continues to meet the regulations and maintain the academic standards of its awarding bodies, and to engage effectively with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

8   The Quality Assurance Framework has now been reviewed and revised, resulting in the restructure of the senior management team to effectively support the changes in programmes offered. This new structure has allowed for more effective grouping and coordination, enabling the College to encourage innovation and provide improved supporting mechanisms for staff and students. The revised framework includes updates to the terms of reference for the Boards of Study with the two new boards for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. This model is intended to allow for focused discussion about issues relating to academic level. The College also undertook a governance review which enables and ensures effective discussion at relevant levels to take place, and to be actioned.

9   The College continues to disseminate changes to any programmes, units or academic policies through the Board of Study, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and Academic Council. Any changes are reflected in the minutes of the relevant meetings. Academic guidance and policies are regularly monitored and have now been moved to a new shared online filing system which allows all academic staff to view the policies, with editing rights restricted to senior managers.

10   In the previous annual monitoring visit of December 2021, the team reported that the revised Summative Assessment Policy, Student Handbook, Quality Assurance Procedures and Periodic Review Process had received approval at the appropriate committees but it was too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these new actions.

11   Subsequently, the College has fully reviewed the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook through the appropriate Boards of Study and Academic Council meetings and the minor issues of errors in version control identified in 2021 have now been rectified. Changes to the Student Handbook and Summative Assessment Policy ensure that they reflect current programme information as well as being in line with all current College policies. All policies are now locked for editing, ensuring no changes can be made without consultation as well as ensuring that the most up-to-date version is used. Version controls are now recorded electronically, removing the manual process.

12   The College has also completed its revision of the Periodic Programme Review (PPR) process, and completed one PPR for the Arabic Language Programmes. Following the successful review, the proposed changes were verified by the SQA and programmes follow the new format. Delivery now includes fewer teaching and self-learning hours per week, with additional lectures, tutorials and activities spread across three semesters. This model is intended to allow for students who seek a greater flexibility in study options such as through evening classes or a longer span of delivery.

13   Annual Programme Review (APR) for all programmes taught during 2021-22 has been undertaken. The processes consider the student's voice, journey and experience, as well as the quality of teaching and student feedback. Matters arising from the reviews are monitored through the Board of Studies and presented to the Academic Council on completion. The outcomes of all reviews are reported to the relevant Board of Studies, the Academic, ASQC and Academic Council and to student representatives. The subsequent College self-evaluation reported no issues with the processes. Matters arising are addressed through an ongoing action plan, and the College's Academic Quality and Standards Committee continues to monitor academic programmes and student performance.

14   The College has experienced a decline in response rates to electronic versions of student unit evaluation forms. As a result of discussion at the Boards of Study, they have reverted to paper-based questionnaires to be delivered in face-to-face lectures with students. Following the review of their Quality Assurance Framework, the College will utilise its new governance structure to monitor this new approach and enhance as required.

15   There were 23 withdrawals from the range of programmes in 2022. This was a significant increase on the previous year although the majority of withdrawals (14) were from the Executive Diploma in Islamic Finance and Entrepreneurship. The eight students remaining successfully completed the programme. Owing to low recruitment the programme will not run in 2022-23. The majority of students (17) were withdrawn by the College for non-engagement and non-attendance.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

16   The College continues to make effective use of external reference points, including the SQA quality assurance criteria, *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). A comprehensive mapping of all sections of the Quality Code has been undertaken and regular reviews are undertaken.

17   The College uses its reviewed governance structure effectively to provide updates to staff on the various codes and standards. A special Board of Study was held at the start of 2021-22 academic year to discuss the Quality Code and SQA expectations in more detail, and discussed all its revised policies and procedures. The Annual Return Form contains a detailed analysis of how the College measures its activities against the Core and Common practices of the Quality Code.

18   The College's programmes are validated by the SQA or through a range of collaborative partners including Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dundee and Abertay University. There is regular engagement with its validating partners and members of the University of Dundee regularly attend Academic Council meetings. With the launch of new master's programmes in 2021-22, academics from Trinity College Dublin and Abertay University will also attend.

19   In 2021-22, SQA conducted a wide range of reviews including a Systems Verification Review and Qualifications Reviews of: Economics; Religious Studies; Accounting and Finance; and Business. The College has received high confidence in the maintenance of SQA standards within the verification group for resources, candidate support and internal assessment and verification.

20   The College continues to engage with external agencies such as Advance HE, IHE, UCAS, UUK and other agencies concerned with higher and further education provision.

Background to the desk-based analysis

21   The desk-based analysis serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review/annual monitoring. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring process or review.

22   The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Nicola Dickson, Reviewer, and Simon Ives, QAA Officer, in December 2022. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.