



Review of UK transnational education in the Republic of Ireland

Case study: Edinburgh Napier University and St John's College

1 This case study is concerned with the collaborative partnership between Edinburgh Napier University (the University) and St John's College, Cork (the College). Through this arrangement, the University is offering the opportunity for students in the Republic of Ireland to study up to honours degree level in veterinary nursing, building on National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 6 and 7 qualifications obtained locally. The programme aims to capitalise on the professional mobility of veterinary nurses between the Republic of Ireland and the UK, enabling Veterinary Council of Ireland registered veterinary nurses and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) registered veterinary nurses to work within the veterinary nursing profession of both countries. The focus of the Case Study is on the approach taken, the steps taken to set up the partnership, how oversight is maintained, and the benefits and challenges of the arrangement.

2 The University, originally Napier Technical College and then Napier College of Science and Technology, became Napier University in 1992 and was renamed as Edinburgh Napier University in 2009. The University is located over three campuses in Edinburgh. Its student body now comprises around 19,500 students. The University's strategic approach to off-campus credit-bearing provision is set out in its Online and Transitional Education Strategy.

3 The College is a further education college based in Cork City, Ireland. The College was established in the mid-1990s, having previously been a boys' school with a focus on technical and vocational qualifications. The College offers a range of full and part-time further education programmes that are vocational and work focused. Subject areas include Applied Science, Art and Design, IT, and Construction and Engineering. The College offers veterinary nursing qualifications at NQF levels 5 and 6 and is administered by the Cork Education and Training Board, with overall responsibility for the NFQ residing with Quality and Qualifications Ireland. The College is not eligible to offer degree level qualifications.

4 The partnership involves delivery of a two-year top-up BSc (Hons) Veterinary Nursing programme for students already registered to practise as a veterinary nurse, delivered through distance learning. The programme aligns with the top-up programme offered on campus since 2002, and provides a pathway to degree provision with degree level qualifications becoming the norm for this profession. The University also delivers an on-campus four-year pre-registration BSc (Hons) Veterinary Nursing programme accredited by the RCVS. While the University's model of choice for the delivery of TNE is flying faculty, in some subject areas it also has considerable experience of delivering top-up programmes including articulation arrangements.

5 The University has well-established processes for the establishment, approval and review of programmes offered in partnership with both UK and international partners set out in its Quality Framework. The Collaborative Provision Committee, chaired by the Vice-Principal, is designed 'to oversee all credit and award bearing provision delivered in

partnership, ensuring that the design, delivery, approval, monitoring and review of all provision delivered in partnership meets University and sector quality and standards expectations'.

6 The relationship with the College initially developed from an approach made by the College to the University's Centre for Wellbeing and Health in 2012. No formal approval process was initially carried out, as the distance learning style of delivery adopted did not at the time necessitate a formal collaborative approval process. The programme commenced in 2015-16, when Veterinary Nursing provision was moved to the School of Applied Sciences. At around the same time the University reviewed its collaborative approval processes as part of the development of a new online and TNE strategy. As a result, the University decided that all off-campus credit-bearing provision should be treated as partnership and adhere to University approval and review processes; the programme underwent an approval process in January 2017 carried out internally by members of the Collaborative Provision Committee. A formal Collaboration Agreement has been put in place that sets out the roles and responsibilities of the University and the College.

7 A University programme leader oversees the arrangement and is instrumental in ensuring that the programme operates effectively. The main point of contact at the College is the Assistant Principal; a College programme coordinator is also in place. The responsibilities of the University programme leader and College programme coordinator are set out in the Collaboration Agreement. A University programme Board of Studies is responsible for the overall running of the programme.

8 Admission to the programme operates in accordance with the University's Admissions Policy. Entry requirements for the top-up programme are set out in the programme specification. Students from the Republic of Ireland holding an NFQ level 6 Veterinary Nursing Diploma are eligible to enter year 1 of the top-up programme (equivalent to year 3 of the full veterinary nursing programme) and those holding an NFQ level 7 Veterinary Nursing Degree are eligible to enter year 2 of the top-up programme (equivalent to year 4 of the full veterinary nursing programme). Students study six 20-credit modules in the first year of the top-up programme and three 20-credit modules plus a 60-credit project module in year 2 of the top-up programme depending on their point of entry. Students must be registered with the relevant professional body, the RCVS in the UK or VCI in the Republic of Ireland, and are normally working in the profession on a full-time basis. The programme operates under the University's academic regulations.

9 The College advertises the programme, and distributes and coordinates the application forms, which are sent back to the University programme leader to make the final decision. The programme was originally intended for students who have gained the College's NQF level 6 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing and most students have been drawn from these cohorts. A small number of students come from other Republic of Ireland institutions holding an NQF level 7 qualification and initially apply through the College.

10 From the outset of the partnership, staff from the University were aware that, as this was a distance-learning programme, students would be isolated; in light of this the University established two face-to-face induction events per annum to provide an opportunity for new and returning students to meet with their cohort and with staff from the University, including their assigned personal development tutor. At these induction sessions, which are held in College accommodation, University staff cover a range of material including the expectations of the course, assessment, relevant University policy and procedures, and how to access the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). The geographical distance between students has posed a challenge that the programme team had not anticipated, having initially thought that most students would be based locally/regionally rather than dispersed across the

Republic of Ireland. This, and the fact that many students are working full-time, has resulted in some students not being able to attend the induction sessions.

11 The learning, teaching and assessment strategy used in the programme articulates with the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. It aims to develop autonomous learners by moving the emphasis from teaching to independent learning. The delivery of the programme is through the University's VLE and students can access the same material as the campus-based programme. Lectures, including those from guest lecturers, are recorded and provided together with other distance-learning materials. This has facilitated access to a range of specialist and expert speakers, which has enhanced the materials available to both distance learning and on-campus students. College staff are not involved in teaching.

12 Students who study on the distance-learning programme are viewed the same as those studying on campus. Students are supported by the personal development tutor assigned to the programme, who keeps in touch with them through Skype, email and/or telephone, and are also encouraged to utilise social media to keep in touch with each other. Students have access to both the College's library facilities as well as the University's e-library. A comprehensive student handbook is provided. Complaints and appeals procedures are set out in the University's Academic Regulations.

13 All assessments are set and marked by University staff. Distance-learning students submit their assessments through Turnitin and receive online verbal and written feedback from the programme team. Students are advised on how to avoid plagiarism in their programme handbook, which also points them to the University's 'Be Wise Don't Plagiarise' website.

14 The programme includes written formal examinations, which take place at the same time as the equivalent examination at the University. Staff at the College have been trained to invigilate examinations at the Cork campus. These examinations, included as assessment components in every module, were intended to ensure parity between the assessment experiences of distance-learning students with those students who attend the full-time veterinary nursing course at the main University campus. However, the programme team has found that the approach has introduced considerable complexity to the management of the programme, including the ability of students to attend examinations, and that while the inclusion of an unseen element of assessment in all veterinary nursing modules is a professional body (RCVS) requirement for pre-registration students, it is not strictly necessary for post-registration students. The use of existing modules designed around the professional body requirements of RCVS has also limited how successfully the Veterinary Nursing top-up programme can embrace the University-wide principles of the Programme-Focused Approach to Assessment and Feedback, which supports the use of more formative assessment.

15 The external examiner is appointed by the University. The remit of the external examiner for veterinary nursing includes those modules studied by students on the distance-learning programme. The external examiner's comments for 2015-16 were positive overall. The University operates a system of Module Assessment Boards and Programme Assessment Boards. Where appropriate, the performance of the distance-learning students is noted at these boards.

16 Student feedback and satisfaction are monitored in several ways. A short questionnaire is given to all students who attend the induction sessions. Each module on the VLE originally had a standard online questionnaire, available and visible only to the distance-learning students. This system of evaluation has now been replaced by the University student module evaluation systems, which covers all modules, including online

modules and allows complete anonymity. Due to the nature of the programme and the dispersed nature of the student body there is no formal system of student representation. Students are encouraged to give feedback to their personal development tutor; dedicated student liaison chat rooms have been set up on Moodle and students run closed groups on Facebook.

17 Annual monitoring is carried out in accordance with University procedures. At the end of each trimester of delivery module leaders undertake a formal reflective evaluation of taught credit-bearing modules. At the end of each stage of study programme leaders undertake a formal reflective evaluation of the delivery of taught award or credit-bearing programmes. Module and programme reports are discussed at various forums within the Schools. In the School of Applied Sciences the Dean holds a meeting with all programme leaders to discuss programme reports, draw out any issues and identify good practice. The programme leader also presents the programme report to the Board of Studies, normally at the first meeting of the academic year. An annual summary report is produced by the Dean of School or nominee, and presented to the Quality and Standards Committee; the Dean of Learning and Teaching also produces a report that picks up good practice from all schools so that this can be disseminated more widely. Certificate and transcripts are issued by the University. The mode of study is noted on the transcript.

18 In the initial stages of the programme the annual recruitment target was 10 students holding the NFQ level 6 diploma, the majority of which were expected to have completed the College's diploma. The final cohort size in 2015-16 was 15, with nine students entering year 1 of the top-up programme: four of these students were College alumni and five held qualifications from other Republic of Ireland institutions. Six students entered year 2 of the top-up programme. All but two of the students who commenced their studies in September 2015 either progressed to the next level of study or graduated with an honours degree. A total of 21 students who qualified at Republic of Ireland institutions are studying on the programme by distance learning in 2016-17. Hence, in relation to meeting its target cohort size and student performance, the distance learning veterinary nursing programme using a supported online model has been successful.

19 Until recently the University had a relatively modest amount of online distance-learning provision. However, it is now taking a strategic approach to the development of such provision, creating a Global Online Learning brand supporting through Global Online Learning Centres. Existing distance-learning programmes, such as the veterinary nursing top-up programme, are expected to come in line with this approach. Given this new strategic direction and the relatively small numbers on the programme, the School of Applied Sciences has now decided to terminate the programme, the September 2016 intake being the last, with teaching expected to be concluded by summer 2018. The College has been informed of the University's decision and of the University's willingness to explore other ways of working with the College in the future. Students have also been informed of the decision to close the programme. A formal closure process in place, which is set out in the University's Quality Framework; students will be appropriately supported until completion of their studies. Students may also take up the option of studying the top-up programme on the main University campus.

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