



Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: City University London, Cass Business School

February 2014

Executive summary

The Cass Business School (the School) at City University London (the University) has been delivering its Executive Master's in Business Administration (EMBA) in Dubai since 2007, when the University opened a representative office in the Dubai International Finance Centre.

In 2009 new offices for the Cass and City's Dubai Centre were launched under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ruler of Dubai. The Dubai Centre provides administrative and logistics support for the delivery of the School's EMBA and other University programmes. The offices also function as an administrative hub for profile raising, brand building, marketing, business development, corporate links, alumni relations, recruitment of students and expanding activities in the region.

The EMBA programme delivered at the Dubai Centre is offered on a two-year part-time basis, taught by staff from the School in a block-teaching weekend format and supported by online learning. The format has been designed to make the programme accessible to business executives in the region regardless of their location and full-time job commitments. There were 190 students registered on the programme in 2013, with 60 new enrolments. The majority of students are nationals of other Arab countries in the region and from Central Asia, and are primarily resident in the UAE or nearby countries in the Gulf. Less than 10 per cent of students are UAE nationals.

The day-to-day management of the Dubai Centre is undertaken by the Head of the Dubai Centre, who is also Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, supported by three full-time Dubai-based staff. The academic management of the EMBA programme is overseen by the Programme Director, based in London, who has overall responsibility for the effective delivery of the programme in Dubai. The Dubai Centre also has an Advisory Board which has members from Cass, City University, and a number of senior executives based in the UAE who are active in regional affairs.

It is less clear who has overall oversight of the Dubai Centre at strategic University level, and whether ultimate oversight resides with the School or a central University function. Students perceived a lack of engagement from the University in the appropriate branding and support of the School provision in Dubai and the region, in particular in relation to other providers.

Students are highly satisfied with their study experience, the content of the programme and the way it is taught and managed. Students commented very positively on their engagement

with academic staff from the School, appreciating the quality of teaching, the academic calibre and reputation of the teaching staff and their business experience, and the academic support given by the School staff, especially the Programme Director who visits Dubai regularly and is the main contact with the University in London. They also commented positively on the robust admission process which is seen as ensuring the quality of executive students on the programme.

In addition to the EMBA programme, the Dubai Centre offers short executive courses, and component modules of the modular master's programmes in Air Transport Management, Air Safety Management, and Aircraft Maintenance Management run by the School of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences. Modules of these programmes can be taken in different locations around the world including Dubai, Bahrain, Frankfurt and London. In 2013 there were over 400 students worldwide on these master's courses, of whom approximately 80 students were taking modules in Dubai.

The University has no intention to develop the School's Dubai Centre into a branch campus with locally based teaching staff. However, it plans to expand the range of programmes offered in Dubai.

Report

Introduction

1 The City University of London (the University) was created by Royal Charter in 1966. It traces its origins back to The Northampton Institute, an engineering-focused institution, founded in Clerkenwell in 1894. By 1957 the Northampton Polytechnic Institute, as it was then known, became a College of Advanced Technology in response to government pressure to meet the growing need for technical and scientific personnel in British industry. Nine years later it was awarded full university status under the name The City University. Over time the University's focus on engineering has diminished as it has diversified into a broader range of subjects, such as business and management, health, law and the arts. The University's mission is to provide rigorous research and education for the world of work. This is encapsulated in the title, the University for academic excellence for business and the professions.

2 The University started delivering programmes in Management Studies and Administrative Sciences in the 1960s, with the establishment of a Department of Industrial and Social Studies which, after a period of reshaping, became the City University Business School in 1976. The School was renamed Cass Business School in 2002 in recognition of a significant charitable donation from Sir John Cass's Foundation. The School is 'triple accredited' by the three main business school accreditation bodies worldwide: the European Foundation for Management Development's European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the Association of MBAs (AMBA). Less than 1 per cent of business schools worldwide (approximately 60) have this level of accreditation by international professional bodies.

3 The School's MBA portfolio comprises four programmes: a full-time MBA (launched in 1979); two London-based EMBA programmes following different delivery patterns, and a Dubai-based EMBA. The School has been delivering the EMBA programme in Dubai since 2007, when the University opened a representative office known as the Dubai Centre inside the Dubai International Finance Centre (DIFC). The Dubai Centre provides administrative and logistics support for the delivery of the School's EMBA and other University programmes. It also functions as an administrative hub for profile raising, brand building, marketing, business development, corporate links, alumni relations, recruitment of students and expanding activities in the region.

4 The EMBA programme in Dubai is offered on a two-year part-time basis, taught by staff from the School in a block-teaching weekend format and supported by online learning. The format has been designed specifically to make the programme accessible to business executives in the wider region regardless of their location and full-time job commitments. The programme has one intake per year, with a current cap of 60 students per intake. There were 190 students registered on the programme in 2013, with 60 new enrolments. The majority of students are nationals of other Arab countries in the region and from Central Asia, and they are primarily resident in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or nearby countries in the Gulf. Less than 10 per cent of students are UAE nationals. The first cohort of students graduated in spring 2010.

5 The Dubai EMBA programme comprises 12 core modules, three elective modules, and a final individual Business Mastery Project. Each module is taught over a monthly four-day (Thursday to Sunday) workshop. The modular format of the suite of EMBA programmes provides students the opportunity to take elements of the degree in London. Students can also participate alongside the London-based students in international electives in the USA, South Africa and China. In addition to core modules and mainstream finance and management electives, the EMBA in Dubai offers a suite of specialised and locally relevant

electives such as Islamic Finance, Family Business, Shipping, Trade, and Real Estate. The availability of these locally relevant electives, especially Islamic Finance, was mentioned by students as one of the reasons for choosing to study at the School.

6 In addition to the EMBA programme, the Dubai Centre offers short executive courses, and component modules of the modular master's programmes in Air Transport Management, Air Safety Management, and Aircraft Maintenance Management run by the School of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences. Modules of these programmes can be taken in different locations around the world including Dubai, Bahrain, Frankfurt and London. In 2013, there were over 400 students worldwide on these master's courses, of whom approximately 80 students were taking modules in Dubai.

7 The University has no intention to develop the School's Dubai Centre into a branch campus with locally based teaching staff. They see the fly-in, fly-out model as what attracts students to its programmes, which was confirmed by students. The University has plans to expand the range of programmes offered in Dubai, and have received initial validation from the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) to run two MSc programmes in Health Management and Health Services Research, which are not yet operational. Local regulations about subject restrictions on programme delivery in free zones and cuts to public funding in the UK are perceived as limiting and slowing the extension of the portfolio of programmes offered in Dubai.

Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

8 The establishment of the School's Dubai Centre was based on comprehensive market research covering local demand from individuals and the corporate sector, brand awareness and market competition, and challenges and risk. It was also informed by the experience gained in a previous attempt to deliver an MBA in Shanghai, which had to be closed after two intakes due to difficulties with doing business in China and agreeing standards with local education providers. On the basis of this experience and initial market and risk analysis, a business plan was submitted for approval by the International Office, the School Dean and the University Council. Once the required approval was obtained, the School entered into discussion with DIFC and other relevant authorities in Dubai and the UAE to establish a representative office and start delivering the EMBA programme.

9 The City University London was registered in DIFC in May 2007. The new offices for the University and School's Dubai Centre were officially launched in 2009 under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. The Dubai Centre trades under the School's name, although the registered legal entity is The City University. It has KHDA academic authorisation and commercial licence to operate in the DIFC, which provides teaching and other facilities.

10 The Dubai Centre operations are supported by the University's internationalisation strategy, which includes the commitment 'to recruit and support the most able students from around the world' and 'enhance students' educational experience and employability through participation in international mobility opportunities'.

Making the link work

11 The day-to-day management of the Dubai Centre is undertaken by the Head of the Dubai Centre, who is also Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, supported by three full-time Dubai-based staff. The responsibilities of the Head of the Dubai Centre

include overseeing the University and School operation and affairs in the region, managing the relationship with local government and key stakeholders, as well as corporate development and student and alumni support. As noted above, the Dubai Centre provides administrative and logistics support for the delivery of the EMBA programme and other University courses, and further acts a regional hub for marketing and recruitment and other business development and community engagement activities, including alumni engagement. Responsibility for the academic leadership and oversight of the Dubai EMBA programme rests with the Programme Director, based in London, who is actively involved in the management and delivery of the programme in Dubai.

12 Responsibility for the academic leadership and oversight of the Dubai EMBA programme rests with the Programme Director, based in London, who is actively involved in the management and delivery of the programme in Dubai. An Advisory Board, composed of members from the School, the University, and a number of senior executives based in the UAE, provides advice to the Programme Director on curricula, programme design and marketing (paragraph 22). It is less clear who has overall oversight of the Dubai Centre at strategic University level, and in particular, whether ultimate oversight resides with the School or a central University function. It is therefore **recommended** that the University review the institutional oversight arrangements for the Dubai Centre as an academic and recruitment hub of City University in the region, in particular in light of the proposed expansion of courses in Dubai involving other faculties.

13 Although there is evidence of the Head of the Dubai Centre negotiating with individual faculties to expand course provision in Dubai, the University does not appear to be taking a strategic approach to the expansion of courses and resourcing of the Dubai Centre. There is evidence of heavy reliance on the high levels of ownership demonstrated by the Head of the Centre and the Director of the Dubai EMBA programme, but less evidence of involvement of the wider University in the positioning of the Centre and its programmes in the region. This was reflected by students commenting on a perceived lack of engagement from London in the appropriate branding and support of the School provision in Dubai and the region, in particular relative to other providers. The University is **recommended** to review its strategic approach and support for its presence and provision in Dubai.

14 Students are highly satisfied with their study experience, the content of the programme and the way it is taught and managed. The students commented very positively on their engagement with academic staff from the School, appreciating the quality of teaching, the academic calibre and reputation of the teaching staff and their business experience, and the academic support given by School staff, especially the Programme Director who visits Dubai regularly and is the main contact with the University in London.

15 Students also appreciated the clear presentation of the EMBA programme by the Programme Director during open days, which many indicated as the key factor influencing their decision to select the School; the robust recruitment and admission process ensuring the quality of students on the programme and its 'executive' nature; and the engagement of teaching staff with the academic and wider business community in the region, perceived as reflecting well on the University, School and the Dubai EMBA programme. The attention of the Programme Director and School teaching staff to the quality of the student experience and the standards of their learning is a **positive feature**. The engagement of School teaching staff in broader forums of knowledge-sharing while in Dubai is also a **positive feature**.

16 Although marketing and recruiting are undertaken by the Dubai Centre, admission decisions are ultimately made in London through the same admission process as for students on London programmes. English language skills are tested, with the

International English Language Testing System score 7 as an entry requirement. English language skills are also assessed during interview.

17 Comprehensive induction to the EMBA programme and the learning facilities is provided over four days at the School's Dubai Centre, with extensive participation of the School's London staff, including the Associate Dean, MBA programmes, the Director of the Dubai EMBA programme, teaching staff, the careers and e-learning teams, and alumni and external speakers. Students are introduced to the Dubai Centre, its staff and its facilities at DIFC, as well as the University virtual learning environment (VLE), the online library resources, and student services in London such as online learning and career support. A number of workshops are run to introduce students to team working and study skills.

18 All the faculty teaching core courses are based in London. A small number of elective courses are taught by visiting faculty based in the region. A visiting senior fellow is based in Dubai and travels to London to deliver the same elective delivered in Dubai. The Dubai EMBA teaching load is considered outside the normal workload. Teaching staff are paid to teach on the Dubai EMBA, which is seen as conducive to having a good team of lecturers. Lecturers are briefed before teaching in Dubai, and are supported locally by the Dubai Centre. Dubai-based staff visit London regularly, including as part of their induction.

19 Students in Dubai have access to a local reference library in the DIFC, which it shares with the London Business School, and to the same electronic learning material and resources available to students in the London campus. The School is considering investing in more local case studies for students in Dubai. However, during the review it was stated that financial constraints at University level were limiting the provision of extended services to students in Dubai, such as improved career advice and networking. This need was confirmed by students' views that career advice services were still in need of development, and that more could be done to enable Dubai EMBA students to tap into the School's alumni network. This reinforces the recommendation that the University review the level of support to ensure the successful operation of the Dubai Centre (paragraph 13).

Quality assurance

Academic standards and quality of programmes

20 From the documentation submitted and meetings with senior management, staff and students, there was evidence that the University retains oversight of academic integrity, quality assurance and quality enhancement of all courses delivered in Dubai. This oversight is reinforced by using UK campus staff to deliver and assess modules on all programmes. All programme aims and learning outcomes for courses delivered on-site in Dubai are identical to the courses delivered in the UK, with some customisation of case study material. Since the curriculum delivered in Dubai is essentially identical to that delivered in the UK, the setting of academic standards is a product of the mainstream UK programme approval process programmes.

21 The Board of Studies of the Business School is the main body responsible for academic policy and standards. It is chaired by the Dean of the Business School and has a membership comprising staff responsible for faculty, programmes and teaching and learning, as well as a matching number of elected members and students. The Board of Studies is a subcommittee of the Senate to which it reports. The Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, has delegated authority from the University Council for the enhancement of academic quality and assurance of academic standards. The Quality Manual contains academic policies and procedures related to the delivery and quality assurance of programmes delivered in London and at overseas centres. The Dubai Centre programmes fell within these University systems and processes for monitoring quality and standards.

22 The School actively seeks external advice in determining its strategic direction, including its internationalisation strategy, through the Strategy and Development Board, which comprises senior business people, many of whom have a relationship with the School as alumni or sponsors, and through the Alumni Board. The School also engages with alumni and representatives of employers regarding course and module developments via the programmes' External Advisory Boards, which provide advice to the Programme Director on curricula, programme design and marketing. Specifically, the Dubai Centre has an Advisory Board which has members from the School, the University, and a number of senior executives based in the UAE who are active in regional affairs. The Chairman of this Advisory Board is a member of Cass's main Strategy and Development Board in London.

23 The programmes delivered in Dubai follow the same quality monitoring processes as the programmes delivered in the UK. All programmes are regularly monitored through an Annual Programme Evaluation (APE), which evaluates curriculum design, considers any issues with the programmes, including issues raised by students and external reports, and reviews progress made on the action plan drafted from the previous APE. All APEs go through the Board of Studies.

24 The 2010 AACSB accreditation report looked at the Dubai EMBA, concluding that 'the Dubai EMBA program is in every respect a School program. Admissions are undertaken by School staff, courses are taught by School faculty, program design and course content is developed and largely mirrors the London program' and expressing satisfaction 'that strong control and ownership of the Dubai EMBA program rests with the Cass Business School in London'. The QAA review team shared this conclusion.

25 Students expressed satisfaction that their voice is heard and they have adequate, and in many cases good, opportunities to feed back comments and views to the School. Student feedback is formally gathered via standard module evaluation, provided online on the last day of the module and managed centrally in London, as well as via programme-based Staff-Student Liaison Committees which meet each term. There is evidence that the Staff-Student Liaison Committee for the Dubai EMBA meets regularly, and that issues raised are taken seriously and responded to. Its work forms part of the Dubai EMBA APE.

26 A current issue, appearing in the latest APE, is the rebalancing of credit from core to electives, with a view to harmonising the Dubai EMBA with the London programmes. Currently, the Dubai EMBA has more core components than the London EMBA, due to initial uncertainty about the academic performance of students on the Dubai programme when it was first established. This arrangement is now being reviewed as evidence of student achievement and progression shows that the quality of the Dubai students is comparable to that of London students. The review team found the quality and engagement of students on the course to be high, with clear evidence of robust processes and practices in place for recruitment and admissions, confirmed by students' satisfaction with the quality and executive experience of their colleagues on the programme.

Assessment and certification of awards

27 Assessments are by examination and coursework for the core modules and coursework for the electives, with the assessment process identical to that used on the EMBA programme in London. Coursework is submitted and marked via the VLE. Plagiarism-detection software is used for dissertations, while for coursework the academics interviewed explained that plagiarism is generally designed out by the nature of assessment. Students are briefed on academic malpractice. Courses are assessed by course leaders, and marks are looked at by moderators. All marking and moderation is conducted by academic staff from the University. Students expressed satisfaction about the detailed feedback received on their coursework.

28 The University Senate appoints external examiners for each programme following nomination by the relevant Board of Studies. There is evidence that, in line with University policy, the Dubai EMBA external examiners submit their report for consideration by the programme Assessment Board, which meets once a year in London, and that the Programme Director provides responses to issues raised in external examiners' reports. The reports are, however, not published to students. The University is **recommended** to make external examiners' annual reports available to all students and ensure that students are aware of these reports.

29 Awards are made by the University with certificates and transcripts produced centrally. Certificates and transcripts do not record the location of study. As the programme in Dubai is the same as in the UK, transfer between locations is possible.

Information on higher education provision

30 The School website clearly positions the Dubai EMBA as part of the School's offerings, providing wide-ranging information on the programme, including the faculty, the Dubai Centre, fees and available scholarships. This information is supported by a brochure and advertising. The marketing of the EMBA programme in Dubai is shared between London and the Dubai Centre, with the School and the University having ultimate responsibility for assuring the accuracy and appropriateness of the marketing and information materials.

31 Students are provided with a comprehensive Student Handbook specific to the Dubai EMBA providing detailed information about the programme, including the learning resources and support services available to them. The Director of the Dubai EMBA programme has overall oversight of the Handbook and other information published to students on the Dubai programme.

32 Information about the programme is provided at recruitment stage during open days in Dubai run by the Programme Director which, as mentioned above, was particularly appreciated by students, significantly influencing their choice to study at the School. Students are also invited to observe teaching sessions before deciding to enrol on the programme. Students also appreciated the comprehensive induction programme run in Dubai before starting their studies.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the attention of the Programme Director and School teaching staff to the quality of the student experience and the standards of their learning (paragraphs 14, 15 and 25)
- School teaching staff engagement in broader forums of knowledge-sharing while in Dubai (paragraph 15).

Recommendations

City University London is recommended to take the following actions:

- review the institutional oversight arrangements for the Dubai Centre as an academic and recruitment hub of City University in the region, in particular in light of the proposed expansion of courses in Dubai involving other faculties (paragraph 12)

- review its strategic approach and support for its presence and provision in Dubai (paragraphs 13 and 19)
- make external examiners' annual reports available to all students and ensure that students are aware of these reports (paragraph 27).

City University London's response to the review report

City University London appreciate the work that the QAA team have put into understanding our programmes in Dubai. We are especially pleased with the very positive feedback that they received from alumni and past students of the well established Executive MBA programme in Dubai. We also understand and were already acting on the team's observation that as City expands its range of courses in Dubai into Aviation, Healthcare and beyond, the fit with overall City University strategy has to be sustained.

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