



Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: Coventry University and Emirates Aviation College

February 2014

Executive summary

The partnership between Coventry University (the University) and Emirates Aviation College (the College) was established in May 2006. The partnership offers a suite of taught postgraduate awards and top-up programmes leading to undergraduate degrees related to the aerospace industry. Apart from the postgraduate taught Human Resource Management programmes, which are taught entirely by University 'flying faculty', all teaching is by the College. All programmes are delivered and assessed in English. Two main delivery models are used: more or less conventional, semesterised and modularised full-time teaching, and block delivery, usually over five days, followed by a period for completion of assignments by supported self-study. All postgraduate and some undergraduate courses are taught in block mode. The University is the sole awarding body for the top-up awards; the postgraduate awards are dual awards of both the College and the University. There are two annual intakes with a total of 220 students admitted each year.

The review identified several positive features, including the rigorous institutional approval procedures and the quality of learning resources available at the College. The University's application of its quality assurance requirements was generally thorough in its partnership with the College. The procedures and their implementation meet the Expectations of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), and flaws were in matters of detail only. Though the University's approach is generally effective, it appeared that it was more effective in terms of University oversight than enhancement at the College. Enhancement requires some degree of ownership by the partner, but as yet it seems that the University has not taken steps to encourage the College to engage with the wider purposes of quality assurance procedures. Moreover, academic links between staff at the University and the College, beyond the demands of quality assurance oversight, are relatively undeveloped. Though the University's strategy is for 'deep' partnerships, and it wishes explicitly to foster applied research projects with multinational companies, little such activity is in evidence at the College, though the University is strong in aviation studies and the Emirates Group offers the potential of what is, by some measures, the largest passenger airline in the world.

Report

Introduction

1 The partnership between Coventry University (the University) and Emirates Aviation College (the College) was established in May 2006. The partnership began as a modest set of programmes leading to top-up awards to two Higher National Diplomas (HND) in aeronautical engineering. In addition to more top-up awards, the partnership now offers a number of University master's degrees. In addition, the MBA Aviation Management is offered as a dual award at the University's London campus.

2 The University considers the College 'an important strategic partner'; its annual intake of 220 students forms a significant proportion of the University's overall overseas student population. Three PhD students are enrolled on University awards, and are co-supervised by the College and University staff. This is acknowledged by the University and the College to be a work-in-progress rather than part of a fully fledged programme of research activities.

3 The University traces its beginnings as a provider of education to the establishment of the Coventry College of Design in 1843. Lanchester Polytechnic was established in 1970 from the merger of the College of Design and a number of other local colleges, and was incorporated in 1989. In 1992, the Polytechnic became Coventry University. In the academic year 2012-13, the University had 23,728 enrolled students, which included 5,039 students paying overseas fees.

4 The College was established in 1991 by the Department of Civil Aviation, initially to provide aviation-related training to private students and corporate clients. In September 2001, the College was merged with the Emirates Group, a Dubai-based international aviation holding company and a major local employer, to form the 'academic wing' of the Group.

The College has since expanded and diversified, and now offers programmes designed to provide students with aviation specialisations on the technical and management sides of the aviation industry. It includes a Business School and a School of Engineering. The College also offers a range of professional training courses to serving members of the aviation industry.

5 Currently, the following University programmes are offered in full-time and part-time modes at the College.

Top-up undergraduate degrees

- BA (Hons) Applied Business; Applied Business with Tourism
- BSc (Hons) Air Transport Management
- BEng (Hons) Aerospace Technology; Avionics Technology; Electronic Engineering

Taught postgraduate degrees

- MBA Aviation Management; Logistics & Supply Chain Management; Information Technology Management; IT Management; General Management.
- MA International Human Resource Management; International Human Resource Development
- MSc Engineering Business Management

6 All the programmes relate to the aerospace industry, as might be expected in a specialist institution like the College. The University has strengths in business and

engineering, and offers similar courses. The Human Resources programmes are accredited by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD); the MBA Logistics and Supply Chain Management is accredited by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT).

7 The College caters for students from many countries; about a third of students overall are United Arab Emirates (UAE) nationals. No significant change in student numbers is anticipated.

8 Two main delivery models are currently used at the College: more or less conventional, semesterised and modularised full-time teaching, and block delivery, usually over five days, followed by a period for completion of assignments by supported self-study. All postgraduate and some undergraduate courses are taught in 'block' mode. There are two intakes a year.

9 The MA Human Resource Management programmes are taught entirely by University 'flying faculty'. All other teaching is by the College's faculty.

10 All the College's higher education programmes, including those leading to University awards, are taught and assessed in English.

11 Coventry is the sole awarding body for the top-up awards. The postgraduate awards are dual awards of both the College and University. Some master's students do not satisfy all entry requirements set by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) for College degrees, though they do satisfy University entry requirements, which make provision for accreditation of prior learning that is not certificated; in such cases, the University-only award is made.

12 The University states that its partnership with the College contributes to its strategic intention to be a 'Business Facing University in a Globalised World'. This strategy is comprehensive as to geography, types of award, modes of learning and teaching, and includes both teaching and research activities.

13 The University wishes in particular to foster 'deep' partnerships; to support applied research projects with multinational companies; to develop its London campus; and to increase income from course delivery overseas'. The partnership with the College contributes materially to most of these aims.

Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

14 The University's international strategy is 'global', and driven by a range of qualitative considerations. If a potential partnership seems likely to contribute to this strategy, location is not significant, and in fact the University has partners on most continents.

15 The University has an Academic Partnership Unit established to help foster University courses taught overseas. Academic partnership managers work with the relevant faculty to prepare proposals for consideration by an International Development Committee reporting to the University's executive. If the International Development Committee's costing requirements are satisfied, legal agreements are established with potential partners. The University states that legal standing and necessary permissions to operate as a higher education institution (HEI) of the proposed collaborator are checked as part of the due diligence process by its own Legal Services unit. Publicly available information, such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) reports, are reviewed, and approaches made to other UK HEIs for references in relation to former or current

collaborations. Supporting information may also be sought on a proposed partner from the British Council.

16 Consideration of the academic aspects of a potential partnership follows a satisfactory assessment of legal and financial risks. The University states that, in addition, 'an Institutional Approval event is required before any arrangement that involves enrolment on programmes leading to awards of Coventry University'. Responsibility for the event is with the University's Quality in Learning and Teaching Committee (QuiLT). QuiLT commissions Institutional Approval Panels (IAPs) to make recommendations on approval. Events always take place at the partner's premises, and involve discussion of a range of matters related to quality assurance and policy. QuiLT notifies the collaborator of outcomes when any conditions of approval are met.

17 The University's consideration of the legal and financial aspects of due diligence of the partnership with the College appeared thorough. The review team noted that the University was careful to distinguish the academic requirements from other aspects of due diligence, and that it distinguished academic approval of the partner from approval of the partner's delivery of any particular programme. The three members of the IAP for the institutional approval event at the College in May 2006 included University staff only, and no external. The report provides background and context, and brief comments on quality assurance and enhancement; organisational structure; the student experience; admissions arrangements and requirements; staffing and staff development; learning resources; research; and appeals and academic honesty. The report is descriptive rather than evaluative, and contains no recommendations for approval. The latest version of the terms of reference for IAPs (dated August 2013) specifies external representation, and clarifies that the role of the report is to make recommendations about approval and any conditions that should be attached to approval.

18 The University declares the costing model on which it bases financial due diligence to be 'commercial in confidence'. No legal due diligence material was made available to the review team. It is therefore possible to say only that if the University's claims about its practices are followed, the arrangements seem likely to result in secure outcomes. The inclusion of an external presence on IAPs will strengthen what was already a robust process.

19 The University's procedures appear to provide opportunities at all key points to assess the risks of a particular partnership, and to tailor due diligence and quality assurance activities accordingly. For instance, the initial business case presented by academic partnership managers and faculty includes an outline costing; the International Development Committee considers the needs of due diligence in relation to the specific proposal; according to the University, the costing model identifies different kinds of collaboration (recognition, franchise, validation and so on) and associates costs with the kinds.

20 The University's documentation explained the UAE's accreditation requirements, and the documentation included relevant letters for UAE and Dubai authorities giving permissions to operate the courses. The original 2006 Institutional Approval report noted that the courses in question were 'accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education in the UAE', and the Course Approval and Review Panel's report for the MBA Aviation Management and Information Technology Management mentions MOHESR requirements.

21 The College is accredited by MOHESR for its MBA provision and the MSc in Aviation Safety and Security. Some of the College's awards, including the HNDs and other diploma awards that are 'topped up' by the University's awards, were brought under the remit of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) by Decree in June 2012.

The University states that it is in the process of applying for 'Academic Authorisation' of the College undergraduate top-ups, and has not yet undergone evaluation.

22 The University states that the formal agreements with the College define institutional responsibilities for quality assurance; course delivery; annual monitoring and reporting; publicity and advertising; assessment (including external examining arrangements where applicable); certification of awards; intellectual property rights; applicable law; termination arrangements; and matters relating to the rights and status of students. The agreement also contains the provision for institutional review after one year for new partnerships, and additionally if the University has any doubts about the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students and/or academic standards. The College underwent 'interim review' (under the system that then applied) in 2009. Under newly approved University arrangements, financial and due diligence assessments are reviewed every two years, though this has yet to apply to the College.

23 The agreement document supplied to the review team was a model agreement only. The model agreement is in accord with the suggestions of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision* of the Quality Code. If the actual agreement with the College follows the model agreement, it will meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

24 The University's arrangements have been in place for some considerable time with only minor amendment: as early as 2003, the QAA overseas audit in Malaysia considered a Coventry University partnership, and described a strategy, structures and approach very similar to what is in place for the College, though some (but not all) committee names have changed slightly, and responsibilities have been refined. The reliance on tried and tested methods has stood the University and its partnerships in good stead, and all overseas audit and review reports of University links have been positive. The comprehensive procedures for institutional approval are identified as a **positive feature**.

Making the link work

25 The College has an allocated Academic Partnership Manager from the University and an academic Link Tutor. At the College the immediate academic contacts are the College deans and the programme coordinators who report to them. The University states that the Link Tutor, the Academic Partnership Manager and the College academic contacts are in 'frequent' contact by a variety of means. The review team was able to confirm that close liaison was sustained between the Academic Partnership Manager and the College, sustained in part by a long-term association between the College and a senior member of the Academic Partnership Unit, whose academic background is in aviation-related subjects. There are also less formalised contacts, such as those between the University Director of Quality and the College Dean in relation to student feedback practices. The review team noted that some key quality assurance activities (for example, responses to external examiners) were in practical terms undertaken by the University's Link Tutor.

26 Student records are created at the College and passed to the University for inclusion in the University's student records systems. This enables a range of learning supports for College students, such as access to the University's library e-resources, and also enables the University to generate certificates and transcripts. The University faculties help the College to develop teaching and learning resources by providing example materials, such as sample examination papers. In relation to assessment, such aids as the marking criteria used for the University equivalents of programmes are also supplied.

27 The administrative arrangements for the courses are captured in a 'Collaboration Framework Document' agreed between the partners. This document appears to be a

very useful reference point covering all day-to-day administrative and academic management tasks, and this is a **positive feature**.

28 English language entrance requirements for the Edexcel HND, from which students progress, are International English Language Testing System (IELTS) 5.0 or the equivalent in a range of other recognised tests. The IELTS-equivalent score must be improved to 6.0 before entry to the top-up year. The entry requirement for the master's programmes is also IELTS 6.0. One of the master's approval panels had recommended that this requirement be kept under review, in view of the academic requirements for technical English, and all three of the external examiners whose reports were supplied to the review team recommended more attention to the standard of English in all programmes. The review team noted that the English language requirement for the College MBA was lower than that for the University MBA, which is IELTS 6.5. The University is **recommended** to review the English language entry requirements for its College courses, especially those at postgraduate level.

29 The College has an English language teaching unit, to which students may be referred by staff. Students who do not meet the HND entry requirements may enrol on a one or two-semester English language foundation programme provided by the unit. The unit administers its own IELTS-equivalent test, which must be passed before entry.

30 The University states that the College learning resources are 'impressive', a view repeated in successive approval and review reports, and supported by its external examiners. Students confirmed that resources met their needs, and that the College was responsive when they identified gaps (for instance, in availability of IT resources at the weekends). Though the review team were in no sense subject experts, the facilities of the present campus matched what might be expected of the training arm of one of the biggest airlines in the world. It is likely that they will improve still further following a projected move to new accommodation in the Dubai International Academic City. The quality of learning resources available at the College is identified as a **positive feature**.

31 The College has recently adopted a new system for its virtual learning environment (VLE), and according to the University, who review the contents in the course of approval and periodic review, it is being used effectively. Students supported this view. College students also have access to the University library's e-resources.

32 Most College students are in employment with Emirates Airlines already, so careers advice is less pressing for this cohort than others. However, students confirmed that there is a careers support service, which provides advice on such matters as compiling CVs and arranges open days. Undergraduate students who met the review team spoke more positively about careers support than postgraduate students did.

33 Student feedback on the quality of learning opportunities is gathered by means of questionnaires distributed at the end of each module, and returned anonymously. In addition, students are surveyed each semester on a subject basis. Students confirmed that they experienced improvements following their feedback.

34 There is an elected student representative system, with one representative per cohort. Postgraduate student representatives stated that they had regular meetings with programme managers. There are also monthly meetings of a Postgraduate Council. The Postgraduate Council arranges formal meetings with staff biannually.

35 The University states that its external examiners 'are given the opportunity' to meet students, and are thus able to gather direct feedback on the student experience. The review team was able to confirm from their reports that external examiners had met students and that conversations were 'constructive' and students' views were 'positive'.

36 The College recruits staff from a global pool. Many College staff have postgraduate and professional qualifications or licences to practice. The University states that those proposed as teachers must be 'approved' by the University 'before being permitted to teach on University programmes'. The review team noted that conforming with the University's requirements had been the subject of a condition of the June 2013 periodic review of the College, and that University staff stated that all conditions had been complied with. It appeared that this worked effectively when programmes were newly approved for delivery, but the College staff stated that the process of approval for new staff is that CVs are appended to annual quality monitoring reports, and thus are approved only retrospectively. The University is **recommended** to ensure that the College understands its requirement for the approval of new teaching staff before beginning to teach University programmes.

37 The College has a staff development system which is used to identify training needs; costs of training courses are met by the College. College staff confirmed that University staff provide staff development opportunities in relation to the needs of University programmes: the Link Tutor had delivered training sessions related to dissertations, and to the use of electronic teaching and learning aids, such as the VLE and anti-plagiarism software. Some College staff had visited the University, particularly when new programmes had been proposed for delivery, though these visits seemed to be confined to the purposes of quality assurance. Students and staff who met the review team had not encountered University academic staff other than the Link Tutor and Academic Partnership Manager. The review team noted that although some joint research work in the form of PhD supervision involving University and College staff had been established, there had only been a single completion and only three students were currently registered. There was limited evidence of wider academic collaboration, and College staff links with the University seemed overwhelmingly to be through the Link Tutor and Academic Partnership Manager.

Quality assurance

Academic standards and quality of programmes

38 The University programme approval procedure has remained stable in outline over many years, and the arrangements described in the 2001 overseas audit of University provision in Malaysia are not significantly different from those that still apply. On the evidence of the positive judgements of successive audits and reviews, the procedure has served the University well.

39 Academic investigation and approval of programmes delivered in partnership are delegated by QuiLT to Course Approval and Review Panels (CARPs). Reports of CARPs seemed generally thorough, and previous QAA reports have confirmed that 'University procedures are correctly and rigorously followed'. The version of CARP terms of reference and guidance on its procedure supplied to the review team was dated August 2013; but the CARP reports supplied all predate this document, some by seven years. While CARP requires at least one external member, and all reports after 2007 indicate the presence of at least one external (some include two), neither of the reports from 2006 and 2007 mention an external. The current requirements specify 'at least three members', though some panels included only two. Recent reports in some cases list four members, however. No member of College staff has ever been included as a panel member. The QuiLT terms of reference of CARPs state that 'Exceptionally a CARP may be conducted at Coventry University on the proviso that a CARP has previously been conducted at the collaborating institute'. In all but one case, the reports do not state where the validation panels met, but College and University staff asserted that most took place at the College.

40 Only one CARP approval report refers explicitly to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and to subject

benchmark statements. However, the concerns of the frameworks are clearly dealt with: many of the reports refer to conditions relating to the clear specification of level in relation to learning outcomes, for instance. While none of the approval reports for MBAs explicitly mentions the MBA benchmark statement, references to such matters as requirements for experience and the practical nature of the content indicate that the purposes of the benchmark statement have been internalised and brought to bear on the panels' judgements. Programme specifications are integral to approval events, explicitly identify level by reference to FHEQ, and refer to the most relevant subject benchmark statements.

41 The review team noted that when the original business top-up degrees were approved in March 2007, there was some discussion of different teaching models for full-time and part-time students, the part-time students being taught in the evenings. At that time, the College regretted that it was not possible to integrate the student groups due to timetable constraints. By the time of an 'Interim Review' of the College in September 2009, the delivery pattern had changed, and it is noted that the business top-ups are 'offered on a block structured delivery pattern over 18 months to meet the needs of part-time students'. The present review team was informed that the current population of top-up business students are all part-time, and the teaching pattern is for delivery in consecutive 'blocks', each of the five taught modules occupying an intensive five days at the College, followed by six weeks 'to work on... assignments'. The final module is a project.

42 The review team identified two problems with present arrangements. First, there appeared to have been no academic discussion of the learning and teaching implications of a method of delivery that was quite different from what was originally approved, though learning in this way would appear to need a different kind of support from what was originally envisaged. Second, assuming the normal expectation of 200 hours of study, and intensive eight-hour days for the taught blocks, students must put in almost four hours of study a day, every day, for the whole six weeks, on top of the demands of his or her job. For hard-working students in full-time employment, the demands of an honours final year by evening teaching over 18 months, as originally established, seems a feasible proposition; but the commitment required for five-sixths (that is, the five taught modules) of a full-time honours year in little more than 30 weeks seemed much less so. The University is **recommended** to ensure that the learning implications of different models of delivery are considered before implementation.

43 All the programmes on offer at the College have analogous programmes at the University, and though the analogies are not exact, University academic regulations apply. Approval reports refer frequently to adaptations for local circumstances. This is to be expected, and it is normal practice for material, such as case studies, to refer to the national context. However, in some cases, it appeared that a Government requirement overruled a University one, even on some matters related to academic standards. For instance, more than one approval report refers to the MOHESR requirement that no master's programme shall include level 6 modules (though the implication is that University programmes may). In one case, a University regulation that a student who has not attempted a module may not be permitted a resit appears to be overturned by an MOHESR ruling that it is permissible. College staff and the Academic Partnership Manager stated that when MOHESR makes suggestions of this kind they are not binding on the University, though the University always considers them, and makes accommodations where possible.

44 The University produces clear and succinct guidelines for annual quality monitoring reports. Boards of Studies are responsible for reports, which cover all courses and modules, though Boards may elect to separate undergraduate from taught postgraduate provision. Where instances of programmes are delivered in partner institutions, the partner produces a separate annual quality monitoring to inform an overall annual report, compiled by the Link Tutor and Academic Partnership Manager. Reports are considered by the relevant University

faculty, fed into faculty annual reports and further considered by the University's Standing Advisory Group on Collaborative Provision.

45 The review team considered the College annual quality monitoring reports for 2010-11 and 2011-12. A single report was completed by the College Dean for all programmes in each year. The report includes a statistical section, listing data on recruitment and admissions, achievement (progression and classification); action plans relating to issues (especially those raised by external examiners); and a 'Critical Evaluation of the Delivery of the Course'. The reports are addressed to the Coventry Quality and Research Support unit (which changed names between years) and to the Coventry Engineering and Computing Faculty, though the University identifies some programmes as the responsibility of the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society. The reports covered the headings in the University's template, though not exactly as listed. There was no reference in the contents (as opposed to the headings) to student feedback. The contents of the reports were brief and almost entirely descriptive. There was little evidence of evaluation, despite the invitation to 'critical evaluation': for instance, each report included data on a module (different in each year) with strikingly higher failure rates than all the others, which was not remarked on in the commentary. There was no reference to comparative data from analogous programmes at the University. There was no indication that the College report had been discussed or considered by anyone at the College, other than the senior member of staff who compiled it.

46 The CARP terms of reference include responsibility for periodic programme review, and comments on the logistics for periodic review events, panel membership and so forth. This is supported by clear 'Guidelines on ...Periodic Review...' which specify the requirements for a 'critical review' document. The guidelines define the parameters of the review, with a series of headings on student consultation, commentary on course currency, evaluation of a specified data set and other information relating to quality and standards, such as external examiners' reports. Authors of critical evaluations are asked to identify innovative features of their provision, and any evidence of good practice and quality enhancement.

47 The College courses were reviewed in June 2013 by a four-person panel constituted as specified in the CARP terms of reference. The panel included two external members and met over two days at the College. The very thorough report of the event indicates that their discussions covered all the matters specified in the guidelines document. Particular emphasis was given to the ways in which the College gathers and acts on student feedback, and conditions imposed regarding how students were to be kept informed of actions taken as a result of their feedback, among other matters. The University stated that the conditions specified for continued approval in the June 2013 review had been signed off prior to the start of the academic year, though there appeared to remain some uncertainty at the College about timing for approval of new staff engaged with teaching modules for University awards (see above, paragraph 36).

48 The review team considered that the University's programme approval and review procedures were generally thorough, and provided effective oversight of partnership activity by the University. So too did the procedure, but it appeared that the College approached annual quality monitoring reports as a bureaucratic exercise. While the process was effective in providing oversight to the University, it did not, in practice, encourage the self-critical approach to the experience of the past year's work by those responsible for delivery that is an equally important (perhaps more important) aspect of routine monitoring. This is not necessarily a criticism of the College, since this approach is characteristic of academic practice in UK higher education, and not necessarily in the UAE. The review team noted that the University's 'Guidelines on Annual Reports from Boards of Study' were strongly focused on what to do, and not why it is being done. The University is **recommended** to consider

whether more support should be given to the College to make the annual quality monitoring reporting exercise more meaningful and productive as regards its developmental as opposed to regulatory aspects.

49 The University states that it is responsible for all awards made in its name, and that this understanding is expressed in all legal agreements relating to partners. Though it did not apply at the outset of the partnership, a course change process in October 2008 transferred all undergraduate courses at the College on to the University's Undergraduate Curriculum and Regulatory Framework. This framework specifies requirements for volume and level of modules and awards, and regulates admissions, enrolment and registration, attendance, assessment, progression, and classification of awards. The framework stipulates that 'every module shall be assessed according to the University's Assessment Strategy'.

50 The University's 'Regulations for Assessment' state that they cover all taught courses. The assessment regulations define the membership and authority of assessment boards at programme (PAB) and module/subject (SAB) levels; make arrangements for dealing with extenuating circumstances; and define the roles of external examiners.

51 All programmes have programme specifications which cover some of the matters from the regulations, in particular credit volume and weight. The University's programme specifications do not include assessment strategies, but refer users to 'module descriptors' where 'more detailed information on the learning outcomes, content, and teaching, learning and assessment methods may be found'. Module descriptors are written in accordance with a template, which classifies many sorts of assessment activity and requires programme providers to describe in considerable detail how and how much these activities contribute to measurement of achievement of learning outcomes for the module.

52 The University states that examination papers are prepared by College staff and reviewed internally, before being further reviewed by staff at the University. Draft examination papers from the College are submitted for comment by secure means to individual members of University staff identified as subject specialists by the relevant Head of Department. These individuals are responsible for commenting on the comparability of content and approach between the University's and the College's delivery of the programme, as reflected in the examination questions. Their comments are collated into a 'pre-moderation report' by the Link Tutor, which is returned to the College for consideration and action. The review team was able to confirm that this procedure is rigorously carried out.

53 The College's postgraduate programmes are assessed wholly by coursework. The University states that 'the assignments set are fully moderated by Coventry University and the external examiner at the first setting and then internally moderated thereafter'. The review team was able to confirm that University involvement in moderation has reduced over time, as the University has built confidence in the College standards, but has remained fit for purpose.

54 SABs and PABs take place at the College, and are attended by the Link Tutor, at least one other member of University academic staff and the external examiners for the courses. Since its own staff are there to make comparisons, the University is thus able to have confidence in its control over the academic standards of assessment. The Boards do not, however, have access to comparative data from the University. The University is **recommended** to consider how to facilitate comparisons between students' achievements at the College and those of students in analogous courses at the University.

55 The University has adopted a standard feedback cover sheet for assignments. Students in most courses confirmed that they get timely and effective written feedback, though MBA students stated that they were given feedback on assignments only when they requested it. External examiners are invited to comment on assessment feedback in their

reports, via a yes/no answer to the question 'were you satisfied with the quality and quantity of feedback given to students on their assessed work?' In some cases the external examiners' narratives against such topics as 'the structure, organisation, design and marking of the assessments' also refer to feedback on assessment. The review team noted that there were occasions when external examiners gave contradictory advice, on one occasion answering 'no' to the yes/no question, and in the same report stating that 'the general level of feedback given to the students is good and in some cases is excellent'.

56 Such confusing evidence is less than helpful, but in light of the comments from MBA students, the University may wish to assure itself that feedback practices at the College match its intentions in every programme. Overall, however, the review team considered that the arrangements for assessment of the University's programmes at the College are effective.

57 The University's regulations on external examiners are contained in the Regulations for Assessment, which are supported by a Handbook for External Examiners for Taught Courses. The handbook is a comprehensive document covering all aspects of the external examiners' role. The arrangements are fully in keeping with the guidance in *Chapter 7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

58 The 'Person Specification' for external examiners appears in the 'Regulations for Assessment'. They appear very closely modelled on the model in *Chapter 7* of the Quality Code. The University supplied nine sample external examiner reports for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, dated 2011 and 2012. The review team noted that two of the examiners had what appeared to be reasonably sustainable examining responsibilities closely related to the academic fields in which they held UK university posts. However, the third external examiner, who was responsible for six of the nine reports, had a much broader span of responsibilities, including all the MBA programmes and also two of the top-up programmes. To judge from the CV supplied by the University, this examiner's background appeared to be in engineering rather than business. The CV indicated that he has been a member of the Royal Aeronautical Engineering Society Accreditation Committee, and has been involved in the professional accreditation of a number of UK university programmes, but has not held a post in a UK higher education institution. It also showed he had direct experience of teaching only up to HND/Foundation Degree level, and appears not to meet the University's (and the Quality Code's) qualifications requirements. The external examiner in question appeared not to have held any other external examiner posts, and had no other external examiner duties at the University. The review team noted that he had been used by the University as an external panel member in a number of validation events. The University was unable to explain what exceptional circumstances justified an appointment that did not match its usual requirements. The University is **recommended** to ensure that external examiners appointed for partner courses meet the same standards in terms of qualifications and experience as those appointed for analogous programmes in the University.

59 External examiners' reports are made using a pro forma, intended to capture a range of yes/no answers to summary questions such as 'were you consulted about... sampling criteria?' and 'had all points of concern raised by you or other external examiners the previous year been dealt with satisfactorily?', as well as prompts for a number of narrative answers on such matters as the standards of the course relative to other UK degrees. There is also an opportunity for general comment on good practice and for recommendations, and a prompt for external examiners in their final years of service to make summative comments on their periods of office. In the reports supplied, the University's external examiners were extremely positive about College programmes and the standards of marking and feedback; in the case of the MBA programme, the external examiner stated that 'overall standards maintained by the College are exemplary'.

60 Some matters that emerge from the external examiners' reports are less positive, however. In particular all three examiners, in more than one of their reports in two cases, comment that they had not seen draft assessment questions, though this is clearly stated as one of their responsibilities in the handbook.

61 Responses to the reports are made using a report response form completed by the Link Tutor. Many but not all of the reports supplied to the review team had completed response forms attached; some had no form; some had a blank form. The University explained this by reference to the fact that while external examiners tended to report after each assessment board, its procedures required only one Link Tutor response yearly. The review team took the view that this was a somewhat minimalist approach on the part of the Link Tutor. In addition, some of the responses to what appeared to be legitimate comments by external examiners were legalistic. For instance, one examiner made an extremely important point about standards of English, in the context of English being 'the language of aviation', and the avoidance of ambiguity a matter of safety; by implication safety of lives, not academic standards. The Link Tutor's response was that all students 'meet the EFL entry requirements', and though he adds that 'EAC will encourage all their students to make use of the EFL support provided at the college', he misses the point about safety, a fact that is underlined by his re-using almost the same words in his response to one of the other externals in relation to different programmes. In some cases negative answers to yes/no questions are ignored; even when they are repeated from report to report, or made by more than one external examiner, they are given no response (such as negative responses to the question of whether external examiners were consulted about or were content with the approach to sampling they experienced).

62 Link Tutor reports, with recommendations for action, are returned to the College. The College's annual quality monitoring reports show clear evidence that the contents of the reports and the link tutors' responses are considered at the College, though it may be that the reports themselves are seen only by senior staff. Teaching staff present at SABs and PABs will of course be aware of any oral reports made at the boards.

63 The University states that following a recommendation in the QAA Institutional audit of 2009, the University intends to make external examiners' reports available to students by uploading them to the VLE, with effect from the 2013-14 academic year.

64 The approach to certification is defined as part of approval and is stipulated in the agreement. The certificate states that the 'location of study is shown on the accompanying transcript'. This conforms with guidance in the Quality Code. Certificates and transcripts are produced at the University and carried to the College by one of the participants in the Award Ceremony or couriered securely to a named individual at the College.

Information on higher education provision

65 The University has produced guidelines for collaborating organisations, which define procedures for authorisation of publicity material by the University's Marketing and Communications department. Academic partnership managers are responsible for reminding collaborating institutions of this requirement and actively monitor such material when visiting and by checking webpages.

66 The review team noted that some of the advertising leaflets for the University master's awards described the programmes as 'approved by the Quality Assurance Agency, UK (QAA)'. A general College leaflet, 'Higher Learning', referring to University programmes among others, states that the College is 'licensed and recognised' by QAA. Both claims are misleading: QAA does not 'approve' programmes, and it does not 'license' either UK or non-UK universities. The University is **recommended** to ensure that advertising

materials produced by the College to publicise the University's programmes do not contain misleading claims.

67 The University states that student handbooks are available for all courses operating at the College, and provided examples of a 'Final Year Top Up Degree' handbook and 'MBA Student Handbooks'. These documents gave comprehensive information on the range of ancillary information students might need, such as student rights and responsibilities, arrangements for representation, counselling and similar services, and also outline descriptions of generic academic matters such as definitions of 'academic dishonesty'. Generic regulations for undergraduate and MBA awards were given in appendices. Information specific to particular courses, such as descriptions of modules or aims and objectives, are available in module handbooks available online. Students confirmed that the handbooks and the material generally available in the learning materials via the VLE are useful.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the comprehensive procedures for institutional approval (paragraph 24)
- the comprehensive 'Collaboration Framework Document', supporting day-to-day administration of the programmes (paragraph 27)
- the quality of learning resources available at the College (paragraph 30).

Recommendations

Coventry University is recommended to take the following actions:

- review the English language entry requirements for its College courses, especially those at postgraduate level (paragraph 28)
- ensure that the College understands the University's requirement for the approval of new teaching staff before beginning to teach Coventry programmes (paragraph 36)
- ensure that the learning implications of different models of delivery are considered before implementation (paragraph 42)
- consider whether more support should be given to the College to make the annual quality monitoring reporting exercise more meaningful and productive as regards its developmental rather than regulatory aspects (paragraph 48)
- consider how to facilitate comparisons between students' achievements at the College and those of students in analogous courses at Coventry (paragraph 54)
- ensure that external examiners appointed for partner courses meet the same standards in terms of qualifications and experience as those appointed for analogous programmes in Coventry (paragraph 58)
- ensure that advertising materials produced by the College to publicise the University's programmes do not contain misleading claims (paragraph 66).

Coventry University's response to the review report

Coventry University welcomes the publication of the report on the audit of its collaborative provision at Emirates Aviation College (EAC). The University is also gratified that the comprehensive procedures for institutional approval and the development of our comprehensive 'Collaboration Framework Document' is recognised.

The University has noted that a number of areas of good practice were identified by the audit team and have been referred to in the body of the audit report. The University is particularly pleased that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has acknowledged that the procedures and their implementation meet the Expectations of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

The University acknowledges the recommendations for action, some of which have already been actively addressed and others that will be addressed subject to further development. Examples of action already taken are:

- We note the comments relating to the English language skills of some of the students. The external examiner wrote 'I stress that the problem is not endemic, but affects just a few individuals'. However, the English language requirement for courses at EAC has been modified to be the same as courses being taught at Coventry University.
- The writing of Annual Quality Monitoring reports will now be produced by subject experts identified from the Business and Engineering Schools at EAC. An Academic Coordinator from Coventry University has been recently appointed who will provide additional support.

It is unfortunate that the panel did not find evidence of the additional academic input beyond the Link Tutor and Academic Partnership Manager. This is one of our strategic partnerships and there is considerable contact between the two institutions. For example, there has been regular CU academic input involving 'flying faculty' from Coventry's teaching staff. The Director of Quality Assurance has also been a frequent visitor and he was, until recently, the Head of the Department of Aerospace, Electrical and Electrical Engineering. There have also been visits from university staff to attend meetings with research teams and students at EAC. Staff and students from CU presented papers at the 1st International Aviation Management Conference which was held at EAC in November 2012. This is a bi-annual conference with strong support from CU.

In conclusion, the University is appreciative of the constructive approach adopted by the audit team, and of the positive outcome of the audit process.

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