



Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: London Business School

February 2014

Executive summary

London Business School (the School) has offered its Executive MBA (EMBA) in Dubai since 2006. The establishment of the Dubai Centre was informed by the School's international strategy and was well planned. Enrolment is around 120 students a year and the programme is one of two pathways for the School's EMBA provision with the same curriculum, academic standards and award. The main difference is that teaching is in week-long blocks rather than at weekends, mostly in Dubai but with three core blocks, as well as electives in London. The links between the Dubai and London-based pathways enrich the educational experience of students.

The programme is delivered and assessed by London-based faculty, while student support is provided locally. Risk is monitored as an integral part of the School's processes. Students are generally very satisfied with the quality of their learning experience and the resources made available, though they did feel that more use could be made of their experience in some areas of learning and assessment. Students have very high expectations of the programme, as well as careers support and the alumni network. They do not always perceive that these expectations have been met despite the substantial resources provided. In part, this perception results from the presentation of information on internal systems which is London-centric rather than based on a distributed student body, such as in the case of available electives.

The faculty is very international and many members have limited experience of UK quality requirements prior to joining the School. Significant attention has been paid to aligning the School's practice with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), though some exceptions remain. An innovative approach to annual monitoring is through a Faculty Adviser, which is in effect a peer review system that is both proactive and reflective. The School has currently no intention to develop the Dubai Centre into an academic branch campus. However, it is keen to extend its functions from an administrative basis supporting the delivery of the EMBA programme in Dubai to a hub facilitating the School's full engagement with the region.

Report

Introduction

1 London Business School (the School) started operations in Dubai in 2006, with the establishment of the Dubai Centre in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). DIFC provides administrative and logistics support for the delivery of the School's Executive Masters in Business Administration (EMBA) in Dubai. The Dubai-based EMBA programme started running in 2007 and is known as the 'One EMBA', to stress the integrated nature of the London and Dubai streams of the programme. The School's portfolio in Dubai includes the EMBA and non-degree executive education programmes. It is developing a cross-School Dubai strategy in which Dubai becomes a hub for degree programmes, alumni activities and executive education.

2 The School was founded in 1964 as a graduate business school. It is a full college of the University of London, but also has its own charter and now awards London Business School degrees. It 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 one per cent of business schools worldwide (approximately 60) have this level of accreditation by international professional bodies.

3 The School offers a portfolio of postgraduate higher education qualifications including full and part-time MBAs, as well as a Master's in Finance and in Management. Part-time MBA programmes were started in 1983 and were renamed as the London-based Executive MBA in 1992-93. The School has a total of 2,400 registered higher education students of which 528 are on the London and Dubai streams of the EMBA programme, plus 10,000 attendees each year on shorter executive programmes. It also has a strong emphasis on research including a PhD programme with 75 registered students.

4 The School operates internationally from its base in London through a combination of international partnerships, the Dubai Centre and corporate executive education work delivered internationally. In relation to degree programmes, the School collaborates with Columbia Business School and Hong Kong University in its EMBA-Global programmes. It also has a wide range of study abroad and student exchange agreements.

5 The School positions itself as international in nature and is one of the world's top 10 business schools, though it is smaller than many of its main competitors. Strategically, it sees Dubai as one of its four main locations for degree programmes. In degree programmes, it sees global reach as a differentiator and is aiming to equip all students with frameworks, skills and attributes they need to effectively lead diverse global teams. Around 94 per cent of students and 86 per cent of faculty are from outside the UK.

6 The One EMBA started with an annual single intake in September 2007. A second annual intake was started in January 2009. The programme is 20 months long. Annual recruitment was 127 in 2012-13 across both streams, with the majority of students foreign nationals, resident in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Gulf Coast countries. The School aims to keep student numbers at this level of around 120 a year giving a total of 200-250 EMBA students based in Dubai. The One EMBA has contributed around a third of the School's overall growth in student numbers from 1,480 to 2,027 between 2007-08 and 2012-13.

7 The EMBA programme begins with a London-based residential orientation week dedicated to induction and understanding the principles of general management and

leadership. Following the orientation week, the two Executive MBA streams continue in either London or Dubai. The majority of the core courses are studied at students' primary study location. In London, core courses are taught on consecutive Fridays and Saturdays of alternate weeks. In Dubai, core courses are taught in a four or five-day block each month.

8 During the second academic year, students take between six and eight elective courses. While in principle around 70 electives are available, in practice choice is more limited given that only six electives are run in Dubai and the scheduling pattern of many electives in London makes them difficult to attend. Students also embark on a compulsory week-long International Assignment and may choose a second as an elective option. Students can choose to undertake an in-company project as part of elective credits. The EMBA concludes with the London and Dubai streams coming together for two residential core modules designed to consolidate learning through multidisciplinary group simulation and feedback. Students have similar opportunities to those based in London and on study courses at partner institutions in the USA and Hong Kong.

9 The School has currently no intention to develop the Dubai Centre into an academic branch campus. However, it is keen to extend its functions from an administrative basis supporting the delivery of the EMBA programme in Dubai to a hub facilitating the School's full engagement with the region.

Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

10 After five years of discussions with various agencies in Dubai, the School agreed to establish an EMBA programme linked to a modest executive education provision. This agreement reflected the Dubai government's desire to develop international-level business education and the School's desire to internationalise and develop a further stream of its EMBA offerings. It was also agreed that it would be located in the DIFC, which was establishing itself as a financial services centre. The School based its decision on strategic analysis of alternative locations, as well as responding to the approaches of the Dubai government.

11 The programme model was similar to its existing EMBA-Global based in New York, except that delivery would be through a School overseas centre, rather than partnership with an established business school. The programme was to have core modules in Dubai and most electives in London, shared with other School programmes. The intention was to have similar standards for admission and educational experience to the existing EMBA-Global. A launch team was set up, led by the School's Deputy Dean for Programmes and a newly appointed Managing Director, with comparable experience in a major USA university.

12 The legal agreement with DIFC included provision of permanent office space plus guaranteed availability of teaching space, including both a lecture theatre and break-out seminar rooms. The agreement also specified financial risk-sharing related to the setting up of the School's presence in Dubai.

13 The School's Executive Committee regularly monitored the progress of negotiations, as well as the necessary resourcing from within the School in particular staff. Making the Dubai presence work was given priority over other collaboration initiatives given its significance to the School. The School's policy is only to award degrees in which it plays a major role in delivering and its approach to Dubai was in line with its collaboration strategy.

14 The programme is approved by the Dubai Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and operates under an Educational Services Permit, last renewed in 2013.

The School's Deputy Dean acts as Academic President in relation to the KHDA. The School also has a Commercial Licence from the DIFC, last renewed in 2013. The School's detailed planning for the programme based on a strategic approach to internationalisation is a **positive feature**.

Making the link work

15 The underlying philosophy is of 'One EMBA' across London and Dubai with the same admissions team, faculty and curriculum. This has been reinforced over time as the two EMBA streams based in Dubai and London have become more integrated. Students were very positive about the experience of working together with their London-based counterparts, seeing it as an enrichment of their learning experience. The linking of the studies of Dubai and London-based students during the programme is a **positive feature**.

16 The School's Degree Programmes Officer (DPO) plays the lead role in managing all degree programmes including the One EMBA, linking programmes to the needs of students with substantial influence on programme design, as well as being responsible for recruitment and admissions. This has meant that, in the DPO's words, 'faculty have rightly become more research-focused and less prominent in running programmes'. The DPO reports to the School's Associate Dean for Careers and Degree Programmes, who in turn reports to the Deputy Dean for Programmes.

17 The staff based in Dubai include a Regional Assistant Director, three programme support staff, a recruitment and admissions manager, and an operations manager. Local staff in Dubai receive a comprehensive and informative induction guide, though this had not been updated recently.

18 The School uses the same faculty for all its EMBA provision. The School's faculty is seen by external accrediting bodies as high quality and is very international with only 14 per cent of UK origin. This means that while academic faculty are very well qualified, their familiarity with the requirements of UK higher education before joining the School is limited.

19 Faculty receive a briefing prior to running a module in Dubai, which includes cultural issues and their impact in class. Dubai-based staff also travel to London and discuss the programme with the London-based faculty and support staff. According to an internal survey 43 per cent of faculty have taught on the Dubai EMBA. While the programme content is similar, faculty do adapt the specific content to a Dubai-based audience and there are minor differences in assessments.

20 Admissions decisions are made by an Admissions Committee based on well-defined admission criteria applying in both London and Dubai, including English language capability. This Committee meets weekly and covers both London and Dubai-based students, thereby enabling comparability of admissions. While some students expressed the view that some students accepted in Dubai were below the calibre of EMBA students in London, academic staff saw little difference between Dubai and London EMBA students, though the level of discussion in the Dubai EMBA and examination performance was higher than in the full-time London MBA. Faculty perceived similar London EMBA student views regarding some of their fellow students, noting that the value to the class of students with less senior-level experience but high ability was increasingly recognised as the programme progresses. Overall it appeared that differences in EMBA admissions were primarily a reflection of the differing mix of size and sector of organisations between Europe and the Middle East, rather than any major difference in admissions policy.

21 Induction is held in London with the London-based EMBA stream in an effort to integrate the two cohorts as much as possible. Induction provides a comprehensive introduction to the programme and the support services available to students, including career and IT support, emphasising the 'Dubai-London' nature of the programme. Students expressed very positive views of the programme induction.

22 Students are provided with all required reading materials including electronic or physical copies of textbooks, and have access to a local reference library in the DIFC, which is shared with Cass Business School. Further learning resources are provided electronically with access to the same electronic resources as in the London library.

23 Students saw the block teaching used in Dubai as attractive. The majority of faculty and teaching was seen very positively, though students felt that some faculty could have used the extensive work experience within the group more actively. Students also expressed the view that assessments could be more 'executive' in nature, with more focus on issues in their own organisations. Faculty were seen as accessible and responsive, making themselves available via email and Skype. The DPO was seen as helpful.

24 General student satisfaction with the programme is high; however, there is significant concern with the availability of electives. While the number of electives from which to choose is high, only six are taught in Dubai, and many are most accessible for full-time London MBA students as they are not taught on a block basis, which is most suitable for EMBA students, whether based in London or travelling from Dubai. Students also expressed concern that the annual scheduling of electives was problematic for certain cohorts who had only short notice of their allocation, which made planning travel and absence from work difficult. Another concern was that modules could be over-subscribed and availability was not guaranteed. One student had delayed completion of their studies as a result of taking a desired elective. Although the School's intention is to encourage Dubai-based students to take electives in London to integrate with the London-based students, it recognises the provision of electives as an issue and academic staff said that this was part of the periodic review underway at the time of the review. The School is **recommended** to review the provision of electives to make them more accessible to its diverse student groups.

25 Career support is provided based on the needs of experienced students including a Dubai-based career coach and an online portal. Leadership development also forms part of the curriculum. Approved employers can post job opportunities electronically and access the CVs of students interested in these opportunities. A wide range of careers events are provided, both in Dubai and virtually, though this range is greater in London where there are more students.

26 However, the presentation of careers information on internal systems appears London-centric with no recognition that many sessions will not be readily accessible from Dubai. As a result, despite the School's substantial commitment to career development support in Dubai, students perceive that they were not receiving the same level of support as London-based students. IT support is provided out of London and does not take sufficient account of the differing working week and hours in Dubai. The School is **recommended** to adopt a more global approach to the presentation of information to students outside its London campus.

27 The School engages actively with alumni and the Dubai business and government community. Student meetings with alumni are held, for example, on entrepreneurial experiences. Two major events are held each year, as well as breakfast events in the DIFC and a student-led conference. The alumni network is seen by students as an important factor

in choosing to study at the School, though as with careers their perception is that this is stronger in London.

28 The School uses a range of feedback mechanisms from students including its representative system, course evaluations, student surveys, lunches with the Assistant Director and direct contact with programme staff. Surveys are analysed systematically. Students felt that their feedback was taken seriously.

29 The School has been proactive in the use of technology in learning in Dubai. There are plans to use video conferencing to Dubai to enhance the student experience by enabling live sessions to/from London. It has a successful iPad pilot in Dubai which replaced printed notes. This gives the potential for further innovation in learning and may be extended to London. An area that has not been developed to any degree is the use of technology to support electives, making them more globally accessible.

Quality assurance

Academic standards and quality of programmes

30 The School's Academic Regulations govern the operation of the programme. The EMBA programme was originally approved in 1992 and this process was not reviewed. The most recent new programme approval was the Master's in Management in 2008. This demonstrated consideration of both business and academic aspects of a new programme, as well as risks. The School has a documented process for programme approval that integrates business and academic considerations. It also includes internal and external reviewers who report on any proposal. Since the programme delivered in Dubai is essentially identical to that delivered in London, the setting of academic standards is a product of the School's mainstream programme approval process.

31 The EMBA programme underwent periodic review in 2009. Known as Periodic Programme Review, the process involved formation of a review panel which worked over the course of a year to review the programme in both London and Dubai. In doing this it took account of the relevant subject benchmark statement, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and recommendations from the School's Institutional Audit by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This Periodic Programme Review led to further harmonisation of the London and Dubai-based streams of the programme. For the Dubai stream, this increased the number of London modules from two to three, as well as changing teaching delivery in Dubai to prioritise effective pedagogy over faculty efficiency considerations. An explicit aim was to build more links between students in the two streams. As noted above, the linking of the studies of Dubai and London-based students during the programme is a **positive feature**.

32 In both locations, the in-company project was made optional, though emphasis was placed on introducing more work-based assessment in subject courses. As a result, there is no master's dissertation or equivalent major project that demonstrates programme-level learning outcomes. Assessment of programme-level learning outcomes is therefore not clear in programme documentation, though these are covered in a capstone module. This issue was noted by the AACSB panel in relation to its 'assurance of learning' standards.

33 Annual monitoring takes the form of a Faculty Adviser Report, which documents changes during the year and confirms the ongoing quality of each course. It also documents external examiner feedback and responses, as well as progress on recommendations from the previous year and more general, critical reflection on the programme. Student feedback is not explicitly considered in the report template.

34 The Faculty Adviser is a senior academic who holds the position for three to four years. The role includes reviewing course content and anticipating potential issues in advance. As well as formal reporting, the Faculty Adviser has an influencing role with faculty on EMBA modules to encourage good practice. The Faculty Advisers from different programmes meet together with the Deputy Dean for Programmes, thereby providing an overview of programmes with their achievements and issues. The innovative approach to annual monitoring through the Faculty Adviser is a **positive feature**.

Assessment and certification of awards

35 The School's approach to assessment is significantly influenced by USA higher education practice. At the same time, key UK requirements for academic standards have been implemented. The Assessment Policy Committee exercises oversight of assessment policy and practice on the EMBA, and has been seeking to align all assessment on the programme with UK requirements, in particular the Quality Code.

36 The School's Academic Regulations define the assessment regulations for the programme. One stream of Boards of Examiners covers all MBA programmes, including the One EMBA. It is overseen by the Assessment Policy Committee. The regulations also cover academic misconduct, extenuating circumstances and other aspects of assessment. Students are required to pass with limited compensation permissible across courses. Within a course there may be requirements to pass specific assessment elements but there are no criteria for how this should be determined in the Academic Regulations. Regulations cover the conduct of examinations.

37 The programme has detailed programme-level learning outcomes, linked to the teaching, learning and assessment approaches. However, there is no explicit linkage between programme content and these learning outcomes in the programme specification. Also the programme specification does not define core modules; it refers to other documentation for assessment requirements and does not clearly specify English language requirements for admission.

38 Overall student achievement is high and seen by external examiners as comparable with high-quality business schools internationally. A wide range of assessment methods are used that are tailored to each module. In general students saw assessment as fair and transparent with clear expectations of what was required. However, students saw the opportunity to enhance the executive nature of the EMBA through greater use of work-based assessments in their own organisations. Feedback on assessment was seen as good.

39 The practice of assessment in each module is overseen by the Assessment Policy Committee, at which there has been 'intense discussion' of assessment policy and practice. Discussion has focused, for example, on the allowed proportion for multiple choice questions, set at 30 per cent, which is high for a master's-level programme as noted by an external examiner. While academic staff argued that well constructed multiple choice questions could be appropriate at master's level, the Assessment Policy Committee has been scrutinising this type of assessment. As a result, the use of multiple choice questions has reduced over time. At the time of the review, only one module of the Dubai programme used multiple choice questions.

40 Most modules use class contribution with a 10 to 20 per cent weighting in overall module assessment. There is a formal Class Participation Policy. Faculty are now required to publish criteria in advance. Auditable records of how grades were awarded are also required. Faculty understood the need for objective and verifiable measures of class participation, including documented records. In some cases, a teaching assistant would observe and document students' class performance.

41 At the time of the review, one module explicitly included attendance in its assessment scheme, an approach that does not meet UK academic standards. However, the weighting of this assessment was minimal in relation to the programme as a whole. The extent to which other modules included attendance within class participation assessment was also unclear. This was stated to be an area of current attention by the Assessment Policy Committee.

42 While the Assessment Policy Committee has been effective in scrutiny of a range of assessment policies and practices, the School is **recommended** to continue to develop its assessment policies and practices and to align them fully with UK requirements.

43 A grading curve, which limits the proportion of students in each grade, is used rather than assessing. Marks therefore reflect students' relative performance within the cohort rather than performance against assessment criteria at different levels of performance. This is then applied to the classification of the degree with 10 per cent (and in some cases up to 12 per cent) of students obtaining a distinction based on a weighted average of course marks. While this limits pressure for grade inflation, an issue identified by the Board of Examiners and external examiners, comparability across courses and between cohorts is problematic as the same performance could be awarded a different grade.

44 While not typical in the UK, this grading curve approach is consistent with the Quality Code, which requires that marking processes are 'clearly articulated and consistently operated'. Both staff and students demonstrated understanding of the system. Senior academic staff expressed the view that given the international nature of the School's faculty and different international norms in awarding percentage marks, in practice this system was fairer than alternatives. They also stressed that while grades were used to differentiate relative performance of students, an absolute threshold standard of performance was required to obtain a pass. However, in relation to threshold standards, external examiners have expressed concern about how the pass/fail borderline is maintained.

45 Processes for appointment of external examiners are clear and meet UK requirements. The Academic Regulations specify how external examiners' annual reports are considered and to whom they are circulated. A formal response to comments raised is required. This is monitored by the Assessment Policy Committee. However, there is no requirement for annual reports to be made available to students. Both staff and students confirmed that external examiners' annual reports were not made readily available to students. The School is **recommended** to make external examiners' annual reports available to all students and ensure that students are aware of these reports.

46 The School uses its own system for academic credit. This divides credit into summative, which is used to calculate overall student achievement and formative, which is effectively pass/fail. The basis for the determination of the credit values of courses and which are summative is unclear. In addition, documentation of the requirements to pass could be made clearer, though both staff and students were clear regarding the requirements in practice.

47 Assessment is conducted by the London-based faculty for each course, using similar processes for both London and Dubai-based students. A sample of each assessment is second marked. The School has a Minimum Standards of Feedback policy. Students commented positively about the quality of feedback on assessed work, which has been commended by external examiners, though students have expressed some concern with its timeliness.

48 Awards are made by the School with certificates and transcripts produced centrally. Certificates and transcripts do not refer to Dubai or another location where study was

undertaken. As the programme in Dubai is the same as in the UK, transfer between locations is possible.

Information on higher education provision

49 The main source of publicity about the programme is the School's website. This clearly and appropriately positions the Dubai EMBA as part of the School's offerings. This is supported by a brochure and advertising. The website provides wide-ranging information on the programme and its component courses. The brochure is also appropriate, covering the London and Dubai-based programmes in an integrated way while making clear their differences. Information on fees is provided on the website, accompanied by details of available scholarships.

50 A virtual learning environment, known as the Portal, is provided which contains a wider range of information, including programme and course details such as electives and assessment. The Portal can also generate a transcript of studies undertaken to date. Students considered that the School provides full and appropriate information on the programme and courses including electives.

51 While assessment requirements are clearly presented, the relative weighting of courses is less clear in programme documentation. However, students were clear about the requirements to pass. The School has clear procedures for student discipline, complaints, academic appeals and extenuating circumstances which are also communicated to students in the form of student guides.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the School's detailed planning for the programme based on a strategic approach to internationalisation (paragraph 14)
- the linking of the studies of Dubai and London-based students during the programme (paragraph 15)
- the innovative approach to annual monitoring through the Faculty Adviser (paragraph 34).

Recommendations

London Business School is recommended to take the following actions:

- review the provision of electives to make them more accessible to its diverse student groups (paragraph 24)
- adopt a more global approach to the presentation of information to students outside its London campus (paragraph 26)
- continue to develop its assessment policies and practices and align them fully with UK requirements (paragraph 42)
- make external examiners' annual reports available to all students and ensure that students are aware of these reports (paragraph 45).

London Business School's response to the review report

London Business School was very pleased to receive the QAA's positive report and to note the recognition of the highlighted positive features of the programme. In particular, the School notes that the Dubai-based students found the experience of working together with London-based students 'very positive' and an enrichment of their learning experience. We welcome and look forward to implementing the recommendations, which accord with our own intentions for further development.

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