



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

February 2014

Executive summary

The Manchester University Business School (the School) has an extensive network of international centres in several countries around the world supporting the delivery of a part-time Global Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme. As part of its strategy to expand the provision of its Global MBA programme in key global business hubs with high demand for executive business education, the School opened its Middle East Centre in the Dubai Knowledge Village in 2006.

The Global MBA programme is taught in all its international centres by dedicated School staff, following a standard block workshop delivery format, supported by additional online learning. The programme provides opportunities for students to attend modules at different centres around the world, enabling experienced professionals to study globally. The Global MBA programme has over 2200 students registered worldwide, of whom 860 were registered in Dubai in 2013.

The Middle East Centre is professionally organised and well managed with appropriate levels of staffing and resources for students to engage with their programmes of study. The core MBA teaching team, drawn from the School's faculty, is trained, briefed and oriented to deliver the programmes in Dubai. Students expressed overall satisfaction with the delivery of the programme at the Middle East Centre, including the support they received by Dubai-based administrative staff. The MBA Programme Director has overall oversight of the delivery of the Global MBA programme across the world, including in Dubai.

The University of Manchester (the University) indicated that a new, shorter part-time Global MBA programme was launched in January 2014, in response to students' demand to be able to complete their studies before the 36-month period set for the previous Global MBA. This new programme will run over 30 months. In addition, a new part-time Global Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programme is launching in July 2014 targeting between 30 and 60 mid to senior executive students. Each cohort will travel as a closed group every semester to attend workshops at one of the worldwide centres, enabling every student to have the full flexibility to study modules in a range of the School's centres around the world. The first Global EMBA workshops will be held in Dubai during Easter 2015.

The School currently has no intention to develop the Middle East Centre into a full branch campus with locally employed academic staff; however, it sees the Dubai Centre as a platform from which to eventually deliver further programmes and engage with the wider region.

Report

Introduction

1 The University of Manchester (the University), in its present form, was created in 2004 by the merger of the Victoria University of Manchester and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, which joined to form the largest single-site university in the UK. Both institutions have a long heritage. The Victoria University of Manchester developed out of Owens College, which was founded in 1851 and from 1872 incorporated the Royal School of Medicine and Surgery. The University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology can trace its origins to the Manchester Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1824 as part of a national movement for the education of working men. The University is a research-led institution with a vision to be a world-renowned university. It has a student population of over 42,000, of whom approximately 65 per cent are undergraduate, 25 per cent postgraduate taught, and just under 10 per cent postgraduate research.

2 The University of Manchester Business School (the School) opened its Middle East Centre in the Dubai Knowledge Village in 2006, complementing other hubs in Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Miami and Sao Paulo. The Middle East Centre provides the administrative and logistic support for the delivery in Dubai of the same part-time Global MBA programme that the School offers in the other international centres and in Manchester.

3 The School stated that it decided to establish the Middle East Centre because Dubai presented the characteristics it was looking for to expand the global reach of its MBA programmes: it is a global business hub, where English is spoken with fluency in business, with a market for premium-fee executive students, in addition to presenting straightforward procedures for establishing in-country operations.

4 The School provision in Dubai is further underpinned by the University's Internationalisation Strategy, which includes the commitment 'to strengthening the international dimensions of our degree programmes, and to delivering courses that equip students to compete in the global job market', and the specific objective to 'maximise the benefits of Manchester Business School offices around the world to support transnational education and income generation'. The Dubai provision is also supported by the University's Transnational Education Policy, which sets out the principles under which transnational education will be approved by the University.

5 The School's Global MBA programme has over 2200 students registered worldwide. In 2013, 860 of these students were registered at the Middle East Centre, with more than 90 new enrolments. More than half of the students - all working professionals - reside in the UAE, with the majority of the balance residing in the other Gulf Coast countries. Only one per cent of the total number of students are United Arab Emirates (UAE) nationals. The Global MBA programme is taught by dedicated School staff in three-day block workshops, supported by additional online learning. Students on the programme are encouraged to attend workshops in an overseas centre other than their 'home centre' to provide them with local contacts overseas and deepen their understanding of international business.

6 Historically the Global MBA, which originally started in 1991 as a distance-learning programme, was offered in association with the University of Wales up to 2001, when the degree became solely a University of Manchester award. Since 2007, the Global MBA has operated within a wholly owned subsidiary of the University called Manchester Business School Worldwide Ltd. 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 one per cent of business schools worldwide (approximately 60) have this level of accreditation by international professional bodies.

7 Starting in January 2014, students have been registering on a shortened 30-month Global MBA programme, which replaces the previous 36-month Global MBA programme. The new Global programme will still be delivered part-time via a blend of face-to-face workshops and online learning, but will span 30 rather than 36 months. The development of the new, shorter Global MBA was driven by students' recommendations and feedback, who asked to be able to complete the programme more quickly, and was based on an analysis of how students were managing their study and workload. Students still have the option to complete the new programme in 36 months if they wish to do so, just as previously they had the option to complete the programme quicker if they wished to do so. As with the current 36-month Global MBA programme, the shortened 30-month Global MBA programme provides students with the opportunity to study modules in any centre around the world.

8 The School is also launching a new Global EMBA programme starting in July 2014 aimed at between 30 and 60 mid to senior executive students with a minimum of eight years' postgraduate and management experience. Each cohort will travel as a group every semester to attend workshops at one of the worldwide centres, enabling every student to study modules in a range of the School's centres around the world. Global EMBA workshops are planned to be held at the Middle East Centre every Easter and autumn, with the first expected to be held during Easter 2015.

9 The provision of a truly global learning and networking experience for students on the Global MBA and the Global EMBA programmes is a **positive feature**. However, the flexibility of study locations, in particular for the Global EMBA programme, requires high levels of administrative support to manage students across centres. It is therefore **recommended** that student experience across the seven worldwide centres is reviewed and monitored regularly to ensure comparability and consistency of experience on the programmes, and to support flexible study across centres effectively.

10 The School currently has no intention to develop the Middle East Centre into a full branch campus with locally employed academic staff; however, it sees the Dubai Centre as a platform from which to eventually deliver further programmes and engage with the wider region.

Set-up and operation

11 Approval for the establishment of the Middle East Centre in Dubai was given by the University's International Office and the Board of Studies at the School. The University carried out a thorough due diligence process, in accordance with its regulations, and the Dubai centre is fully approved by the relevant authority for free zone provision, namely the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). The School also holds all required commercial licences for operating in the Dubai Knowledge Village.

12 The set-up of the Middle East Centre has been led by the Director of the Centre who manages the growing Dubai-based team. The Middle East Centre in Dubai is well resourced and well managed. Staff at the Middle East Centre are responsible for marketing the Global MBA programme, recruiting students and administratively supporting students. The Centre also provides professional support and direction in the coordination and establishment of workshops and workshop events in Dubai. These functions and activities are overseen by the MBA Programme Director and the programme administration team in Manchester. There was evidence of a close working relationship between administrative staff located in the Dubai centre and administrative staff located in Manchester and in other

regional centres, including reciprocal visits to better coordinate the running of the Global MBA worldwide and the sharing of good practice. The close links between the School regional centres are a **positive feature**, which contributes to the effective global organisation of the MBA programme.

13 The academic development and delivery of the Global MBA suite of programmes is largely coordinated in Manchester and is the responsibility of the Programme Director, who is based in Manchester. The Programme Director must ensure consistency of the programme throughout all seven worldwide centres. Academic staff expertise from Manchester and other regions is used to deliver workshops in the Dubai centre, supported by adjunct staff who provide student support, mainly online.

Making the link work

14 The admissions function is shared between staff at the Middle East Centre and the staff located at the home campus in Manchester. There was evidence of the function being implemented fully and in line with the University's Admissions Policy. The programme admissions team in Manchester has full oversight of admissions to its programme delivered at the Dubai Campus. The Middle East Centre accepts applicants exceeding all minimum admission requirements while all other applicants are forwarded to the admissions team in Manchester and are subsequently presented to the Global MBA admissions committee, which is held in Manchester weekly. All applications and supporting documentation are stored in the Global MBA student record system to which relevant staff in Manchester and the Middle East Centre have access. All applicants are required to have sufficient levels of English language and are tested for entry to the MBA programme.

15 Before induction onto the MBA programme all new students are required to undertake a study preparation period, where they are introduced to the University's virtual learning environments and library online systems, as well as undertaking a practical study skills course. The induction process culminates with a face-to-face one-day induction at the Middle East Centre hosted by the Centre Director and the Programme Director (or Associate Programme Director) and supported by a range of professionally produced documentation, including the Student and Programme Handbook, aimed at familiarising students with the University's policies and procedures, programme structure and expectations. Alumni and current students are also invited to attend.

16 All new students are allocated a member of the Middle East Centre administrative staff as a student adviser who acts as the first point of contact, helps them through the induction process and scheduling their courses, and follows their progress. For academic support students are asked to contact the relevant e-tutor in the first instance. In addition to being the first point of contact for academic queries, e-tutors are responsible for the online tutorial component of the units, moderate discussion forums and provide ad hoc extra individual support.

17 Day-to-day communication with students is managed by the Dubai-based student advisers, while the School tends to manage programme-level communication. A variety of communication methods are employed including email, telephone and teleconferencing. There is, in addition, a Middle East Centre-specific newsletter and an overall Global newsletter sent regularly to all students registered on the Global MBA programme at all international centres. Students expressed satisfaction with the support they received, appreciating in particular the proactive support offered by the Dubai-based student advisers, which is a **positive feature**.

18 Feedback from students is collected and collated after each workshop by the administrative staff at the Middle East Centre and there is evidence of comprehensive

analysis of this data. A further feedback survey is sent to all Global MBA students at the end of each semester, and at the end of the programme, although the University has found that the response rate for these surveys is lower than the workshop feedback surveys. Students are given sight of the aggregate semester feedback. Student representatives are formally invited to attend the programme subcommittees, which are held in Dubai twice yearly. Student representatives and all students are also invited to meet with the Programme Director when visiting the Dubai centre. Overall, students felt that the School responded to concerns and tried to address issues raised.

19 Online tutorials are timetabled throughout each semester taking into account the specific needs of its worldwide centres, such as religious and national events and holidays, and time-zone differences. Each online tutorial is delivered between two and five sessions, complementing workshop block delivery. Online tutorials provide an opportunity for students to interact with e-tutors and other students studying the same unit. Attendance at workshops is monitored closely. The Programme Director stated that the 260 hours of face-to-face learning exceeded the expectation of AMBA and that the programme provided additional online learning, career events, training and networking opportunities for students. In addition to the University central library, students also have 24-hour access, seven days a week, to the Middle East Centre's library, which houses key reference books and study materials and computer stations.

20 Decisions regarding the appointment of teaching staff are made centrally by the University and there is evidence that the Programme Director has overall responsibility for allocation and management of staff on the Global MBA in conjunction with the academic subject areas. Teaching on the Global MBA is conducted using School staff, who are required as part of their contract to teach at international centres in addition to the Manchester home campus. A team of academics is allocated to each course delivered at all regional centres to guarantee consistency and continuity (teams of six to eight for core courses, and at least two for electives). Each course has a coordinator, responsible for course content, assessment and overseeing the overall quality of the particular course.

21 Course coordinators and course academic teams are assisted by adjunct staff supporting students between workshops as e-tutors. E-tutors are approved by the School's Appointments Committee which is made up of the MBA Director and the Associate Heads of Teaching from each of the four academic divisions within the School. The School hosts regular staff development sessions and provides support for any member of staff involved in teaching on the Global MBA. There is clear evidence of staff being advised and oriented before delivering a workshop on the Global MBA programme. Development and planning away-days are regularly held in Manchester and ad hoc seminars and training sessions are organised face-to-face or online with academics. In addition, all new members of teaching staff are expected to shadow permanent staff before they conduct workshops.

Quality assurance

22 The University stated that the Global MBA programme delivered at the Dubai centre adhered to the University's teaching, learning and assessment policies and procedures, and the documentation provided and review meetings supported this statement. These policies are set out in the Manual of Academic Procedures which provides both academic and administrative staff with information on regulations, policies, procedures, people and other sources of information.

23 The University operates a process of annual monitoring which is based on a model of continual monitoring of programme standards and student experience, embedded within the programme and School management structures, and annually reported to the faculties. The School maintains an overview of the worldwide programmes via the Academic Affairs

Team meetings, of which the MBA Programme Director is a member, and has a standing agenda item each meeting to report on activities in the Manchester Business School Worldwide programmes.

24 As part of the School's annual monitoring reporting requirements to the faculty, the School is required to produce a Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) for each of its different activity areas, covering undergraduate programmes, postgraduate programmes, full-time MBA and Global MBA. The SEAP is maintained by the School's Teaching and Learning Committees, with the Academic Affairs Committee maintaining a holistic overview. Detailed evidence of the role and nature of the SEAP was provided and discussed. The SEAP is submitted by the School three times a year for review and approval of the plan and reports on progress made by the Faculty Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience.

25 The School underwent a periodic review in 2010 which incorporated visits to regional centres. As part of this review a meeting with the School Senior Management Team was held to discuss aspects of teaching and learning that cross all activity areas on the Global MBA programme in its various locations and regions. The final report of the School periodic review made a number of detailed commendations and recommendations. The School was commended, among other things, for its commitment 'to try and provide a world class experience for all its students and its aim to establish itself as one of the top Business Schools in the world', and more specifically for 'the appointment of e-facilitators to support the student experience and the mechanisms for embedding them in the programme team, induction, training and reviewing performance'.

26 Recommendations included, among others, reviewing the application and admission processes to ensure the quality of students on the programme, ensuring that the appointments of external examiners are, as much as possible, aligned with those for the full-time MBA in Manchester, as well as facilitating opportunities for them to meet with students. There is evidence that the School has worked to put measures in place to address these and other recommendations. For instance, admission processes across programmes, including the Global MBA programme, have been reviewed, with all applications now going to a joint admission committee overseen by the Director of MBA Admissions. Also, a review of external examiner arrangements on the Global MBA programme has been undertaken which looked at ways in which to facilitate opportunities for external examiners to meet with students either face-to-face during workshops or remotely, and considered the possibility of combining future appointments of external examiners for both the full-time and Global MBA.

Assessment and certification of awards

27 Assessments are designed by the course coordinator and reviewed by external examiners assigned specifically to the Global MBA programme and the international centres. A sample of all coursework is second marked, and a second marker selects a minimum of 10 per cent of all examination papers on a sample basis, plus all fail grades. Assessments and marking are centre-blind. Invigilation of on-site examinations is managed by external invigilators, including the British Council, and a number of Dubai-based staff are also trained as invigilators, using British Council standards. All final MBA group projects are first and second marked with further moderation by the School's academic staff.

28 External examiners report to the Examination Board. There are two separate Examination Boards for the full-time and Global MBA programmes and both are held in Manchester. Students stated that they did not get sight of external examiners' reports and these did not appear to be made readily available to students at the Middle East Centre. It is **recommended** that the University moves swiftly towards the implementation of its policy of making available external examiners' reports to all students, wherever these are located.

29 Students stated that they would appreciate more support in finding their final project, and felt that the programme could be more connected with the local business environment, an issue that the School is trying to address. Feedback to students is provided in line with University policies and School guidelines; students expressed overall satisfaction with this process and with the feedback they received for their coursework, appreciating the opportunity to contact the course leader to expand on feedback. Student appeals, complaints and matters of misconduct are dealt with in accordance with the University's regulations.

30 Upon successful completion of studies, all students are issued with a certificate and transcript by the University. On request, the transcript can include a statement of location of study.

Information on higher education provision

31 The main forums for publicity of the Global MBA are the School's website and the Global MBA brochure. The Programme Director and marketing team in Manchester have overall responsibility for assuring the accuracy and integrity of information produced at the Middle East Centre. The student handbooks are approved by the MBA Programme Director and the programme team in Manchester, and there was evidence of professional documentation and approval processes in place to provide students with up-to-date and appropriate handbooks and learning materials.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the close links between the School regional centres, contributing to the effective global organisation of the MBA programme (paragraph 11)
- the proactive student support service provided by the Middle East Centre student advisers, and the commitment and professional management of the Centre Director (paragraph 15)
- the new Global Executive MBA programme that gives students the opportunity to study modules in any centre around the world, thus providing a truly global learning and networking experience for students on the MBA programme (paragraph 8).

Recommendations

The University of Manchester is recommended to take the following actions:

- review and monitor the student experience across the seven worldwide centres regularly to ensure comparability and consistency of experience on the more student-mobile Global Executive MBA programme and to support flexible study across centres effectively (paragraph 8)
- make external examiners' annual reports available to all students and ensure that students are aware of these reports (paragraph 25).

University of Manchester's response to the review report

The University of Manchester welcomes this encouraging report and the positive features which have been highlighted along with the recommendations made by the review team.

We particularly note, and appreciate, the positive comments made in respect of the close links between Manchester Business School and all of our support Centres and the proactive student support service provided by the Middle East Centre staff.

In addition, the recommendations made will be addressed by the University.

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