Review of UK Transnational Education in Malaysia: Coventry University and Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC)

October 2019

Executive summary

Coventry University has been in partnership with Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) since 2014, to offer a suite of undergraduate and postgraduate awards. All programmes are designed and delivered by TAR UC academic staff, but validated by Coventry University, allowing students to receive an award from both institutions. TAR UC is recognised by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, and its programmes are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Its main campus is located in Kuala Lumpur, with branch campuses in Penang and Perak.

There are effective communications at all levels of the partnership, from senior management down. The partnership has evolved over time, with strong relationships at all levels. This interaction between Coventry and TAR UC adds significant value and strength to the partnership.

All Coventry students at TAR UC have the option to study for one semester in the UK, with a significant proportion of students taking up this option and providing very positive feedback on their experience. Coventry-based students also have the opportunity to study at TAR UC for a short period, and these reciprocal study abroad opportunities and the wider student-to-student interaction they promote provide an enhanced student experience to a wide range of students.

Coventry delivers its Global Passport Programme to all of its students at TAR UC, to enhance the employability and overall personal development of students. The programme embeds the Coventry experience into all Coventry students at TAR UC, and students rate it highly. However, greater engagement of Coventry with potential and current students at TAR UC in a number of areas would improve the student experience, both in terms of how it communicates with them and how it effectively listens to their voice.

Introduction

1   Coventry University (Coventry) describes its strategic approach to academic partnerships in its Corporate Plan and its Education Strategy. It aims to be recognised nationally and internationally by its students and strategic partners for the quality and diversity of its international education experience, student mobility opportunities and its

international research collaborations. In order to achieve this, it plans to increasingly deliver its programmes overseas through strategic relationships with high quality partners.

2   Coventry partners with over 70 academic institutions worldwide, through which it pursues joint research and teaching programmes, student and staff mobility, collaborative degrees and progression pathway programmes. This includes three partnerships in Malaysia, offering a range of franchised and validated programmes.

3   Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) in Malaysia satisfies Coventry's aims to deliver its programmes overseas through strategic relationships with high quality partners. There are synergies between the two institutions at subject level, as well as strategic level. From a TAR UC perspective, the relationship develops graduates with global competencies, something that they aspire their graduates to have developed.

4   The partnership between Coventry and TAR UC has been in place since 2014, with TAR UC now offering a range of validated bachelor's and master's degrees in Accounting, Business, Management, English and Media Production. The programmes offered at TAR UC leading to Coventry awards are:

- BA (Hons) Accounting
- BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance
- BA (Hons) Business Administration
- BA (Hons) Business and Human Resource Management
- BA (Hons) Business and Marketing
- BA (Hons) English
- BSc (Hons) Finance
- BA (Hons) Financial Economics
- BA (Hons) International Business
- BA (Hons) International Business Management
- BA (Hons) International Economics and Trade
- BA (Hons) Media Production
- MSc Investment Management.

5   The learning outcomes for these Coventry awards are mapped to the equivalent TAR UC programmes, with different award titles. In almost all cases, students who achieve one award will also achieve the other, but on occasions TAR UC may not make an award due to failure of, for instance, a Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU) module, the general studies subjects required by the Ministry of Education.

6   Coventry defines these programmes as validation arrangements, as they are programmes developed, delivered and assessed by TAR UC in accordance with its own academic regulations and quality assurance processes, with Coventry judging them to be of an appropriate and comparable standard and quality to contribute or lead to a Coventry award.

7   However, TAR UC considers them to be dual award arrangements as students who successfully complete the programme are awarded two degrees, one from TAR UC and one from Coventry. Coventry argues that this is a terminological difference, and that a dual award would mean something different at Coventry whereas in Malaysia the model is referred to as dual award. Their definition of these programmes as validation arrangements accurately describes the process, but Coventry admits there could be some potential for uncertainty regarding their certificates and/or transcripts which do not acknowledge the existence of the TAR UC award (see paragraph 42).

8   Coventry and TAR UC plan to strengthen the partnership through an expansion in the range of disciplines offered in the near future, and at the same time develop research collaborations between the two institutions.

Developing, agreeing and managing arrangements for setting up and operating the link

9   Coventry's Collaborative Provision Development Committee (CPDC) advises the University on matters relating to collaborative development and recruitment, with a focus on strategy, development priorities, reviewing the business case for new proposals and the review of existing activities. CPDC considers all proposals for new collaborative partnerships, with the University's Group Registrar and Chief Governance Officer also approving in principle any new partnership from a strategic perspective. This allows it to then approve partnerships through an Institutional Approval event. Following an Institutional Approval visit to TAR UC in January 2014, the partnership was approved by Coventry's Quality in Learning and Teaching Committee.

10   CPDC also has a role in initial proposals for new collaborative programmes, and on an ongoing basis in the review of partnerships and maintenance of links with partners. At an operational level, Faculty Collaborative Provision Committees monitor the delivery of collaborative programmes across partnerships, with the Academic Partnership Unit (APU) supporting and managing the delivery of Coventry awards in partnerships.

11   Coventry have primarily adopted TAR UC's own policies and strategies, as set out in their Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) documents. These documents are produced by TAR UC for each programme to inform the Malaysian accreditation process. COPPA documents are supplemented by Coventry's own regulations for the delivery of their awards at TAR UC, which ensures that all regulations and policies meet both UK and Malaysian expectations. The Academic Regulations for Coventry awards at TAR UC are adapted from those that apply to programmes delivered at Coventry, with programme-specific variances outlined in the programme specification and student handbook.

12   Both Coventry and TAR UC retain the responsibility for their respective awards and each institution applies their own academic regulations and calculation profile to calculate the degree awards. All TAR UC awards are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), and TAR UC also notifies MQA of the Coventry awards mapped to their degrees.

13   There are effective communications at all levels of the partnership, from senior management down. A senior partnership manager provides an oversight function across all dimensions of the partnership, and Coventry's APU supports and manages the delivery of Coventry University awards in collaborations across the world, and is in regular contact with colleagues at TAR UC.

14   Appointed by the relevant faculty for each validated programme or aligned group of programmes, link tutors are the primary means of academic communication between the two institutions, and are in regular contact with programme leaders at TAR UC. They visit three times per year to: discuss and advise on the teaching calendar; discuss recruitment, admissions and induction; undertake staff development; undertake pre and post-moderation activities; attend examination boards; and attend graduation. Some also deliver guest lectures to students and staff, and students appreciate the contact they have with these Coventry staff.

15   Contacts extend to individual staff relationships between the two institutions, increasingly to develop collaborative research opportunities. TAR UC staff also have the opportunity to visit Coventry, for both the annual Coventry International Partner Conference and the annual Learning and Teaching Conference.

16   The partnership has evolved over time, with effective, strong and regular relationships at all levels. This interaction between Coventry and TAR UC adds significant value and strength to the partnership, and is a **positive feature**.

17   The Programme Approval Agreement is the comprehensive legal agreement between the two institutions, with clearly defined clauses regarding the obligations on both partners. It is amended as and when programmes are approved or withdrawn.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

18   There are effective processes in place for programme approval, monitoring and revalidation. Following CPDC consideration of a proposal for a new collaborative programme, approval takes place through the Faculty Collaborative Development Committee (FCPC) for submission to a formal Course Approval and Review Panel (CARP). This approval requires a formally appointed panel visit to the collaborative institution.

19   Coventry offers the same award titles at its home campus and at TAR UC, which requires it to draw an equivalence between the two. Coventry's programmes are therefore closely mapped to the equivalent TAR UC programmes to ensure that the programme learning outcomes are met. The CARP confirms this mapping to justify that the students who study the TAR UC programme have covered the curriculum of the relevant named programme.

20   Coventry monitors the provision at TAR UC through the Collaborative Course Quality Enhancement and Monitoring (CCQEM) process. This is a data-driven process, in which TAR UC-generated programme statistics are considered alongside external examiners' reports for each programme or aligned group of programmes. TAR UC, working with the relevant link tutor, is required to submit a CCQEM to Coventry each year for consideration and approval by FCPC. The report is also at departmental level at TAR UC, and both institutions are involved in the implementation of the resultant action plan. Any changes to the curriculum that result from the TAR UC annual monitoring process is communicated to Coventry, which undertakes a mapping exercise to ensure consistency with its programme learning outcomes.

21   Coventry undertakes periodic review of its collaborative provision on a six-year cycle, again through a formal CARP undertaken at the collaborative partner. It most recently undertook a periodic review of identified programmes at TAR UC in January 2019, where it commended TAR UC on its Student Support Services in counselling but placed a condition of approval on the need for updating and publication of student handbooks, programme specifications and programme regulations.

22   Coventry undertook an interim review of the partnership in October 2015, one year after it first entered into an academic partnership arrangement with TAR UC. This is common practice for Coventry in the follow-up to the approval of a new partnership, and is a 'light touch' process to provide Coventry with a health check on the collaboration and to ensure that both it and the collaborative organisation are working well together. The review team considered Coventry's interim review process to be a **positive feature** of its approach to

new partnerships, giving it an early indication of the effectiveness of new partnerships and how the delivery of its programmes are being managed.

Assessment

23   There are currently effective processes in place for maintaining academic standards through assessment. Coventry have adopted TAR UC's own policies and strategies for assessment, as set out in their Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) documents. Coventry's own assessment regulations for its awards at TAR UC simply refer to the relevant COPPA document. Assessment processes and strategies are also supplied in the programme specifications and the student handbooks.

24   The Collaborative Framework Document describes arrangements for assessment and examination boards. All assessments are set and marked by TAR UC staff, but with significant overview from the link tutor and other staff at Coventry. The link tutor and the TAR UC programme leader have a key role to play in ensuring that assessments are pre-moderated by appropriate subject specialists from Coventry and that samples of marked student work are post-moderated by the link tutor and external examiner.

25   Students are clear about what is expected of them in relation to assessment and how to achieve certain grades, and receive both collective and individual feedback that is useful and timely.

26   External examiners are appointed to both Coventry and TAR UC programmes. The Collaborative Framework Document explains that it is TAR UC's responsibility to appoint external examiners rather than Coventry, following approval from both TAR UC and the Coventry Group Registrar and Chief Governance Officer. However, the review team was told that TAR UC and Coventry appoint external examiners separately and that they operate independently of each other, with only Coventry's external examiners attending subject-level assessment boards. The University's regulations for the delivery of Coventry awards at TAR UC concur with this approach. Coventry may wish to consider this conflicting advice in its own documentation, to clarify arrangements for the appointment of external examiners.

27   Coventry and TAR UC jointly operate Subject Assessment Boards (SABs) to ratify marks for all modules, followed by separate Programme Assessment Boards (PABs) operated by each institution to determine progression and awards for individual students. SABs are chaired by a senior member of TAR UC and are attended by the link tutor and the Coventry external examiner. In addition, Coventry contributes significantly to SABs through their prior involvement in pre and post-moderation processes. PABs take place in Coventry several weeks later, chaired by a member of Coventry staff and also attended by the Coventry external examiner. TAR UC staff do not attend PABs.

28   External examiners produce both an annual report and post moderation reports after each assessment board they attend. Annual reports are provided to TAR UC programme leaders via the Coventry portal, for inclusion in the annual monitoring (CCQEM) process. Coventry responds to all external examiners' reports.

Quality of learning opportunities

29   Arrangements for student admissions are articulated in the Coventry Collaborative Framework Document and COPPA document, with further information and criteria contained in the relevant approval and review documents and related programme specifications. TAR UC is responsible for recruiting students in the first instance, with students opting to study the dual award being referred to Coventry for registration. Coventry therefore has a minor

role to play in recruitment, with acceptance onto the Coventry programme being automatic if students are accepted onto the TAR UC award. Students indicated that they would have liked to have received more information on Coventry and its programme prior to enrolment.

30   The policy and procedures for induction and student support including roles and responsibilities of TAR UC are outlined in the relevant approval and review documentation, with processes further elaborated upon in the Collaborative Framework Document and COPPA document. Coventry link tutors visit TAR UC to provide additional support during induction, and also provide input into teaching and staff development. Students were positive about their induction experience provided by TAR UC, describing it as comprehensive and accurate. In particular, meeting the link tutor, the opportunity to meet exchange students from Coventry and the students' fair were highlighted. The review team considers the wider student to student interaction through exchange opportunities in both directions to be a **positive feature** of the partnership.

31   TAR UC provides all ongoing support to students on Coventry's programmes. Students stated that programme lecturers are accessible and have allocated hours for meeting with students. Students are also offered career guidance and are complimentary of the student counselling services available.

32   TAR UC gathers student feedback through questionnaires, student representatives and student/staff meetings which are often attended by the Coventry link tutor. It was emphasised that students also have the opportunity to approach lecturers directly with any module-related concerns. The outcomes of these processes feed into the annual monitoring process.

33   Students are provided with the opportunity to complete both confidential programme and lecturer evaluations. Student representatives are openly selected but are provided with limited training to undertake the role. They attend regular staff-student meetings, both at programme level and at institutional level via the TAR UC Student Representative Council where there is some facility to feed issues to Coventry. However, in general, students considered their ability to directly feedback any concerns to Coventry to be limited.

34   The TAR UC campus includes a Learning Resources Centre, teaching rooms, social areas, counselling centre, careers centre, student support and administrative areas and offices, all of which have been judged by Coventry to be appropriate for the programmes on offer. Students are also able to access Coventry's e-learning resources, for which they are required to register for a Coventry computing account using their student identity number. Students were not all aware that they had access to these resources, and others who did expressed difficulties in accessing them. However, those who had managed to register and access Coventry's e-learning resources were complimentary.

35   TAR UC is responsible for the appointment and development of all teaching staff, with approval of their CVs by the relevant Coventry Faculty Collaborative Provision Committee to enable them to teach on Coventry's programmes. Any changes in staffing and their duties are recorded as part of the annual quality monitoring process.

36   Coventry's link tutors and TAR UC's programme leaders work together to identify and agree the nature and extent of staff development and support required on an ongoing basis. Typically, link tutors provide staff development during their visits. A shared portal between Coventry and TAR UC provides common documentation for TAR UC staff to gain a shared understanding of learning and teaching methods in the UK. Staff development is also provided during regular visits of TAR UC staff to the UK.

37   The processes for student appeals and complaints are detailed in the TAR UC COPPA documents and Coventry's own academic regulations for TAR UC programmes, and explained to students in their handbook. All complaints, appeals and disciplinary proceedings are managed under TAR UC's policies and procedures. However, once these internal processes have been exhausted, students are able to refer their appeal or complaint to the Group Registrar and Chief Governance Officer at Coventry, and ultimately to the UK Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). There have been no appeals or complaints from students at TAR UC to Coventry or to OIA, and none to TAR UC in the past 2 years. However, students indicated that a charge is imposed for appealing a grade, which discourages them from doing so. They were also unaware of whether they could refer their appeal to Coventry for consideration. This, along with several other examples referred to in this report (see paragraphs 29, 33 and 34), leads the review team to **recommend** that Coventry reviews its engagement strategy with its potential and current students at TAR UC, to ensure that it is communicating in a timely and useful manner.

38   Students at TAR UC have the option to study a semester of their award in Coventry. A significant number of students - around 15-20% - have taken up this option in recent years (83 in the previous year); and those who have are very positive about their experience in the UK. In particular, students appreciated the different teaching styles that allowed a better understanding of the subject. TAR UC students who have studied in the UK have also been shown to have performed as well as, if not better than, students based at Coventry. Coventry-based students also have the opportunity to study at TAR UC for a short period, which TAR UC-based students appreciated as it gave them a greater sense of belonging to the global Coventry University. The review team considered the study abroad opportunities and the wider student to student interaction through exchange opportunities in both directions to be a **positive feature** of the partnership.

39   In addition to their degree studies, Coventry has delivered the Global Passport Programme to all of its students at TAR UC since 2016. Consisting of competency modules and various online activities, the programme is designed to enhance the employability and overall personal development of students. From November 2019 the programme will take the form of a compulsory module within all Coventry programmes, rebranded as Global Leadership Skills, in order to strengthen the Coventry experience for those students who do not get the opportunity to study in Coventry for a Semester. Students were positive about the programme, and appreciated the opportunity to engage with Coventry staff. The review team considered the Global Passport Programme to be a **positive feature**, in that it embeds the Coventry experience into all Coventry students at TAR UC.

Information on higher education provision

40   The Programme Approval Agreement outlines arrangements for the approval of information that TAR UC publishes to prospective students and to current students. All marketing literature used by TAR UC must conform to the requirements laid out in this legal agreement, with all literature bearing Coventry's name and logo being sent to the Academic Partnership Unit for the approval of the Marketing and External Affairs Group Department prior to publication. Similarly, any relevant Coventry publications require the preapproval of TAR UC.

41   Students are provided with an informative Degree Award Handbook containing information on Coventry's input into the dual award arrangement, including access to Coventry's learning resources, study abroad opportunities, assessment and award arrangements, graduation arrangements and methods of appeal or complaint to Coventry. Students also receive a TAR UC Faculty Student Handbook, with a range of more detailed guidance related to their TAR UC award. Students find both handbooks useful and accurate.

However, both student handbooks are silent on the external examining system, despite a recommendation during the 2015 interim review of the partnership for student handbooks to 'cite the name, home institution and programmes of external examiners and details of how students will be able to access the reports'. Although the TAR UC academic regulations refer to the existence of external examiners, there is no facility for students to be able to access or request access to external examiners' reports. Students confirmed this to be the case, and were mostly unaware of the external examining system in place. This, along with other examples referred to in this report, leads the review team to **recommend** that Coventry reviews its engagement strategy with its potential and current students at TAR UC, to ensure that it is communicating in a timely and useful manner.

42 Degree certificates and associated transcripts are issued by Coventry, with the location of study being identified on transcripts. All transcripts are checked by both Coventry and TAR UC for accuracy. Although transcripts identify the location of study, neither certificates nor transcripts identify the fact that two awards are made for the programme of study. Coventry acknowledges that transcripts should be clearer in this respect. The review team **recommends** that Coventry identifies in either its certificates or transcripts that another degree is awarded by TAR UC for the same programme of study, even if on occasions TAR UC may not make an award due to failure of, for instance, a Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU) module.

Conclusion

This is a well-established partnership between Coventry University and Tunku Abdul Rahman University College, offering Coventry University awards in combination with awards from Tunku Abdul Rahman University College. The partnership has evolved over time, with strong relationships at all levels. This interaction between the two institutions and the commitment of both to high quality provision adds significant value and strength to the partnership.

The partnership provides an educational experience that meets UK academic standards and requirements for the student experience. There are effective processes in place for setting and maintaining academic standards, and Tunku Abdul Rahman University College is providing a high-quality experience. However, the review team identified several examples of where it considered that greater engagement of Coventry with potential and current students at TAR UC would improve the student experience, both in terms of how it communicates with them and how it effectively listens to their voice.

The two Universities plan to strengthen the partnership through an expansion in the range of disciplines offered in the near future, and at the same time the development of research collaborations between the two institutions.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- The interaction between Coventry and TAR UC at all levels, which adds significant value and strength to the partnership (paragraph 16).

- The interim review process for new partnerships, giving Coventry an early indication of the effectiveness of new partnerships and how the delivery of its programmes are being managed (paragraph 22).

- The study abroad opportunities and the wider student to student interaction through exchange opportunities in both directions (paragraphs 30, 38).

- the Global Passport Programme, which embeds the Coventry experience into all Coventry students at TAR UC (paragraph 39).

Recommendations

Coventry University is recommended to take the following action:

- Coventry reviews its engagement strategy with its potential and current students at TAR UC, to ensure that it is communicating in a timely and useful manner, and listening to their voice effectively (paragraphs 29, 33, 34, 37, 41).

- Coventry identifies in either its certificates or transcripts that another degree is awarded by TAR UC for same programme of study (paragraph 42).

Coventry University's response to the review report

We would like to thank the QAA review team for their work, the constructive visit and supportive report. The review was especially helpful in providing a detailed external examination of our relationship with TAR UC and assisted us to reflect on our practices and processes.

The University welcomes the recognition of good practice in this collaboration and the positive features identified. The two recommendations reported will be carefully considered and appropriate action taken.