



Review of UK Transnational Education in Malaysia: Liverpool John Moores University and YPC International College

October 2019

Executive summary

Liverpool John Moores University (the University) has been in partnership with YPC International College (YPC) since 2005, offering a suite of franchised or validated accounting, business and computing programmes. YPC 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 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, with a mission to offer affordable educational opportunities to its local community.

The joint University-YPC Academic Oversight Panel provides oversight of the partnership, and strengthens the strategic and operational governance of the partnership. It is an effective tool for maintaining contact between the two institutions, for exchanging information and for action planning.

The University and YPC work together to deliver excellent staff development opportunities to those staff who teach on these programmes. The University provides a range of development opportunities to YPC staff, both online and face-to-face. Link tutors engage with staff when they visit YPC; pre-recorded development activities provide YPC staff with opportunities to access sessions; there is regular attendance of YPC staff at the University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference; and the University has funded curriculum enhancement internships at YPC. An international version of the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education has been delivered to YPC staff in Malaysia, evidence that it invests in developing teaching staff at YPC to improve the quality of student learning opportunities.

The University adopts a risk-based process for the moderation of marked student work, with some YPC programmes being first marked and also moderated by YPC staff and then moderated by University staff, but for others the responsibility for moderation is delegated to YPC staff. There are no set criteria for deciding whether that responsibility resides with the University or whether it is delegated to YPC, and this is an area for improvement to ensure consistent decisions are made across programmes and partnerships.

All examination boards take place at the University, with the external examiner present in Liverpool and YPC staff present online. External examiners are given an opportunity to speak to students online; however, the low take-up of this opportunity and the inability of externals to meet YPC staff and review its learning and teaching environment does provide

a barrier to their ability to comment on the comparability of provision delivered at YPC and the overall experience of their students.

Introduction

1 Liverpool John Moores University's ('the University') Strategic Plan 2017-22 focuses on it becoming a 'pioneering modern civic university, delivering solutions to the challenges of the 21st century', with 'Civic and Global Engagement' being one of its core underpinning principles. Its strategic aspiration for global engagement provides a commitment to being a University with global reach and impact, and to act as a gateway for overseas engagement and investment. In support of this, the University has focused on delivering a range of collaborative partnerships, student and staff mobility opportunities, and incoming short-term study opportunities.

2 The University's international collaborative partnership strategy, which supports the institution's international strategy, focuses on the development of a range of collaborative activities, including articulation/progression pathways, franchising and validation, dual and/or joint awards, flying faculty and doctorates. To facilitate this, an International Relations unit has been set up to support the creation, development and sustainability of high quality international partnerships.

3 At the time of the review, Malaysia was the University's largest Transnational Education (TNE) market, with further growth potential in the view of the University. The University has 19 active programmes being delivered by three Malaysian partners, seven of which are with YPC International College.

4 YPC International College ('YPC'), previously known as Kolej Teknologi YPC-iTWEB, aims to be the champion of affordable education in Malaysia, and a college that serves the need of the community. Its target students are low income groups looking for quality international education, with the University partnership providing them this opportunity at local costs.

5 All of YPC's degree programmes are offered in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University. The partnership between the two institutions is longstanding, having been first established in 2005. The University's portfolio at YPC is focused on accounting, business and computing, with 569 students registered on a range of five bachelor's and two master's programmes, which are either franchised or validated, and in the case of the bachelor's programmes, also allow for articulation to the equivalent programme at the University in the UK. The programmes offered at YPC leading to the University's awards are:

- BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance
- BA (Hons) Business Management
- BSc (Hons) Computer Security
- BSc (Hons) E-Business Technology and Management
- MSc E-Business Technology and Management (Full-Time)
- MSc E-Business Technology and Management (Part-Time)
- BSc (Hons) Multimedia Computing.

6 The University has recently validated three new programmes at YPC, which are awaiting accreditation from MQA. Both institutions intend to develop further provision where there is a clear market and where that provision would benefit local needs.

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

7 The University's Academic Board delegates responsibility for the academic standards and quality of its collaborative provision to its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. In turn, this committee delegates aspects of that responsibility to its Collaborative Provision Panel (CPP). This panel monitors and manages the University's strategies for collaborative development and receives reports on key strategic collaborative initiatives. It also has oversight of the approval and review of collaborative partnerships and programmes.

8 The University's Academic Planning Panel reports to the Education Committee, and considers any proposals for new awards including proposals for collaborative arrangements with both newly approved and existing academic partners.

9 A joint University-YPC Academic Oversight Panel provides oversight of the collaborative partnership and reports to CPP, and was commended in the University's 2016 Higher Education Review as a mechanism for strengthening the strategic and operational governance of large partnerships. It meets three times per year, one of those at YPC, includes membership from both institutions with responsibilities including the oversight of programme monitoring activity and programme level data and the consideration of partnership enhancement opportunities. The Academic Oversight Panel is an effective tool for maintaining contact between the two institutions, for exchanging information and for action planning, and is a **positive feature**.

10 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, the Collaborative Provision Panel and all Academic Oversight Committees are chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), which ensures continuity at all levels.

11 The business case for all prospective international partnerships are initially developed by International Relations, endorsed by Faculty and then approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement) on behalf of the University's executive leadership team. International Relations then undertake the necessary due diligence documentation (in consultation with the Faculty and Professional Services), focusing on legal, reputational, financial and academic due diligence. University-level approval of a collaborative partnership is then confirmed by the chair of the Collaborative Provision Panel.

12 There is effective engagement between the two institutions at all levels, from the Senior Management Team downwards. For partners such as YPC, where the Academic Oversight Panel is in place, an institutional link is appointed to help the mitigation of risk and to steer enhancement of the partnership arrangement at an institutional level. The institutional link is a senior academic member of the University appointed on the basis of their academic and partnership experience, and is a member of the Academic Oversight Panel for the partnership.

13 The Academic Partnerships Operational Guidance describes arrangements for management and review of partnerships, and arrangements for setting up legal agreements.

14 YPC programme leaders and University link tutors are appointed on a programme-by-programme basis. They support the maintenance of quality and standards at the partnership, and act as the key point of contact. Link tutors are the key University contacts with YPC at programme-level, communicating with the YPC programme leader and other YPC staff to help ensure that students have an equivalent experience to those at the University. They also bring information back to the University, to assure it that the quality

of the student experience at YPC is being managed appropriately. Link tutors are perceived as being very useful by YPC, contributing effectively to the engagement between the two institutions. They typically visit YPC twice per year, with the first visit being in induction week and the second coinciding with a Board of Studies meeting. Students confirmed that the link tutor is available to be contacted on any matters, but that their problems are usually solved locally and they have not felt the need to refer to the University so far. Recognising their key role, the University provides training for all new link tutors, and ongoing briefings to all.

15 In addition to any updates provided by the institutional link and link tutors during visits, YPC is provided with regular updates on a range of matters, including changes to the University's regulations. Annual sessions are provided to all collaborative partners, either at the University or online, with additional recorded partnership forum sessions meeting other training needs.

16 YPC retains responsibility for ensuring that all programmes are accredited for delivery by the MQA, and for the delivery of the additional Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU) modules, the general studies subjects required by the Ministry of Education. As such, these modules sit outside the degree classification requirements for the University award.

17 Partnership termination arrangements require the development of a closure plan. YPC agreements clearly identify the commitments of both the University and YPC upon termination of the arrangement. The University's Student Protection Plan would be triggered if a course were discontinued for any reason, and identifies measures that will be put in place if this happens.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

18 The key mechanisms used by the University to assure the academic standards and quality of its programmes are programme validation, periodic programme review, external examining, continuous monitoring and enhancement, and Boards of Examiners. All of these processes are effective, and are described in the University's Framework for Quality and Standards.

19 Programme approval requires the initial approval of financial arrangements and the approval of a Collaborative Programme Proposal pro forma by the Faculty and then the University's Academic Planning Panel. This initiates the programme development process leading to programme validation. In advance of the validation event, a planning meeting and a pre-validation event take place to ensure that key development stages and deadlines are agreed, and that the evidence provided to the validation panel is complete, accurate, and is consistent with University regulations and policies.

20 Programme documents are prepared for each programme delivered at YPC as part of the validation process and programme review process, setting out detailed roles and responsibilities relating to delivery of the programme(s). They consist of the Programme Specification, an evaluation of the previous programme to inform programme redevelopment, details of the validated programme including responsibilities for aspects of programme delivery and management, and validation approval documentation. Where a franchised programme is amended at the University, then programme documents for the equivalent programme at YPC would also need changing. These documents are very detailed and thorough, and although they are only used for the purpose of programme validation and periodic review, they are considered to be a useful ongoing reference point.

21 Student engagement is required both during programme development and at the validation event itself. The validation culminates in a panel event at the partner. The maximum period of approval provided is varied on a risk basis, with a new programme at an established partner such as YPC receiving the maximum period of approval of five years. The outcomes are monitored by both the University's Collaborative Provision Panel and the Validation and Review Oversight Panel.

22 External examiners are appointed on the same basis as those responsible for University-based provision. The University asks its external examiners to comment on the comparability of the provision delivered at the partner with cognate internal programmes delivered at the University, and so they are appointed to examine both the University-delivered programme and the equivalent YPC-delivered programme to ensure this parity. Their reports are considered by Faculty-level Quality Committees in parallel to the programme monitoring process, and responses are made by the Director of School, programme leader at YPC and the relevant link tutor.

23 The annual monitoring process previously undertaken on University programmes delivered at YPC are thorough and evaluative. Since 2018-19, the University has monitored its programmes by continuous monitoring and enhancement rather than annual monitoring reports. This is a real-time monitoring process, focused on enhancement, which facilitates consideration of key data in a timely manner, and enables issues to be addressed as soon as they are identified. This move was driven by a desire to have a more timely reflection of practice and course performance, to inform prompt and relevant enhancement planning. A Collaborative Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement area is available on the University's intranet to allow YPC to engage with this process, and it is supported by the University to engage. Programme leaders at YPC carry out the monitoring, in consultation with the relevant link tutor.

24 In parallel with the programme real-time monitoring process, the University's International Relations Directorate works with Finance and Academic Registry to complete an Annual Partnership Audit, which is presented to the last Collaborative Provision Panel of the academic year. It provides the University with data to ensure and enhance the efficient operation of partnership arrangements, including student recruitment, University income, University expenditure, marketing and publicity checks and external influences on the future health of the partnership. It is a general check on the business and financial health of the partnership and its programmes.

25 For established partners such as YPC, programme periodic review takes place on a quinquennial basis, although new programmes at new partners are reviewed on a shorter timescale. The process mirrors the validation process, but with an emphasis on self-evaluation and the identification of programme enhancement opportunities rather than curriculum development.

26 Partnership review takes place in a scheduled academic year, considering a range of partner and programme information, financial due diligence and operational information. A review of YPC International College will take place prior to renewal of the Partnership Agreement in 2020-21.

Assessment

27 There are currently effective processes in place for maintaining academic standards through assessment. The University's programmes delivered at YPC operate in accordance with its Academic Framework Regulations. YPC is required to comply with University expectations for anonymised marking, moderation and assessment feedback. The University adopts a risk-based process for the moderation of marked student work, with some YPC

programmes being first marked by YPC staff and then moderated by University staff, but for others the responsibility for moderation is delegated to YPS staff. Arrangements for moderation are discussed and agreed at programme validation; however, there are no set criteria for deciding whether that responsibility resides with the University or whether it is delegated to YPC. Typically, the decision is based upon the experience of the relevant staff team at YPC, along with the maturity of the partnership and the programme. Where the University moderates, the link tutor plays a key role in facilitating the process. The review team **recommends** that the University formalise the decision-making process behind the delegation of moderation, to ensure consistent decisions are made across programmes and partnerships.

28 The external examiner is involved in both the review of all draft assessments at the beginning of each academic year and the moderation of a sample of 10% of marked student work prior to attendance at the Board of Examiners meeting. All examination boards take place at the University, with the external examiner present in Liverpool and YPC staff present online. The University does not require that its external examiners visit partner locations, but it does give them an opportunity to speak to students online. Nevertheless, the low take-up of this opportunity and the inability of externals to meet YPC staff and review its learning and teaching environment does provide a barrier to their ability to comment on the comparability of provision delivered at YPC and the overall experience of their students (see paragraph 35).

29 Examination boards are chaired and managed by the University. Boards typically take place at the University, with the online attendance of YPC programme leaders. The University's academic regulations state that membership should include 'all leaders of modules which contribute to the programme(s) which are to be considered at the Board', but for YPC examination boards, programme leaders are considered to meet this membership requirement rather than module leaders. Examination boards are specific to YPC-delivered modules and programmes only, and do not consider any other University programmes, and this focus on YPC allows for clearer discussions on any issues with members.

Quality of learning opportunities

30 Decisions on the admission of students is delegated to YPC, in accordance with the University's own Code of Practice for Admissions. YPC receives a copy of LJMU Admissions Policy and Code of Practice, along with annual training from the University's Head of Admissions. The University retrospectively processes admissions information about each student in preparation for enrolment, and the YPC programme leader reports on the admissions process in the programme monitoring process.

31 YPC also undertakes student induction, supplemented by visits from the University's link tutor to give an overview of the programme from the University's perspective and often to give a guest lecture. On registration, all YPC students are provided with a University student card and student portal log-in details, which enables them to access University e-mail, library and other resources. YPC students value their access to the University's library resources.

32 YPC offers academic support to its students, through module staff, as well as a range of study and pastoral support, with all students having a personal tutor to refer to, in addition to counselling services. Careers support is wide-ranging, including alumni visiting the College, employment skills sessions and advice on employment opportunities and further studies, including master's-level studies at the University. The link tutor is the primary source of academic support from the University, although students identified the University's student portal as also being a valuable source of guidance. Although YPC's library has sufficient key textbooks, students find the University's online library particularly useful.

33 YPC students are provided with opportunities for representation and feedback on the quality of their learning experience through involvement in validation and periodic review processes, module and programme surveys and Boards of Study. Student representatives are appointed during induction, and are provided with training from their programme leader. Module evaluation surveys are undertaken each Semester by YPC, in accordance with processes described in the programme documentation, with the University reviewing the outcomes of surveys through the annual monitoring process.

34 Boards of study operate in line with University guidance, and have student membership as well as, wherever possible, link tutor attendance. These two meetings per year are the University's favoured process for the student voice to be heard.

35 Students who met the review team were aware of the external examining system. However, none of them had the opportunity to meet an external examiner. Only a small proportion of the University's external examiners had met students through online media, despite some external examiners requesting a meeting. The review team **recommends** that the University put in place mechanisms to ensure that all external examiners take up their opportunities to speak to students at YPC, to enable them to comment on the overall experience of students at YPC compared with that of students based at the University.

36 YPC takes responsibility for the employment of appropriate staff, with the University approving those staff to teach on University programmes at validation or subsequently through the Faculty-level Quality Committees. The University expects all teaching staff to be qualified to the level that they are teaching.

37 The University provides a range of development opportunities to YPC staff, both online and face-to-face. Link tutors engage with staff when they visit YPC, providing support and development as required. The distribution of pre-recorded development activities, such as the University's 2018 Partnership Forum, provides YPC staff with the opportunity to access sessions that would otherwise be inaccessible. There is regular attendance of YPC staff at the University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference in Liverpool, where they have also presented. The University has also funded a curriculum enhancement internship at YPC for a project that addresses an aspect of curriculum-related enhancement.

38 In 2015, the University delivered its Postgraduate Certificate Learning and Teaching (PGCert) in Malaysia for YPC staff. Provision of this programme has led to identified enhancements in the practice of YPC staff. For example, a peer observation scheme has been strengthened using experience from the programme enabling staff to identify their strengths and areas for development. The University is willing to deliver the PGCert in Malaysia again, when the need arises. However, both the University and YPC are considering how to implement a more sustainable development structure to enable them to support YPC staff to enhance their practice. The University's investment in developing teaching staff at YPC to improve the quality of student learning opportunities is a **positive feature**.

39 Information about appeals and complaints are included within the programme guides. Academic appeals are made in line with the University's Academic Framework, and complaints follow the YPC International College policy in the first instance. Students are also aware of informal means to appeal or complain, through anonymous feedback mechanisms or their programme leader, and know that they can make a formal appeal or complaint to the University via their programme leader.

40 For franchised programmes, students can apply to transfer to the equivalent programme delivered at the University, and a small number take up this opportunity. Applications are considered by Faculty admissions teams. Interested students are provided

with an opportunity to meet with the University's link tutor and are provided with support from its Malaysian Office for practical arrangements such as visas and accommodation.

Information on higher education provision

41 All programme marketing and publicity materials are prepared by YPC. The monitoring of YPC's public information and website is undertaken by the University's Link Tutors and through the Annual Partnership Audit, overseen by the Collaborative Provision Panel. The University's Academic Partnerships Operational Guidance guides all partners on their marketing and publicity materials, along with the responsibilities of International Relations and Link Tutors in monitoring materials. International relations formally approves all marketing materials used by YPC to promote programmes. Students confirmed that the information they received at their recruitment stage was accurate.

42 Detailed programme guides are prepared by YPC for their students based on a generic template for all University collaborative programmes. They are prepared by YPC programmes leaders, in association with the link tutor, and approved by the relevant University department. Students value them, and stated that they are accurate.

43 The University issues student certificates and transcripts based on its own student records. Its policy for Certificates and Transcripts for Students on Collaborative Courses states that information relating to the name and location of the partner organisation is not normally stated on the Certificate (unless by prior agreement). The associated transcript for YPC graduates identifies that the programme of studies was offered in association with YPC.

Conclusion

There is a long-standing partnership between Liverpool John Moores University and YPC International College offering franchised and validated accounting, business and computing programmes. This mature 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 YPC are providing a high quality experience. The partnership has evolved over time, with strong relationships at all levels.

The joint University-YPC Academic Oversight Panel strengthens the strategic and operational governance of the partnership, and is an effective tool for maintaining contact between the two institutions, for exchanging information and for action planning. The University and YPC also work together to deliver excellent staff development opportunities to those staff who teach on these programmes, to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. However, the University needs to formalise the decision-making process behind the delegation of moderation, to ensure consistent decisions are made across programmes and partnerships, and it should enable more external examiners to speak to students at YPC, to enable them to comment on the overall experience of students at YPC, compared with that of students based at the University.

The University and YPC plan to develop further provision where there is a clear market and where that provision would benefit local needs.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- The Academic Oversight Panel, an effective tool for maintaining contact between the two institutions, for exchanging information and for action planning (paragraph 9).
- The University's investment in developing teaching staff at YPC to improve the quality of student learning opportunities (paragraph 38).

Recommendations

The Liverpool John Moores University is recommended to take the following action:

- To formalise the decision-making process behind the delegation of moderation, to ensure consistent decisions are made across programmes and partnerships (paragraph 27).
- The University put in place mechanisms to ensure that all external examiners take up their opportunities to speak to students at YPC, to enable them to comment on the overall experience of students at YPC compared with that of students based at the University (paragraphs 28 and 35).

Liverpool John Moores University's response to the review report

Liverpool John Moores University thanks the QAA review team for the positive report, following their thorough and robust evaluation of our partnership with YPC International College. The University is pleased that the report recognises the strength and maturity of the partnership, as well as the rigour of our approaches to maintaining and enhancing academic standards and the student experience. We are particularly pleased that the review team recognised the effectiveness of our Academic Oversight Panel, and welcome their acknowledgement of our provision of development opportunities for colleagues at YPC.

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