



Review of UK Transnational Education in Malaysia: University of Lincoln and KDU Penang University College Malaysia

October 2019

Executive summary

The collaboration between the University of Lincoln and KDU Penang University College (KDU) began in 2016 driven by both partners having a focus on internationalisation, in particular in increasing student and staff mobility, in internationalising the curriculum and in developing and enhancing their global brand and reputation.

The major area of partnership activity is the provision of a suite of dual awards with over 500 registered students. Some of these students are able to undertake a period of study in the UK and a number of Lincoln UK students have travelled to Malaysia to undertake a period of student exchange.

Each dual award is established and maintained through a robust process of mapping learning outcomes between programmes. This mapping is actively maintained and students are aware of the mapped learning outcomes through handbook information and individual assessment cover sheets. Appropriate quality assurance processes ensure the quality and standards, alongside visits by Lincoln staff to Malaysia and a strong working relationship between the partners.

Students are adequately supported in their studies but would benefit from a stronger representation system and enhancements to the personal tutoring system. Other resources such as staffing, facilities and support mechanisms are adequate and appropriate.

The Universities have clearly worked hard to develop a strong partnership, including developing funds for reinvestment and project funding, that has included the development of a Lincoln Lounge in KDU Penang to cement the Lincoln identity within the partner organisation.

Introduction

1 University of Lincoln (Lincoln) can trace its history to 1861, gaining university status in 1992 and eventually being known as the University of Lincoln since 2001. Lincoln has over 17,000 registered students in 2018-19.

2 KDU Penang University College (KDU) is a private provider of Higher Education in Malaysia, offering a range of subjects. It is owned by the Paramount Education group (Paramount Corporation Bhd) and started as KDU College Penang in 1991, upgrading to University College status in 2015. Paramount entered into a strategic partnership with an Australian public university, University of Wollongong in 2018. KDU Penang University College will extend from Penang Island to include a new purpose-built campus at Utropolis Batu Kawan on the Penang mainland in September 2019. KDU is currently rated as a 6 Star college (the highest possible) within the Malaysian MyQuest college evaluation system.

3 The University of Lincoln previously operated a franchise partnership with KDU from 1998-2004. The partnership at that time operated across three campuses in Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Sibu (Sarawak). During that time some 4,000-5,000 students graduated with a University of Lincoln award in the subjects of Business, Computing and Engineering at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

4 The collaboration between Lincoln and KDU Penang University College (KDU) in its current form began in 2016 driven by both partners recognising the potential for mutual and complementary advantages, each having a focus on internationalisation, in particular in increasing student and staff mobility, in internationalising the curriculum and in developing and enhancing their global brand and reputation.

5 The major area of partnership activity is the provision of a suite of dual awards. KDU students enrol on a local degree programme that has been accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Optionally these students can also enrol onto the Lincoln dual award programme, successful students are then eligible for an award of the University of Lincoln.

6 Currently more than 400 students are registered on Lincoln/KDU dual degree programmes. The review team considered the following Lincoln/KDU programmes during its visit:

- BA (Hons) Business and Management/Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Business Management
- BSc (Hons) Computer Science/Bachelor of Computer Science (Hons)
- BA (Hons) Accountancy and Finance/Bachelor of Accountancy (Hons)
- BA (Hons) Communications and Public Relations/Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Communication and Public Relations
- BSc (Hons) Computer Science (Information Systems)/Bachelor of Information Systems (Hons) or Bachelor of Computer Science (Hons)
- BSc (Hons) Computer Science (Network Technology)/Bachelor of Computer Science (Hons) in Computer and Network Technology
- BA (Hons) Media Production/Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Media Production
- BEng (Hons) Automation Engineering/BSc (Hons) Mechatronics Engineering.

7 Lincoln's Strategic Plan 2016-21 states 'We will look to develop our international partnerships to develop our reputation, provide new research and teaching opportunities'. Lincoln's Internationalisation Strategy 2018 further develops this ambition stating that 'the

University will adopt a phased approach, developing a small number of high-quality, sustainable TNE partnerships in strategic markets'.

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

8 Lincoln's Quality Assurance Manual has a section on Academic Partnerships which summarises the University's processes for partnership approval, monitoring and review.

9 The University's Academic Affairs Committee holds the central role of approving new partnerships and agreeing and approving formal Partnership Agreements.

10 In the case of the partnership between Lincoln and KDU, the formal partnership was preceded with an initial proposal that was approved by the University's Senior Management Team and followed by a due diligence exercise. This due diligence alongside a further proposal was considered by Lincoln's Portfolio and Partnerships Oversight Group (now split between two groups, the International and Partnerships Group (IPG) and the Portfolio Oversight Group). A new partnership proposal form provides adequate coverage of risk assessment within the pro forma.

11 The dual award is achieved through a detailed mapping of learning outcomes, ensuring that in completing the local degree students will have also demonstrated competence and been assessed in the learning outcomes of the equivalent programme of the University of Lincoln. The first dual award students between Lincoln and KDU commenced their programmes in September 2016 and the first graduation of these students will occur towards the end of 2019. The partnership was developed and approved in a relatively short space of time, recognised by the partners as representing a depth of understanding between them.

12 The initial partnership approved required a 3-yearly review to be undertaken to monitor the partnership, this being carried out within the same timeframe as this QAA TNE review (mid-late 2019). While the partnership review outcomes are yet to be finalised, the senior team indicated that outcomes would likely centre on enhancing the Lincoln experience, improving opportunities for students and staff interactions and exploring further staff/student mobility initiatives.

13 Operational details for the management of the partnership are provided in Lincoln's annually-updated 'KDU Penang University College Off-Campus Academic Handbook 2018/19' which provides extensive operational procedures for the management of the programme.

14 An Operations Management Group meets at least once per semester and is chaired by the Dean for Global Engagement, comprising the academic link tutors and professional support staff including representation from Finance, Student Administration and the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships at Lincoln. This group considers potential new initiatives (for example, internships), academic and resourcing issues, receives and discusses the annual monitoring and external examiners' reports as well as following up on outstanding actions. It reports to the International Partnerships Group and hence ultimately reports to senior management.

15 Lincoln has established a mechanism, through its Operations Management Group, to consider new initiatives and the provision of dedicated budgets to support these and the relationship in general. Initiatives have included the development of funding to promote student mobility (recognised as being of assistance by students) and a specific re-

investment fund that has included developing a Lincoln Lounge, a University of Lincoln-branded study and meeting venue at KDU (identified as a positive method of promoting a 'Lincoln identity' by students at KDU).

Quality assurance

Academic standards

16 Lincoln recognises that the dual award approach introduces challenges to both partners but concludes that it provides benefits to both institutions and students enrolled on the programmes that contextualise those challenges. Lincoln's Academic Partnerships Policy specifies the definition and requirements of dual award degrees.

17 The dual award is achieved through a detailed mapping of learning outcomes, ensuring that in completing the local degree, students will have also demonstrated competence and been assessed in the learning outcomes of the equivalent programme of the University of Lincoln. The transcript of results will make clear how the award has been achieved.

18 Quality Assurance processes and structures for Lincoln's partnership with KDU are identical to those operated for other partners and on campus, that is, subject-level committees, academic College committees and ultimately Academic Affairs Committee at institutional level.

19 Institutional visits to Malaysia, including a Lincoln presence twice a year for exam boards, provides opportunities for joint management meetings to discuss the partnership at departmental and senior management levels. Professional services staff (for example, Registry) at Lincoln are in regular contact with KDU counterparts and also visit KDU in Malaysia periodically.

20 Lincoln's Quality Assurance Manual summarises the University's processes for programme design, validation and revalidation. Initial strategic support for new programmes with collaborative provision is approved through the IPG leading to Academic Affairs Committee approving academic aspects of the programme through an Approval to Deliver event. All structures lead to reporting through to the Senior Leadership Team on new programme approvals with partnerships.

21 As part of the dual award degree approval process, an extensive curriculum mapping exercise is undertaken where module learning outcomes of each programme are compared across the two institutions, ensuring that coverage of each Lincoln module learning outcome could be identified with one or more equivalent KDU module level learning outcomes. This deep and detailed mapping of learning outcomes at module level is undertaken across the University with support from the QA office at Lincoln and ensures that students meet Lincoln's requirements. Once the curriculum mappings have been established, the programmes are put through the University's established quality assurance validation and approval procedures.

22 This mapping exercise is used to inform a range of teaching and learning activities. For example, each assignment specifies which learning outcomes it addresses for each partner degree and this is indicated clearly on an assessment cover sheet for the students. Students expressed how this provided them with clarity, and staff spoke of external examiners also having clarity around which learning outcomes were being assessed for each piece of assessed work.

23 Programme revalidation involves remapping to take account of additional or modified learning outcomes. Changes to modules are re-mapped before being put into place and Lincoln ensures that any required changes do not disrupt the mapping. Any changes in learning outcomes have to be communicated and remapped, initially passing through a KDU academic programme committee (to which Lincoln staff are invited) with changes approved by Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate.

24 The detailed mapping of learning outcomes at the initial dual award approval stage and ongoing mapping as the programme develops was considered to be a **positive feature** of the provision. That this mapping is actively maintained and that students are aware of the learning outcomes of each degree of the dual award, this being detailed on each assessment cover sheet, is a factor of special note.

25 An annual programme monitoring report must be completed for all programmes delivered by partners during the previous academic year. Partner annual programme monitoring reports will be approved alongside annual link tutor reports at College Academic Affairs Committee. Partner annual programme monitoring reports must also be forwarded to Heads of School to incorporate into the School overview report.

26 The collaborative partner annual programme monitoring reports and action plans for KDU indicate appropriate consideration of multiple sources, including external examiner feedback in annual programme monitoring. Evidence was also provided that both partner annual programme monitoring reports and link tutor reports are considered at an appropriate level within the institution, specifically College Academic Affairs Committee and Operations Management Group.

27 These reports are also shared with staff at KDU, with the annual monitoring and link tutor reports passing through the KDU academic governance structures. One common report format is used for all programmes. The link tutor annual report, alongside the broader link tutor engagement in quality assurance, is an effective way of ensuring quality.

28 In addition to the annual monitoring process outlined above, all provision of the University is reviewed on a periodic basis. Periodic Academic Review (PAR) is carried out over a five or six-year cycle, and covers all of the provision offered by an academic School or cognate subject area. All partnership provision associated with an academic School will be reviewed alongside the rest of the provision. No PAR exercise had yet been completed for dual degree activity in relation to Lincoln's partnership with KDU due to the timings of the exercises; the Business and Management PAR are likely to be the first to be published during 2019-20.

29 Student representation for academic matters at KDU is variable without a formal system in place. Class representatives are selected by academic staff rather than elected by the student body and operate mostly as assistants to the lecturers (passing on messages and so on). A KDU Student Representative Council (SRC) operates mostly as a student association with a social/activities focus, although it was understood that an SRC representative sat on KDU's Senate. Communication from student reps to the SRC is informal alongside a tendency for students to approach academic staff directly to resolve problems rather than going through the student reps and KDU SRC.

30 Students complete surveys at the end of modules/semesters. It was reported that any issues identified from survey forms would be discussed between KDU lecturers and the student representatives.

31 Students were aware that they could raise complaints at KDU but were not aware of any opportunity to complain directly to Lincoln, although this is specified in the KDU Penang University College Off-Campus Academic Handbook 2018-19. It is intended that complaints are dealt with by KDU in the first instance with only more serious or unresolved issues to be referred to Lincoln. While Lincoln staff stated that link tutors could flag up issues raised by students, the students met by the review team indicated that they had never met a Lincoln link tutor.

32 The team **recommends** that Lincoln works to ensure that students are assured that Lincoln hears and responds to their voice, for example through ensuring that appropriate representative structures exist and that the students are assured that their feedback to the link tutor via the KDU staff is observed in full.

Assessment

33 As far as possible, regulations for students studying at KDU have been brought in line with those of Lincoln such that dual award degrees are subject to the University's Undergraduate Regulations.

34 Students indicated that marking rubrics are usually provided at KDU and are useful and clear about what is expected of them in relation to assessment and how to achieve certain grades. However, the review team heard that some Lincoln-moderated assessments did not have full marking rubrics available to KDU students and the KDU staff could not assist. It is therefore **recommended** that Lincoln ensures that students have access to all marking rubrics that assess against the learning outcomes.

35 Students indicated that there was variability in relation to assessment feedback timing and quality. The KDU Penang University College Off-Campus Academic Handbook 2018-19 indicates an expectation of three weeks (15 working days) turnaround time for assessment feedback which students suggested was not always met along with variation in quality of feedback. This was particularly highlighted by students who had been on the Summer School exchange to Lincoln and had observed the Lincoln 'norm' of feedback. Lincoln is **recommended** to ensure that feedback on performance and assessments provided to students is appropriate from KDU staff.

36 Level 1 and Level 2 exams and coursework are set at KDU and moderated by Lincoln at all levels of study. All assessments are developed at KDU with approval from Lincoln. Engagement through link tutors ensures that local teaching at all levels matches with the assessment.

37 The external examiner is appointed in three contexts: to examine the local KDU degree; to examine the Lincoln component of the dual award; and to be part of the team examining the Lincoln on-campus programme. Their report informs the collaborative partner annual programme monitoring report. The review team was impressed to hear of having the same external examiner at all sites within the dual award, that is at both partners, and commend it as a **positive feature** towards providing a robust QA environment.

38 At the end of each semester a two-tier set of Boards of Examiners meets to consider firstly the performance in modules of study and secondly the progression and awards made for each student. These Boards are always held at KDU. For continuity, the Boards in KDU are always attended in person by a senior member of Lincoln's Global Opportunities office. In each academic year the link tutor for a subject and their external examiner attend one Board in person in KDU and the other by electronic communication from Lincoln. The external examiner is encouraged to carry out the UK Board by attending the University and meeting staff and students there. The external examiners, with their dual

appointment role, are full members of the Board. Lincoln attendees are designated as observers to the KDU boards. Following the completion of these KDU Boards, a University Progression and Award Board is held at Lincoln. This Board considers the marks achieved by, and decisions made on, students. Link tutors also undertake a moderation exercise within this process.

39 The external examiner report on the quality and standards of the programme includes elements specifically to address comparability of standards between the partner institutions and the effectiveness of the mapping process to ensure it has been correctly applied in assessing students. The use of the same external examiner permits comparability of outcomes and standards. Students were aware of the external examiner system but suggested that there was no mechanism for them to receive feedback from the external examiners (for example, access to reports).

40 Due to operating in different jurisdictions, Lincoln and KDU faced an issue with regard to marking scales and classifications. A pass mark at KDU is 50% while in Lincoln it is 40%. Hence, a marking scale algorithm is used to translate KDU marks into Lincoln marks in order to facilitate marking and moderation of submitted work. This conversion algorithm has been devised to assist students, tutors and external examiners to understand the marks achieved under each scheme. The algorithm is now not only included in the external examiners guide but is also emailed out in advance of each end-of-semester moderation activity. The students receive a transcript from each institution with the different marks ascribed.

41 KDU staff indicated that they had learned a lot from Lincoln as they moved to University College status and, in particular, they felt that they had developed in their knowledge and understanding of assessment techniques and processes.

Quality of learning opportunities

42 Applicants apply directly to KDU in the first instance and selection takes place in Malaysia according to agreed criteria. All applications are required to be approved by Lincoln before offers for the dual award degrees are made. Academic entry requirements are agreed prior to the start of the academic year.

43 Upon registration, students undergo an induction and obtain a student handbook.

44 A personal tutoring system is provided for students at KDU. On enrolment, each student is assigned an Academic Adviser who is available throughout the duration of the student's programme to provide help and support. Although stated policy is that there should be designated meeting times between students and their Academic Advisers, the KDU students suggested that this did not happen and that while there was no timetabled access, the support was available when needed. Additional student support functions are provided by KDU, including counselling and careers support. Students reported these facilities to be adequate.

45 Lincoln has a role to play in staff recruitment for KDU staff who will teach on the programme, with KDU staff CVs being approved by Lincoln, but do not have a say in who teaches which specific component of individual programmes. The overall teaching plan is prepared one month before the teaching starts where the link tutor will look to provide feedback and it will eventually also be seen by external examiners.

46 KDU staff indicated that they had sufficient academic autonomy and were able to modify content so long as it does not modify learning outcomes or diverge too far from the indicative content. Lincoln suggests that the dual award approach is one which provides a

significant level of academic autonomy to the partner institution, providing room for discussion and for the partner to develop their own curriculum and assessment, guided by Lincoln.

47 Staff development for KDU staff is provided by visiting Lincoln staff, for example, link tutors. Examples of training provided has included postgraduate supervisor training, framing assessments, and marking strategies, usually with a view to enhancement rather than fixing problems. The original partnership approval noted that the provision of staff development would be important, especially in the area of sharing of pedagogic practice, and has clearly put in place activities to meet this need. Further development feedback is provided to KDU staff from the external examiners around assessments and marking. A recent initiative was a joint academic conference between KDU and Lincoln with six or seven Lincoln staff attending.

48 For academics at KDU, the Lincoln link tutor is the key contact. There is interaction between lecturers on an informal needs basis. Formal contact primarily occurs at the link tutor level. A staff exchange scheme has been established for individual staff to spend a short time at the partner institution. This facilitates travel in both directions and is set up exclusively to provide development opportunities for the teaching staff. In addition, key administrative staff have travelled to the partner to better understand the functioning of that institution. KDU staff have visited Lincoln for training, meetings and class observations, but the majority of the staff mobility flow is from Lincoln to KDU to deliver workshops and presentations, among other activities.

49 There is no timetabled delivery by Lincoln lecturers to KDU students. However, there is some interaction during staff visits to KDU or during the summer programme (for those students able to travel to Lincoln). Students reported that KDU staff are responsive, but that they cannot contact the Lincoln staff. Students met by the review team commented that they had not seen any guest lecturers from Lincoln and had not met any of the link tutors but expressed the view that they would appreciate the opportunity to have access to Lincoln personnel. They would also potentially benefit from interaction with the link tutors during their visits to KDU.

50 Students reported that access to resources was sufficient and appropriate. Students access KDU's virtual learning environment to access learning materials and, as well as having access to their own local library, they can also access Lincoln's e-library to access electronic resources. Students were satisfied with the IT facilities provided along with other resources. Lincoln ensures regular monitoring of resources and no issues of concern were reported.

51 Lincoln and KDU reported that they had started to explore joint student projects and that this was something that Lincoln was now looking at exploring with other partners too.

52 KDU students can study at the University in several ways as outlined in a Study Abroad Agreement between the two institutions. Students can attend at Lincoln for a short semester (seven weeks), a full semester, or for a full year. Study abroad is dependent on the link tutors reaching agreement about the appropriateness of the proposed programme of study. There have been two cohorts of University of Lincoln UK students who have undertaken summer programmes in Penang and two cohorts of KDU students who spent a summer in Lincoln taking credit-bearing modules.

53 The summer school activity was perceived as very helpful for students who took up the opportunity and it is a **positive feature** of the partnership that such opportunities have been created for student mobility and working across boundaries and that these opportunities have been developed and resourced by the University.

Information on higher education provision

54 The student handbook for students on the dual award programmes is created from the Lincoln academic handbook and hence Lincoln assures itself of the validity of the information provided to students based at KDU. Information provided to students is developed together with staff from Lincoln.

55 Marketing material used by KDU to promote the dual award has elements of Lincoln oversight and approval.

56 While the first degree ceremony for the dual award degree programmes will take place in late 2019, it is anticipated that the degree certificate will be the same as the Lincoln certificate and the academic transcript will specify where the degree was studied.

Conclusion

The partnership between Lincoln and KDU is characterised by a deep engagement between the partners and a robust quality assurance framework. The learning outcomes mapping at the heart of the dual award remains organic and is maintained. This ensures the quality assurance of the programmes on offer as well as providing clarity to students and assessors through the detailed presentation of learning outcomes for each assessment undertaken.

Students are clear on reasons for choosing the programme, highlighting the potential for wider employment opportunities because of having been assessed by Lincoln standards and the opportunities for international mobility provided by a UK degree. The presence of the Lincoln Lounge in KDU Penang cements the image of the partnership and promotes the University identity physically within Malaysia. However, Lincoln could easily develop this further through greater interaction between Lincoln staff and KDU students and assuring themselves and the students that their feedback is heard and acted upon by Lincoln and KDU.

Structures for the governance and management of the partnership are deemed to be appropriate as are staffing and other resources. First steps at staff development have been effective, with potential to develop this activity further, including enhancing feedback on assessments provided by KDU staff.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- The detailed mapping of learning outcomes at the programme approval stage and ongoing mapping as the programme develops, and that this mapping is actively maintained and students are aware of the learning outcomes of each degree of the dual award, this being detailed on each assessment cover sheet (paragraph 24).
- Having the same external examiner at all sites within the dual award, that is at both partners, providing a robust QA environment (paragraph 37).
- The opportunities for student mobility and working across boundaries and the opportunities developed and resourced by the University (paragraph 53).

Recommendations

The University of Lincoln is recommended to take the following action:

- Work towards ensuring that students are assured that Lincoln hears and responds to their voice, for example, through ensuring that appropriate representative structures exist in KDU and that students are assured that their feedback to the link tutor via the KDU staff is observed in full (paragraph 32).
- Ensure that students have access to all marking rubrics (KDU and Lincoln) that assess against the learning outcomes (paragraph 34).
- Ensure that feedback on performance and assessments provided to students is appropriate from KDU staff (paragraph 35).

University of Lincoln's response to the review report

The report provides important external verification of the progress of this relatively new partnership. The process of preparing for the review, and then engaging with the review team itself has proved extremely useful and valuable for the entire team. It has provided an opportunity for an institutional evaluation of the partnership as well as individual reflections on roles and activities. The report provides an illuminating evaluation of the current status of the partnership and also offers useful guidance in taking it forwards in the future.

The QAA review took place just after the University's own routine three-yearly review of provision. It was therefore reassuring to see a high degree of commonality in the outcomes of the two processes. The University is pleased to see the positive features that have been identified, particularly the mapping process which is novel in many aspects of its construction and application. The very favourable external evaluation of this is most encouraging. Given the University of Lincoln's strong and clear focus on quality enhancement the recommendations will be followed through to ensure that the student experience provided is the best possible.

The University would like to thank the review team for the very engaged and constructive way in which the process was carried out.

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