Review of UK Transnational Education in Malaysia: University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Malvern International College

October 2019

Executive summary

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) has a partner in Malaysia - Malvern International College (MIA) - which it took over from the University of Wales (UW) as a result of the ongoing integration between the two Welsh institutions.

For business reasons UWTSD decided not to continue the partnership and is therefore in teach-out. However, it allowed the partner to recruit two further cohorts while it sought a new academic partner. To protect the students, UWTSD adopted the University of Wales (UW) regulations for the two remaining cohorts on these programmes to ensure that students were not disadvantaged by any regulatory changes. Students noted that they had not been affected by the changes taking place in the University.

The oversight of the partnership has necessarily gone on alongside the wider governance issues of the integration and has ensured that the partnership has been overseen at a senior level despite the modest number of students (now 26) and the time limited nature of the arrangement.

MIA offers programmes of study that lead to a UWTSD award. In accordance with UW regulations, a moderator is appointed to oversee the quality of the student experience and to ensure that there are adequate resources available. The moderator also has a key role in assuring academic standards and submits reports to the University following each visit. Together UWTSD and MIA have continued to provide support for students and to maintain the quality assurance processes, including staff visits, as the various cohorts have finished their studies and hence as student numbers have declined. Inevitably with small numbers, the student support has become more informal and personal but students were satisfied with their support.

Introduction

1   Malvern International Academy (MIA) is a private institution in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and was founded in 1988 as part of a larger group of institutions based across Malaysia, Singapore, and the UK. MIA was approved as a collaborative centre of the University of Wales (UW) in 2006 for the delivery of validated programmes leading to the awards of a Foundation Certificate in Business Administration; BA (Hons) in Business Administration (with pathways); and an MBA (with pathways).

2   In October 2011, the governing bodies of the University of Wales, Swansea Metropolitan University and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David made a commitment to irrevocable constitutional integration. In August 2017, the University of Wales entered into a Deed with University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) which formalised the governance and administrative arrangements between both institutions. The Deed stipulated that UW would not matriculate or register any new students to any of its programmes of study and, from 1 January 2018, placed into abeyance its powers to award taught and research degrees for any candidate not already registered on a UW programme.

3   As part of the integration a small number of UW validated programmes, including those of MIA, are now linked to UWTSD awards for an interim period.

4   In preparation for the transfer of MIA, UWTSD undertook an academic and financial due diligence process followed by a partnership approval event. This due diligence and academic review recommended the partnership be continued. However, UWTSD did not approve a long-term partnership owing to its existing commitments in Malaysia.

5   Although it was agreed that MIA would not become a long-term partner of UWTSD, the University recognised the business risk to MIA of immediately terminating the partnership and so entered into an agreement to allow MIA to recruit two further cohorts of students. It further adopted the UW set of regulations as a subset of the UWTSD regulations for these programmes to facilitate the transfer so that the same regulations would apply to all MIA students.

6   There are currently 26 students registered on the hybrid model programmes, 16 at undergraduate level and 10 postgraduates. All students are part-time. Students are expected to complete their studies in 2024.

7   UWTSD have gone to great lengths to support partners with business continuity and to ensure that no student has been disadvantaged despite the changes in the UK. This is a **positive feature**.

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

8   The Deed between UW and UWTSD established a protocol for key senior officers of UW and UWTSD to work on behalf of both institutions. Since the establishment of the protocol, the UWTSD Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Corporate and Quality) have carried out formal responsibilities in relation to UW and now chair the key UW committees that oversee quality and standards, facilitating an enhanced focus on quality management. These arrangements have also provided an opportunity for the management of collaborative partnerships of both UW and UWTSD to be consolidated into a single unit, the Collaborative Partnerships Office (CPO), which was established in February 2018 and maintains oversight of both UWTSD and UW provision. In addition to two Heads with responsibilities relating to partnership liaison and operations

respectively, the CPO includes five Academic Officers who work closely with partners in both an administrative and quality assurance capacity.

9   The Memorandum of Agreement between UWTSD and MIA outlines the expectations of UWTSD in terms of the management of awards. A hybrid arrangement has been adopted where UWTSD manages the partnership but programmes follow the standard UW quality assurance procedures set out in the UW Exit Phase Taught Degree Handbook. The handbook includes the UW academic regulations and provides comprehensive information about a range of matters including admissions, amendments to programmes, annual monitoring and review, assessment, external examining, and publicity. Programme specific information is included within the handbooks developed for the UW programme

10   The programmes offered at MIA are awarded by UWTSD. The programmes are not the same as programmes offered at UWTSD (or previously offered elsewhere by UW) and therefore the curriculum and assessment are unique to this programme and partner. Quality assurance and academic standards are not judged against those of UWTSD programmes as would be the case in a franchise programme but instead are assured through oversight by a moderator to ensure university processes are followed and an external examiner who assesses academic standards against UK norms.

11   As part of maintaining oversight of validated provision, the UW Academic Board appointed a moderator who maintains a key role in assuring the quality of provision within a collaborative centre including the standards of the awards. Moderators are charged with specific oversight of the quality of the students' learning experience; reporting to the UW Academic Board as to whether practices and procedures at the collaborative centre meet the requirements of the University and of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education; and verifying that adequate resources are being maintained and kept up-to-date.

12   The moderator also provides MIA academic staff with some limited training and support. This is largely around understanding university processes rather than attempting to develop a UK teaching style at MIA. UWTSD recognises the weakness of the current system and is in the process of centralising some aspects of partner staff development into the CPO to provide a more consistent approach across partners and greater efficiency through online resources. Further supporting guidance is available through a range of resources provided via the UW website.

13   Throughout this extended period of institutional change, senior staff in UWTSD and MIA have maintained good communications between institutions which allowed difficult issues to be raised and addressed in a collaborative manner. This has helped safeguard the student experience and is a **positive feature**.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

14   UWTSD receives information and feedback on the quality of the education provided and the assurance of standards from a number of sources during this transition phase, including annual monitoring reports from MIA, external examiner reports and moderator reports.

15   Reports arising from quality assurance mechanisms for MIA are first scrutinised in detail by the UW Quality, Audit, and Review Committee (QARC). Summaries of deliberations of QARC are considered by the UW Degrees and Academic Awards Board and subsequently the UW Academic Board. Information relating to all UWTSD and UW

partnerships is received at a Partnership Overview meeting. Notes of the Partnership Overview meetings are submitted to the UWTSD International Affairs and Collaborative Partnerships Committee ensuring that UWTSD academic governance maintains oversight of its responsibilities for the awards delivered through the hybrid model.

16   MIA provides an annual report to UW which provides a review of activities over the previous year and includes curriculum changes, a review of previous actions, and admissions information.

17   External examiners are required to submit a report following each meeting of the examining board and are requested to comment specifically on the comparability of standards of student performance with the standards of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions.

18   Moderators have the following responsibilities with regard to the examination and assessment procedures for a validated scheme of study:

- assisting, as appropriate, with external examiner induction and in the preparation of draft examination papers prior to their transmission for approval by the external examiner(s)
- meeting with students to gain feedback
- chairing examining board meetings
- ensuring University regulations are followed.

19   Moderators are also requested to comment on the standards demonstrated by students. Both the external examiner and moderator have indicated broad contentment with the standards demonstrated by students and the comparability of standards to other UK higher education awards at MIA. Reports from the moderator are comprehensive and cover all aspects of the partnership. The moderator also delivers training during centre visits in order to address key matters raised within external examiner and moderator reports.

20   The reports arising from visits by both the moderator and external examiner express general satisfaction with provision at MIA. Thematic issues over the last two years indicate issues in students' critical engagement within assessment and timely student feedback, as well as minor issues of administrative compliance relating to assessment.

21   The moderator is a key person for overseeing quality and standards. As UW did not employ academic staff, so the moderator was employed by UW on a consultancy basis from the UK higher education sector. As the partnerships become integrated into UWTSD so the moderator is being replaced by a UWTSD member of staff called a partnership team leader (to differentiate the position). This will allow UWTSD to have greater oversight of the partnerships and strengthen the oversight of quality and standards. As MIA is in teach-out it will not have a partnership team leader.

22   The programme being offered by MIA was originally validated by UW. At the time of the merger of the institutions the programme was transferred to UWTSD, drawing upon information from a self-evaluation by MIA, as well as external examiner reports, moderator report, and annual monitoring reports.

23   Entry standards are set by MIA and are the standard requirements of the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia. The moderator decides on cases with unusual qualifications.

Assessment

24   The responsibilities of the UWTSD and MIA in respect of assessment are specified within the Memorandum of Agreement and in further detail in the Taught Degree Handbook. The moderator has a key role in ensuring that MIA complies with the University Academic Regulations, while the external examiner has the primary role in assuring academic standards.

25   Assessments are developed by MIA and follow the Assessment Approval Process specified within the TDH. Following drafting, assessments are submitted to the University (CPO office), which submits the draft assessment to the external examiner for approval.

26   MIA staff mark student work and this is moderated by other MIA staff then reviewed by the moderator and the external examiner prior to the exam board. Exam boards for progression and award are chaired by the moderator, and attended by a CPO Academic Officer and external examiner.

27   When moderators are replaced by partnership team leaders, they will have a role in both setting and moderating assessments and will thus increase the oversight by the University, though this will not apply to MIA.

Quality of learning opportunities

28   Students are part-time and taught on Saturday and Sunday. Academic staff CVs are submitted to the moderator who approves them on behalf of the University. Staff will normally have appropriate academic qualifications as well as teaching experience and industry experience.

29   As a validated programme and as specified in the Memorandum of Agreement, MIA is responsible for the general support of students.

30   At the start of the programme students took part in induction activities and at that time were provided with a student handbook which outlines MIA policies and procedures, alongside a programme handbook which provides detailed information for their validated programme of study. Students also receive a 'welcome' email from UW, which provides them with their student number and information about accessing the UW online library.

31   Students can access MIA facilities such as the library and IT facilities during the week or weekend. As part-time students they have some limited access to careers advice, scholarship support and other student services. MIA does not provide personal tutors but students reported that all MIA staff were approachable and that any concerns or questions would be promptly answered by staff. Students gave examples of issues being addressed promptly and commented on the good relations that they had with staff and on the support they received from them.

32   Each class at MIA appoints a class rep as a point of contact with staff, but class reps are not part of any formal system. Feedback to MIA and UWTSD is provided through module evaluation feedback and through twice-yearly meetings with the moderator and UWTSD staff.

33   Students explained that as part-time students already in full time employment they had little need for the wider range of student services provided to full-time students and were satisfied with the support they received. They particularly noted the good relationships with staff.

Information on higher education provision

34   In accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement, MIA is required to seek University approval of publicity materials relating to the provision. The University also undertakes periodic monitoring of publicity materials used on institutional websites.

35   MIA is responsible for preparing the student handbook which is checked by the CPO office before being circulated to students.

36   The University is responsible for awarding certificates and transcripts. The standard degree certificate is provided and the transcript shows the location of study.

37   Public information is reviewed every six months by the CPO office.

Conclusion

UWTSD is in the process of undertaking a significant change management programme as it has taken over the partnership with MIA as well as a number of other partnerships and programmes that had previously been managed by UW. The teach-out arrangements for MIA have necessarily extended over several years and have been managed at a very senior level in UWTSD.

Throughout this time, UWTSD and MIA have continued to work together both to support the remaining students until their studies are complete and to support business development of MIA. They have also kept in place the quality assurance processes that allow UWSTD to monitor student achievement and success during this period.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- At institution level, the example of MIA shows that UWTSD staff have gone to great lengths to support partners with business continuity and to ensure that no student has been disadvantaged despite the changes in the UK (paragraph 7)

- Staff at UWTSD and MIA commented on the good communications between institutions which allowed issues to be raised and addressed in a collaborative manner (paragraph 13).

University of Wales Trinity Saint David's response to the review report

UWTSD welcomes QAA's report on its partnership with MIA. The review process provided a useful opportunity to reflect on the arrangements for maintaining oversight of collaborative provision, and it is pleasing that the efforts to support partners during the period of integration with UW is recognised as a positive feature.