



Review of UK Transnational Education in Malaysia: University of Nottingham and University of Nottingham Malaysia

October 2019

Executive summary

The University of Nottingham Malaysia (UNM) is a branch campus of the University of Nottingham. It opened in 2000 and has almost 5,000 students and 651 staff. Together with the campus in Ningbo China, the two overseas campuses provide a strong international presence that is well established and mature.

UNM offers a range of programmes from Foundation to PhD level across two faculties – Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Faculty of Science and Engineering. As with other branch campuses, UNM offers the same programmes as the UK campus and has common processes and systems that are used across all campuses.

The scale and maturity of UNM provides a well-developed environment for study with high quality facilities and education. The campus is self-contained and includes teaching and research facilities as well as student accommodation and sport facilities.

There is well developed communication between the campuses allowing all staff to participate in programme development with well-documented delegation of responsibilities.

The University has extensive staff development ranging from induction through formal courses to ongoing monitoring and support. The University also has a well-developed student representation scheme allowing students to participate in areas of development as well as providing feedback on their experience. Together these features help underpin the ethos of teaching in a UK style and providing a UK learning experience for students.

This level of quality and maturity is recognised by the Malaysian Government which has awarded UNM with self-accrediting status and has rated it as 'Excellent' (5 star) on the SETARA (in the mature university category) rating scale used in Malaysia to rate University Colleges and Universities. UNM has also been awarded a MyRA 5-star rating for its research.

Introduction

1 The University of Nottingham (UoN) is a large university with around 34,000 students in the UK with two large international campuses. Some 9,000 of the UK-based students are originally from overseas. The international campus in Malaysia has about 5,000 students and the other in China is slightly larger (with about 8,000 students).

2 The campus in Malaysia has been in operation since 2000 and the one in China since 2005. This scale of operation and age of the campuses means that international business is well established in UoN at a strategic level.

3 The UoN plans to grow student numbers at both international campuses and to increase cooperation between all campuses.

4 While in a TNE partnership areas of concern often centre around how the two institutions work together when both institutions have different strategic objectives and success criteria, with an international campus these issues largely do not arise as the international campus is fully embedded in the operations of the home campus and in some cases will be wholly owned by it.

5 For the UoN, there is one strategic plan for both UoN and UNM, one set of policies (such as the Quality Manual), one set of programme specifications, one way of managing external examiners and so on. Therefore a review of the operations is effectively a review of how well the policies and processes are operating rather than shining light on the differences between two partnering institutions, and making sure that each side has a shared understanding of what is expected.

6 On the other hand, UoN is a public university in the UK and is publicly funded, whereas in Malaysia UNM is a private University competing with other private universities whose objective is often to maximise shareholder value or profit. This difference in environment leads to differences which need to be managed and understood by staff in the UK as they may impact on the student experience.

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

7 As with all private universities in Malaysia, UNM operates as a private company, University of Nottingham in Malaysia (UNiM) Sdn Bhd. The majority shareholder is Boustead Holdings Bhd but the joint venture agreement between the partners gives the University of Nottingham total control of all academic matters. UNiM Sdn Bhd is registered with the Ministry of Education Malaysia as the owner of the University of Nottingham Malaysia, which has full approval to offer degree programmes in Malaysia, and has obtained self-accrediting status.

8 The UNiM Sdn Bhd Board is primarily concerned with ensuring that good corporate governance systems exist within the company. The Board meets three times a year and includes senior staff from UoN (including the Vice Chancellor) as Board members. The Provost and CEO of UNM is responsible for delivering the agreed strategy and for operational matters. The Provost is supported by a senior management team in Malaysia including two Vice-Provosts for Teaching and Learning and for Research and Knowledge Exchange.

9 Academic matters are the responsibility of UoN. The Provost holds the position of Pro-Vice-Chancellor in UoN and is a member of the Executive Board. The UoN Senate

approves programmes for all campuses, monitors academic quality and is responsible for the award of degrees and other qualifications. The Provost, Vice-Provosts, Deans and other additional elected staff members from UNM are full members of the Senate.

10 The University (all campuses) operates as a single academic institution and so the Quality Manual and other University regulations regarding the quality management of learning and teaching apply equally to the University's campuses in the UK and Asia. Across all campuses, primary responsibility for quality assurance and for the implementation of the Quality Manual (including module and programme ownership) rests with the Heads of Schools under the jurisdiction of Senate and its committees. Schools with provision on more than one campus are therefore regarded as multi-campus entities for the purpose of the Quality Manual. Schools with responsibility for provision at the China or Malaysian campuses must demonstrate that they follow policy and procedures laid out in the Quality Manual for provision at the international campuses in the same way as for provision on the UK campus.

11 Over the years, as UNM has matured, different schools and faculties have introduced different approaches to solving specific problems. While all activities viewed meet the minimum requirements of the Quality Manual, the review team saw examples of good practice developed by some schools that could be adopted as standard practice. For example, most departments/schools, but not all, have inter-campus moderation, formal induction for new staff, and collaboration across campuses for programme development. The University is encouraged to review some of the processes to identify this good practice with a view to implementing it across the institution. This would have two benefits. The first is that if there was a single process for some activity then it would be simpler to have effective online processes rather than some of the manual processes noted by staff. The second is that the Quality Manual could then be developed to include good practice as well as minimum expectations. This would help new staff, and staff new to operating across campuses, understand what was expected of them not just as a minimum.

12 The University has instituted a formal system for recording delegated authority to Heads of School in UNM through formal Statements of Responsibility. These are comprehensive documents that include the range of Heads' responsibilities and include not only the responsibility delegated, but also the person or committee that they work with on different issues. Staff in some schools used these as living documents that support school governance and management. The review team regarded these as a **positive feature** permitting the University to formalise activities that in most institutions are more ad hoc and hence open to misunderstanding.

13 Academic staff appointed at UNM undertake induction where they are briefed on the University's policy, benefits, rules and regulations, health and safety aspects, and medical insurance coverage. Academic staff also take part in a component of the PGCHE teaching programme. This is currently half the programme (30 UK credits) and is to increase to the full (60 UK credits) programme in the future. New staff are allocated a 'buddy' to advise on policies and processes and to ensure marking and grading of student work is at the correct standard. New staff are also subjected to peer observation to help develop their teaching skills. Some schools provide additional support including for research and professional development. The level of staff development is a **positive feature** and is central to developing a UK teaching style and a UK style of learning for students.

Quality assurance

14 The Quality Manual sets out the process for approving new programmes irrespective of the campus. Approval includes both academic approval and business approval and includes approval from senior staff at the Malaysian campus.

15 Although programmes in Malaysia have the same title as in the UK, there is flexibility in the structure and module content to meet local requirements. This provides the flexibility for UNM programmes to include the compulsory General Studies subjects required by the Ministry of Education and to meet local professional requirements, such as compulsory internships. In most cases, differences must be agreed by all campuses and are normally minimised to keep the degree content as similar as possible across campuses.

16 Where a campus is proposing to run a programme that already exists on another campus, only the business case needs formal approval. This business case includes fee income and projected recruitment, as well as resources such as staff and specialist teaching space. The programme specification is also reviewed by the Quality and Standards Committee and the relevant campus to ensure that local delivery plans and the overarching programme specification are consistent. With respect to such 'based on' programmes, the new version of the programme will include the same learning outcomes and compulsory modules as the original version. There is also an expectation that the title of the new programme should be the same as the original version.

17 The review team heard of examples of teams of teaching staff working closely together across the three campuses to manage the curriculum, and this is **a positive feature**.

18 Although there are examples of staff working together across campuses, there have been examples, reported through internal reviews, where changes are introduced by UK schools without proper consultation. Senior staff explained that this practice has become less common as staff become familiar with the needs and operations of overseas campuses. Training is being put in place for key committee members to improve the scrutiny of documents and decision-making.

19 UNM is largely autonomous and is responsible for its own admission decisions and has its own policy on fairness that follows the UK.

20 All academic provision is reviewed annually by Schools with programmes being considered in appropriate groupings. Annual monitoring reports in UNM are normally prepared by the Programme Directors and will include information on student progress (including performance data), external examiner reports, course changes and general information. The forms require confirmation that Statements of Responsibility are agreed and operating effectively.

21 These are then combined with similar reports from the other locations and considered at School level before being considered at Faculty level and finally the Quality and Standards Committee. Where generic themes are identified these are passed to the appropriate committee such as the Teaching and Learning Committee.

22 Periodic reviews are called Educational Enhancement and Assurance Review (EEAR) and are carried out on a five-year cycle. Academic staff in Malaysia prepare a report for the UK which is collated with other documents in the UK for scrutiny by the review panel. Review meetings include meetings with staff and students from Malaysia. These reviews are

comprehensive and reflective, with reports being open about issues to be addressed and with clear action plans for addressing them. They include all campuses.

23 In addition to the formal annual and EEAR reviews, the campus in Malaysia undertakes Internal Quality Audits for the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and where appropriate undertakes local reviews of academic activities. Neither of these processes currently feeds into the formal processes from the UK.

24 There is also a process for periodic reviews of entire campuses, which also lies outside the formal system although there is a formal handbook to set out the process. The most recent campus review of UNM was in 2018. The campus review established that all quality assurance processes were being followed and like the periodic review was comprehensive and reflective with clear recommendations.

25 External examiners are appointed in the UK and have responsibility for programmes delivered on all campuses. In their reports they are required to provide comments on each campus. Reports are considered by the Schools and reported through the annual monitoring process and reported to the Quality and Standards Committee. The outcomes of the external examiner reports are shared with students at the Learning Committee Forum.

26 Although UoN and UNM offer the same programmes, exams and other assessment activities are normally different. Examinations and other assessment activities at UNM are set by UNM staff. There is then normally a system of moderation involving exchange of papers between campuses, prior to submission to an external examiner.

27 Examination scripts are marked by UNM staff followed by a system of moderation and verification of marking, normally across campuses. Local examination meetings will consider marks and student extenuating circumstances prior to passing completed marks and scripts to the UK for scrutiny by the external examiner. UNM staff attend the exam boards.

28 External examiners have the opportunity to interview UNM students and are encouraged to make a physical visit to UNM or at least to engage with the campus at some point during their tenure. External examiner reports include comments on the Malaysia and China campuses.

Quality of learning opportunities

29 UNM is a fully serviced campus and offers the full range of academic and non-academic support for students.

30 All new students attend a formal induction programme that has two parts:

- Central Induction includes welcome by the Provost and SA President, introduction to support services by the Director of Student Experience, IT Services, Security, Wellbeing, Health and Safety and Campus services and accommodation.
- School Induction includes the welcome from the Dean and Head of School, introduction to the school administration, processes, handbook and timetabling.

31 The Student Association runs a number of induction activities and there are special activities for international students.

32 UNM has in place a comprehensive system of student representation at course, school and faculty level that provides students with many opportunities to give feedback on academic and other matters. Training is provided to student representatives each year.

33 The campus also provides a number of forums where students can discuss issues with staff and so support the development of the curriculum, academic support and non-academic support. Forums include the student-led Learning Committee Forum, the regular Faculty meetings and the Student Council where the student voice can be heard, and actions discussed and agreed. The students also run the Students Association, which supports numerous clubs for students.

34 The review team considered this depth of representation to be a **positive feature** and is evidence of a learning style that mirrors that in the UK.

35 The University's online virtual learning environment (VLE) is used throughout all campuses in the University. The VLE is the place where lecturers upload learning materials such as lecture slides, handouts, readings, web-links, audio and videos as well as announcements. Students can take part in activities such as forums, submit assignments or collaborate online. The resources and activities available are determined by the lecturers and vary from module to module.

36 Different Schools have different policies regarding learning materials. Some have the same resources for all campuses, some have different resources with students able to access all information sets and some only allow students to see local materials.

37 The VLE also provides online submission, marking and feedback for assessments and guidance on plagiarism avoidance. Submission of assignments is usually through Turnitin (plagiarism-detection software) where a student is able to check work on an ad hoc basis.

38 It is clear from staff and students at UNM that there is considerably more demand for transfer to the UK than is currently permitted (by the UK campus). There is a significant opportunity for the University to enhance the profile of the institution by increasing transfer opportunities. The University is **recommended** to review its transfer practices in order to meet the aspirations of the students.

Information on higher education provision

39 Publicity materials produced at UNM follow brand guidelines provided by the UoN and are submitted to UoN for approval. Students described the handbook as comprehensive and accurate.

40 Degree certificates are the same as UK certificates. The location of study is not recorded on the certificate but the transcript will indicate the administrating campus.

Conclusion

The University of Nottingham Malaysia campus is a large well-established campus with a wide range of education opportunities and student facilities. It provides a vibrant student community with high quality education and extensive support facilities.

The University provides extensive staff development to support teaching in the UK style and has a well-established student representation scheme that allows students to engage in future developments.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- The formal system of documenting delegated authority through Statements of Responsibility provides a robust method for ensuring that everyone understands where decisions are made and for providing intuitional oversight of that delegated authority (paragraph 12).
- The staff development provided to new staff is comprehensive and extensive and is key to delivering educational programmes that are not only to the UK standard but are in the UK style (paragraph 13).
- The collaboration between academic staff across the three campuses for the management, oversight and development of academic programmes (not all programmes do this) (paragraph 17).
- The collection of student feedback and the system of student representation at course, school and Faculty level together with the discussion of student issues at various forums, such as the Learning Committee Forum, provides a robust process for listening to the student voice and for engaging students in their learning (paragraphs 32-34).

Recommendations

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

- To look at opportunities to increase student mobility between campuses to the benefit of the students and the institution (paragraph 38).

University of Nottingham's response to the review report

The University of Nottingham thanks the QAA TNE panel for their review visit and for the professional and positive manner in which the review was conducted. The visit was a valuable opportunity for reflection on practice and the University endorses the review findings.

We are pleased that the panel recognised and highlighted the robust methods used to successfully manage our three campuses, in particular the Statements of Responsibility and our student feedback mechanisms.

With regard to the recommendation in the report, the University will continue to seek ways in which student mobility may be increased.

QAA2510 - Feb 20

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2020
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557 000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk