



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

October 2019

Executive summary

The University of Reading Malaysia (UoRM) is a wholly owned campus of the University of Reading (UK). The campus is located in Johor Baru in Malaysia and is one of a number of universities in Iskandar EduCity. Other UK universities are Newcastle and Southampton.

As a wholly owned campus all academic matters such as programme content, academic standards, quality assurance processes and the general culture and values are the same in Malaysia as in the UK. There are contextual differences and these are necessary for the effective education of students. This contextualisation is encouraged by the Ministry of Education.

Students at the University of Reading Malaysia are students of the University and enjoy the same academic benefits as UK students although actual facilities will be different.

The University has in place extensive staff development including formal courses, staff support and peer observation all of which are supported by UK staff. This supports the delivery of high-quality teaching in the UK style and in turn student learning in the UK style. The university has in place processes for engaging with students and these support the development of a UK culture and values. However, many staff and students rely on informal processes which reduces the impact of the formal systems.

Academic staff involved in teaching have good relationships with UK colleagues and participate in programme development. However, quality assurance processes are led from the UK and UoRM staff have a less active role in those processes leading to a more limited understanding and ownership of some key processes.

Introduction

1 The University of Reading (UoR) is a UK university with a total student population of over 21,000 students that sees itself as a global university competing in the international education market. The main campus is in Reading (almost 18,000 students) but in addition it has a significant international footprint with the campus in Malaysia (the object of this review) together with several single programme partnerships such as the Henley Business School campus in South Africa (over 1,000 students) and partnerships with the Beijing Institute of Technology (almost 600 students) and Nanyang University of Information Science and

Technology (almost 300 students) in China. The University has over 30 partnerships across the world ranging from progression partners to teaching partners.

2 Following extensive discussions with various authorities in Malaysia, the University of Reading was invited to establish a branch campus in Iskandar EduCity in late 2011. The formal registration process was completed in 2013. The first students were admitted in 2013, with teaching in a temporary campus, before moving to the custom-designed and built campus in 2015. The first graduates were awarded degrees in 2017.

3 As a branch campus, UoRM has adopted the same programmes, policies and quality assurance processes. Therefore, unlike partnerships between different organisations, there are few issues around cultural alignment, institutional values and contradictory processes which can lead to inconsistent information and a poor student experience. On the other hand, there is a risk that when the campus is small and the locally appointed staff are inexperienced in the UoRM processes, that issues can be overlooked due to management overload. The University therefore seconded experienced staff from the UK to Malaysia to support the launch of the campus and to help train local staff. They also put in place academic training for staff and encouraged exchange visits between the UK and Malaysia. As the scale of the operation has grown so the number of seconded staff has reduced.

4 The campus offers a number of degree programmes in Business (business management, accounting and finance, real estate), in Psychology and in Quantity Surveying. Law was introduced in September 2019. There are Foundation programmes to take students from the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) local school qualification to A Level standard necessary for degree entry. The campus also offered an MPharm in Pharmacy on a 2+2 basis (two years in Malaysia and two years in the UK).

5 Since the launch in 2013, the growth in student numbers has not been as large as anticipated and, shortly before this review, the University announced that the MPharm programme was being closed and students transferred to the UK. The programmes in Building Surveying and Construction Management have also closed and recruitment has stopped for the Foundation in Science programme, the MSc programmes (several of which are approved but have not recruited any students) and doctoral programmes. The MBA programme is being taught out.

6 The original business plan anticipated some 2,000 students at this stage of development. However, for a number of reasons there are currently 740 students (2018-19). Therefore, the business plan has been reviewed and a number of actions are in place to streamline the portfolio, clarify the business objectives and reduce costs to ensure that there is a sustainable business. UoRM has also given up the lease on part of the campus.

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

7 Branch campuses are large scale and risky investments and this is reflected in the process that was followed prior to setting up the campus.

8 The proposal to establish a branch campus was taken by the University Council (the governing body) on the recommendation of a report by the Strategy and Finance Committee. This committee considered the detailed business case prepared by university management, legal and commercial arrangements and the establishment and operation of Rupal - the special purpose company established to comply with Malaysian law.

9 The University sought professional legal advice to ensure that the investment met the legal requirements of Malaysia (and the UK) and involved other professionals with specialist knowledge.

10 The business case identified a number of risks and set out the actions to mitigate these risks. The risks ranged from academic risks, that can be controlled by the University, to political risks that cannot. The overall proposal and the management of these risks is owned by the University at the highest level.

11 The Malaysian company, Rumal, has a Board of Directors comprising: the Head of School for the School of the Built Environment (pending the appointment of a new Pro Vice-Chancellor International); Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning; a Malaysian Director; and Company Secretary. This Board oversees the UoRM Executive Board who support the Provost and CEO. There is therefore clear visibility of the operation of the campus at the highest level.

12 All teaching and learning activities at UoRM follow the policies and processes of UoR. There is a Quality Assurance Manual for UoRM which sets out roles and responsibilities of individuals, committees and boards and identifies the relevant documentation for each activity. This ensures that there is consistency between campuses and allows Malaysian staff to quickly find the relevant information.

13 Following approval by the University and the formal invitation by the Ministry of Higher Education, each individual programme was approved for delivery in Malaysia by school and university-level committees. As is required in Malaysia, programmes were also accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and consequently approved by the Ministry of Higher Education. Malaysian authorities also approve and regularly monitor individual teachers, teaching spaces, lab equipment, and general resources. This level of scrutiny ensures that all operations at UoRM are fully documented and subject to inspection by Malaysian Authorities and provides detailed local oversight in addition to the UoR processes.

14 Operationally, programmes are delivered by joint teams of staff from the UK and Malaysia. Malaysian staff are members of, for example, school committees, programme boards and exam boards. Although the Programme Directors are currently all based in the UK, there are Module Convenors based in Malaysia.

15 Academic staff at UoRM are enrolled on the same staff development module as new UK staff as part of their probationary period, and are supported by the Academic Development and Enhancement (ADE) team in the UK, who travel to Malaysia to deliver the Academic Practice Programme. Peer observation provides ongoing monitoring and feedback. This staff development leads to formal recognition by the UK Higher Education Academy and is a **positive feature**.

16 When the campus in Malaysia first opened, UK school-based staff had the opportunity to be seconded to the Malaysia campus to help set up the programmes and to support local staff in delivering 'the Reading way' and ensure staff were aware of UoR policies and processes. There now remains only a small handful of UK staff in a few sections and local staff lead the programmes and delivery with due attention to the Reading ethos and principles, underpinned by local knowledge and context. Most Section Leads have had the opportunity to spend some time at UoR UK to build relations with school staff, discuss programmes face-to-face and to experience the Reading campus and teaching environment.

17 Schools and sections recognise the value of effective working relationships and good communications in ensuring students have a comparable teaching and learning experience, and building a teaching community for staff across the two campuses.

18 Malaysian staff are members of university-wide committees such as the University Board for Teaching and Learning and Student Experience, the University's Programme Board and the Subcommittee for the Development and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, as well as school-level committees. The effectiveness of these formal structures is enhanced by informal links between individuals, staff visits and regular communications through Skype.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

19 The general principle adopted by UoR (in common with other branch campuses) is that the Malaysia Campus will follow the UK campus practice as far as possible and in particular:

- UoRM will use the same programme curriculum, structure and learning outcomes as at UoR UK, with local context
- UoRM will use the same assessment practices (for example, assessment setting, marking scheme and assessment criteria, cross-campus moderation practices, cross-campus external examiners)
- approval of all awards will be through a UoR UK exam board
- UoRM will adopt the same teaching and learning policies and processes as UoR, as far as reasonably practical
- UoR and UoRM will put in place training for teaching staff, including support from the University's ADE team.

20 The programmes delivered at UoRM are mirror programmes of existing programmes at UoR, which have undergone internal and external scrutiny processes in accordance with the University's Programme Lifecycle Policy with local contextualisation of content as appropriate. Contextualisation is encouraged by the Ministry of Education to ensure that the education of Malaysia students is relevant and placed in their context.

21 All programmes are well-established programmes and have been approved through the relevant school and university-level boards (school programme boards, faculty boards and university committees), the original programme design and approval would have had input from external examiners, students and industry representatives where relevant. All programmes have been accredited by the MQA.

22 There is a single programme specification and set of module descriptions for each programme, regardless of delivery location, and the Programme Director and Module Convenors work closely with their counterparts (Programme Leads and Module Leads) to ensure the successful delivery of the programme learning outcomes. At present all Programme Directors are based in the UK and some Module Convenors are based in Malaysia.

23 Students at UoRM use the same learning resources as students in the UK through a shared VLE. UoRM students access a separate copy of the resources to avoid synchronisation issues. Staff at UoRM provide local contextualisation.

24 Programme changes are approved by School and University committees and include consultation across campuses.

25 UoRM have sole responsibility for the management and delivery of the Mata Pelajaran Umum (MPU) courses, the general studies courses which are a requirement of the Malaysian Ministry of Education. However, these are not a requirement for the UoR degree award.

26 The programmes delivered in Malaysia are subject to the same quality assurance processes as programmes in the UK through key processes that are led from the UK. The key processes are

- annual review
- periodic reviews
- external examiner reporting.

27 UoRM also uses the University's systems for student module and programme evaluations. Schools at the UK campus are responsible for the quality and delivery of their programmes at UoRM and they consider operations in Malaysia as part of the normal annual review of all teaching and learning activities. The activities at UoRM get limited consideration among a whole school's portfolio during annual review, but the University considers this to be outweighed by the benefits of considering the UoRM programmes in the wider context of a school's portfolio. Some UoRM staff are involved in these reviews but practice is variable across schools and programmes.

28 The school-level annual reviews inform a wider University Annual Quality Assurance Review, which considers a summary of the school reports alongside external examiner reports, teaching and learning issues, analysis of data on student recruitment, progression and achievement and analysis of student feedback.

29 In addition to these annual review processes, UoRM provision is considered as part of the owning school's portfolio during six-yearly periodic review of taught programmes. As part of this process, the panel hold meetings via Skype with students and staff based in Malaysia. As with annual monitoring this is led from the UK with some engagement with staff at UoRM. The University is **recommended** to review how UoRM staff participate in institutional quality assurance reviews to engender greater ownership by UoRM staff and to adopt the best practice across all schools.

Assessment

30 The regulatory framework for assessments at UoRM is the same as that in the UK and assessment practices follow UoR policies. Each programme's assessment regime mirrors the UK version as far as is reasonably practical and where any assessments vary, this will be agreed between relevant colleagues in both the UK and Malaysia. External examiners are also involved in the moderation of assessment briefs in accordance with the University policies.

31 With the exception of Pharmacy (which had identical exam papers in the UK and Malaysia), students normally receive a variant exam paper, testing the same learning outcomes as the UK exam paper, which will have been written and checked by colleagues in the UK and Malaysia.

32 Marking of assessments is carried out by Malaysian-based staff and moderation of first marks is carried out in the UK. All assessment carried out in Malaysia is overseen by

external examiners of the UK home school and marks are considered alongside those of UK-based students in programme and university-level exam boards. This ensures consistency and comparability across cohorts. The exception to this is the administration of exam boards for the Foundation programme, which takes place in Malaysia, with representation from the UK. This programme still shares the UK-based external examiners, who, regardless of location, are appointed in accordance with University of Reading policies.

33 UoRM has been included in the recent university-wide Electronic Management of Assessment (EMA) Project, to ensure that systems and processes at UoRM continue to align with the UK-campus. Most assessments are now submitted and marked online, allowing staff in Malaysia and the UK to easily access, mark and moderate student work. By ensuring that the Malaysian-based students are included within the UK-based assessment processes and systems the University can have greater confidence in the consistency of results across the two institutions and can quickly raise any concerns.

Quality of learning opportunities

34 The admissions process at UoRM follows the principles of the admission processes for UoR, which seek to ensure there is a 'reliable, fair and inclusive admission system'.

35 Some flexibility exists within the applications process to allow UoRM to consider applicants who apply below the published entry qualifications, also in line with usual practice in the UK. These students are interviewed by a member of academic staff before an offer decision is made. To comply with Malaysian regulations there may be additional MQA programme standards, and as part of the MQA requirements UoRM records below-advertised entry admissions. Entry qualifications for all programmes at UoRM are reviewed at the same time as those for UK-based programmes.

36 Students at UoRM are given an induction and provided with orientation information. Welcome Week activities ensure students receive information about their programme, the University's values, and their responsibilities. There are also social activities designed to introduce them to each other and their Reading University Malaysia Students' Association (RUMSA) executive, and to the local area, and to encourage them to join new societies and clubs. International students receive sessions on cultural aspects of studying in Malaysia, a tour of the local area and amenities, and a trip to a local restaurant. This is comparable to the type of activity carried out in Welcome Week in the UK.

37 Students in Malaysia follow the same learning structure as students in the UK, through lectures, seminars, tutorial and discussion classes and practical lab sessions where appropriate. The Malaysia campus is set up with the resources to support this activity, with fully furnished classrooms with AV capabilities, lab facilities, a library and computer labs.

38 All students in Malaysia are assigned Academic Tutors who can help with both academic and pastoral issues and are normally a first point of contact for any problems. Students also have access to counselling services, with a qualified counsellor. There is a careers facilitator to support student placement opportunities and manage careers events and guidance activities. Events and activities are put in place for students in Malaysia, by the University and by RUMSA, to support personal development and wellbeing.

39 UoRM students use the same virtual learning environment (VLE) as UK students (Blackboard), which is populated with the same learning materials and information. Support and advice for using the VLE is available to all students and staff through online guidance documents and two Technology Enhanced Learning Champions in place at Malaysia.

40 Student representation opportunities mirror those at UoR, as much as is practical. Student Reps are nominated and elected by their peers for each programme. Student Reps participate in programme-level boards and Student-Staff Liaison Committees, which are organised by section. They represent their peers at a programme level, relaying student feedback on the quality of their student experience (what works well, what could be improved and any ideas for change) and reporting any actions taken as a result of this feedback to the student body.

41 In addition, the elected RUMSA Officers (who are part-time) represent the UoRM student community and have membership on the UoRM Academic Board, and may attend other university boards, such as the Committee on Student Experience and Development. Although a formal representation structure is in place, the staff and students tend to use informal processes to address issues and it was clear that many UoRM staff rely on informal processes to obtain feedback. The university is **recommended** to review its processes for listening to the student voice and for ensuring that the formal systems are effective in recording and acting on matters raised by students.

42 The comparability and consistency between the programmes available in Malaysia and the UK, has allowed the University to offer mobility options for students studying the same topics at each campus. Cross campus mobility is available in both directions and students may spend anywhere from three months to one year at the other campus as part of their normal programme of study. Students may also transfer fully from one campus to another subject to specified conditions.

Information on higher education provision

43 UoRM manages and publishes its own marketing materials and webpage following the UoR branding guidelines and the main UoR messaging. Currently the UoRM Provost has responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the information published by UoRM. Prospective students can find information about UoRM on the webpages and through the UoRM prospectus. UoRM is also active on social media sites.

44 Students are provided with a programme handbook covering the duration of their study at UoRM. The handbooks contain information about the student's individual programme and information on student entitlement to academic/personal support and learning resources at Malaysia and in the UK. These handbooks are based on a university-wide template which is adapted to provide the relevant information and context that the Malaysian students will require.

45 Students can find information about the procedures for student discipline, academic appeals and student complaints within their handbooks, on the UoR webpages and from the Student Support Centres. The policies, procedures, reporting and escalation lines are the same in Malaysia as the UK, although responsibility for some activities and investigations is delegated to appropriate members of staff at the Malaysian campus. All final investigations are heard by the relevant UK-based committees.

46 Students have a mirror graduation ceremony and celebration at the Malaysian campus. They receive University of Reading Certificates, produced by the Graduation Office in the UK, and Diploma Supplements, printed at UoRM based on the UK template. The Degree Certificate issued to the Malaysian students is the same as the Certificate issued to UK-based students. The Diploma Supplements clearly indicate the University of Reading Malaysia as the place of study.

Conclusion

Over the past seven years, the Malaysian Campus has not grown as fast as was anticipated and recent reductions in space, staff and the portfolio will require careful management as changes are implemented. However, the University of Reading remains committed to maintaining the current level of academic and non-academic services and to maintaining an education experience that is British both in style and in content.

Positive features

The following positive feature is identified:

- Academic staff development opportunities with formal development programmes, taught by UK staff supported by peer observation (paragraph 15).

Recommendations

The University of Reading and the University of Reading Malaysia are recommended to take the following action:

- Consider strengthening the role of Malaysian staff in formal monitoring and review processes and engender greater ownership of those processes and adopt best practice from across the university (paragraph 29).
- Review its processes for listening to the student voice and for ensuring that the formal systems are effective in recording and acting on matters raised by students (paragraph 41).

University of Reading's response to the review report

The University of Reading is grateful to the QAA TNE panel for offering their perspective on the provision at the University of Reading Malaysia and their helpful comments.

We welcome the panel's positive evaluation of our provision and their recognition of the mutual commitment to, and effectiveness of, academic staff development opportunities.

With regard to the recommendations in the report, we will review how the perspective of UoRM staff and students can feed more formally into the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes. We recognise that both formal and informal processes for feedback and quality enhancement are important, and we will consider, as UoRM grows, the ways in which these complement each other need to evolve.

QAA2514 – Feb 20

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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