



Review of UK transnational education in the Republic of Ireland

Case study: University of East London and Chevron Training and Recruitment Ltd

1 This case study is concerned with the collaborative partnership between the University of East London (the University) and Chevron Training and Recruitment Ltd (Chevron). Through this arrangement, the University is offering an opportunity to students in the Republic of Ireland to study to honour degree level in Early Childhood Studies, building on their related Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) level 6, and in some cases National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 7, qualification. The focus of the case study is on the approach taken, the steps taken to set up the partnership, how oversight is maintained, and the benefits and challenges of the arrangement.

2 The University of East London, formerly East London Polytechnic, became a university in 1992. The University is based around three sites in East London and offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes across seven academic schools. The University recruits mainly locally and its student body includes a large number of students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. As of December 2016, the University had 11,455 students on campus studying through both full and part-time study modes. The University's International Strategy (2013-16) sets out its strategic approach to the recruitment of international students and development of international partnerships. The Strategy was revised in 2015 and the revised approach was implemented in 2016-17. The University currently has around 35 collaborative partnerships, which include local, regional and international partners. There are currently approximately 6,300 students studying on programmes with collaborative partners in both the UK and internationally.

3 Chevron was established in 2005 as a private institution offering nationally accredited training in Ireland. It employs around 25 staff. Chevron began delivering training in childcare and healthcare in 2009, with childcare being its largest provision; courses include QQI level 5 and 6 awards. Chevron specialises in online learning provision and training for mature learners.

4 The collaborative relationship between the University and Chevron commenced in 2016, following an approach to the University by Chevron. Chevron was aware of the University's experience of offering an online programme in this subject area, the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies programme already being available online, delivered through the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). There was also felt to be a strong alignment between the two organisations, particularly in relation to their student populations. The partnership involves a franchise arrangement whereby students progress from a QQI level 6 Early Childhood Care and Education Diploma onto the University's BSc (Hons) Early Childhood Studies programme part way through The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) level 5, and complete 180 credits on the University's award - 60 credits at FHEQ level 5, and 120 credits at FHEQ level 6. Students with a related Republic of Ireland qualification obtained pre-2012 complete two additional modules.

5 Details of the programme are set out in a programme specification made available to students through the programme handbook. A recent articulation agreement has been put in place allowing students who have attained a relevant degree (NFQ level 7 award) from seven named institutions in the Republic of Ireland to complete 120 credits at FHEQ level 6 to attain the University's honours degree. All modules are core and are existing University modules from the School of Education and Communities (the School). The programme is a distance, online learning programme, delivered through Chevron's VLE and supported by Chevron staff. The first cohort of students commenced its study in January 2016. At the time that the case study was written there were 124 students on the programme: 79 full-time first years; four full-time second years; and 41 part-time first years.

6 The University's Quality Manual outlines its quality assurance and enhancement processes, including those specific to collaborative partnerships and its responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and enhancement. The University's approach to quality assurance and enhancement are underpinned by a set of underlying principles. The Academic Board is responsible for academic quality in relation to taught programmes and research; many of the operational aspects are delegated to standing committees of the Academic Board. The University's committee structure is set out in the Quality Manual. The University also has a comprehensive Quality Assurance Handbook for Collaborations, which contains information about the operation of its partnerships.

7 Definitions of the University's collaborative arrangements are set out in its Quality Manual and include franchise, joint, validated, autonomous franchise, distance learning, distributed delivery, double award and articulation arrangements. The University retains ultimate responsibility for the standards and quality of all programmes offered through collaborative arrangements. The language of instruction for programmes offered through the University's partners is normally English although there are some exceptions. Franchise arrangements are typically utilised for international collaborations and operate under the University's Academic Framework, Assessment and Feedback Policy, and Skills Curriculum. Proposals for collaborations undergo initial approval, institutional approval, the drawing up of a memorandum of cooperation and programme approval; the programme approval process involves a planning meeting and a validation event normally involving a site visit.

8 Following approval by the School, initial approval for the partnership with Chevron was granted by the University's Academic Development Committee in June 2015. Institutional approval followed in October 2015. A validation event took place in November 2015 at Chevron's premises, and as required by the University's procedures the panel for which included external members. The report from the validation event was approved through the University's Validation and Review Subcommittee in December 2015. As part of the University's quality assurance and enhancement procedures additional due diligence information was requested from Chevron the following year. The award meets Republic of Ireland requirements for publication on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs list of approved qualifications.

9 The rights and responsibilities of the University and Chevron are clearly set out in the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by the Vice-Chancellor of the University and Managing Director of Chevron in 2016. The Memorandum of Cooperation, while not time-limited, is reviewed on a three-yearly basis to ensure that it is fit for purpose; a separate appendix containing financial and other information is updated annually. As part of the programme approval event, a mapping from the local, Republic of Ireland qualification was considered, and an articulation agreement was signed alongside the standard Memorandum of Cooperation; this ensures that students enter at the appropriate point in the programme and have achieved the learning outcomes from previous levels. As noted above, a further articulation agreement has recently been put into place allowing students who have attained

a relevant degree (NFQ level 7 award) from seven named institutions in the Republic of Ireland to complete 120 credits at FHEQ level 6 to attain the University's honours degree.

10 Regular and open communication between the University and Chevron ensures the effective operation of the partnership. The University's academic Link Tutor, in conjunction with the University's Academic Partnerships Office, is responsible for the academic management of the partnership; a role descriptor for University Link Tutors is set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook for Collaborations. The Link Tutor reports on the arrangement through the School Collaborative Committee. The Link Tutor is supported through the University's workload allocation model. A designated programme leader at Chevron works closely with the University Link Tutor. Administrative support for both staff and students is provided through a Senior Collaborative Officer from the Academic Partnerships Office. Students are referred directly to the appropriate member of University staff if issues arise.

11 The admissions and enrolment processes comply with standard University procedures. Chevron manages the application, admissions and enrolment process, collects fees and manages bursaries. Admissions requirements are set out on Chevron's website and information on the programme is also provided to prospective students by Chevron. Chevron has in place its own admissions policy and, to satisfy the University's requirements in relation to the online programme, has developed an admissions process. Where an applicant does not have English as a first language they are required to complete the IELTS qualification with a grade of six overall (or equivalent) before they can enrol on the programme. Chevron provides the University with a list of all students on the programme, their entry qualifications and where appropriate evidence of their IELTS qualifications within four weeks of the start of a term. The University's Link Tutor reviews a sample of the applications for each intake. As part of the requirements for entry to the programme students are expected to have regular access to appropriate IT facilities, reliable internet access, a reliable and valid email address, an up-to-date internet browser, and if possible access to printing facilities. As part of the admissions process applicants are given free trial access to a sample of online materials to allow them to familiarise themselves with the requirements of studying online. Students may be admitted with prior learning through the University's Accreditation of Experiential Learning or Certificated Learning policies.

12 Following enrolment, students are provided with a comprehensive student handbook that details all academic and administrative protocols associated with the programme and are expected to attend an induction session with the Chevron programme leader, which may take the form of a face-to-face session or webinar. The programme leader also acts as personal tutor for students on the programme and contacts students following enrolment and monitors student engagement with the programme.

13 Learning and teaching approaches within the programme are designed to be as similar as possible to those employed on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree offered at the University. Some adaptations to learning content and assessment have been made to meet the needs of the local environment and the mode of delivery; this contextualisation ensures that teaching, learning and assessment materials are relevant to Republic of Ireland policies and practice. The programme is delivered on Chevron's VLE. Each module has a site on the VLE structured around a sequence of weekly topics. Each topic contains a lecture, typically a series of slides and accompanying audio recording, supported by guidance on key learning outcomes, self-assessment questions, and links to core and additional readings and other resources. Students are provided with guidance on the use of the VLE. Chevron staff can access teaching materials on the University's VLE.

14 Each module is supported by a local tutor, employed by Chevron, who meets the requirements of Chevron's online staffing policy. Chevron provides tutors with a tutor handbook. Local staff CVs are initially provided at programme approval; if any changes are

made to staffing, Chevron inform the University. The staff student ratio is one to 25. Students have access to an online student community and discussion forums to foster communication with other students. In addition, module tutors use this facility to address any common academic issues, and to contact students where necessary. Some students have also set up locally based study support groups. The University provides ongoing staff development and support for Chevron staff associated with the programme. Collaborative partners were recently given the opportunity to meet at the University through a one-day collaborative partners' conference, which was attended by Chevron.

15 Students have access to the University's student portal and e-library as well as local library facilities and specialist materials provided by Chevron. IT support is provided through Chevron, which also offers students access to a discounted printing service. Other student support services, including counselling, disability, financial and employment services, are provided by Chevron.

16 The programme operates under the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy. A mixture of formative and summative assessment is utilised. Assessment largely takes the form of coursework assignments, which are submitted through plagiarism-detection software; students also receive feedback through this software. Assessment tasks are written and marked by Chevron tutors, who sample each other's marking to ensure consistency; all assessment and marking is subject to moderation by the University's Link Tutor, who writes a report on the process. Assessment tasks are sent to the external examiner, who also reviews samples of student work. Students are informed of the University's assessment policies including those relating to academic integrity, referencing and research integrity through the student handbook, and relevant policies and procedures are highlighted to students at induction.

17 External examiners are appointed by the University; external examiners are appointed to modules and will normally cover the module regardless of the location or mode of study. The head of subject area makes a written response to the external examiners reports. The results of assessment from modules taught through Chevron are considered at the University's subject area assessment boards for Early Childhood and Education, which are attended by external examiners.

18 Chevron holds programme committee meetings online; details of programme committees are set out in the student handbook. Student representatives are appointed for the online course and 'attend' the committee, as do University staff, normally through Skype. The representation process is highlighted to students at induction and student representatives are provided with guidance on their role through Chevron. Feedback is sought from students through a variety of other ways, including module evaluations, monitored discussion forums, and feedback through the programme leader and other staff. Students are also provided with the University Link Tutor's contact details. The formal processes for complaints and appeals are set out in the student handbook.

19 The University's processes for monitoring and review are set out in its Quality Manual. Annual monitoring is conducted through the University's Review and Enhancement process, which checks that programmes are achieving their stated aims and that students are attaining the learning outcomes stated in programme specifications. Review and Enhancement reports for collaborative arrangements are compiled by the programme leader at the partner institution, with advice and guidance from the University Link Tutor; the Chevron programme leader compiled the first 2015-16 Review and Enhancement report, which also includes input from the University Link Tutor. An action plan is produced. The School reviews the programme level report and provides feedback to the partner through the Link Tutor prior to the report being reviewed and approved at institutional level through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

20 The University's collaborative review process set out in its Quality Manual involves review of the partnership and associated programmes on a five-year cycle; the relationship with Chevron being too recent to have undergone this process. A meeting to prepare for the process is held one year in advance of the collaborative review taking place. A partner enhancement meeting is also held at the end of the first year of operation of a new partnership, which discusses progress and considers solutions to any issues that have arisen.

21 The process for Chevron to market and promote the University's programme is set out in the Memorandum of Cooperation; the University approves all materials in advance of their publication. The University also provides partners with a helpful set of marketing and publicity guidelines. The University audits the website of its partners after the first year of operation and then on a three-yearly basis; one issue was raised in the audit of Chevron's website in relation to use of the University's logo, which was addressed.

22 The University issues award certificates and records of achievement; the latter notes that the programme is delivered by distance learning, although Chevron is not mentioned by name. Students are invited to the University's graduation ceremony; in the future Chevron will host a graduation ceremony for students graduating from this programme.

23 There are clear benefits for both Chevron and the University resulting from this partnership. The partnership draws on the expertise of both partners in delivering online provision in Early Childhood Studies and extends the University's reach in relation to students studying online in this subject area. While, theoretically, students could study through the University's existing online provision, the programme offered through Chevron is contextualised and hence more relevant in meeting the needs of the local environment. The programme provides students with access to a progression route from QQI level 6 (and in some cases level 7) to a full honours degree and responds to an identified need in the Republic of Ireland to ensure the upskilling of staff working in the pre-School sector, an aim supported by the provision of higher capitation grants for employers/providers of services in this sector employing staff with higher (degree) level qualifications. The delivery model provides students with a flexible model of study, which they can fit around their lives.

24 The model presents some challenges. Initially, the move from a further education programme to higher education provision is a challenge for students. However, the expectations of the programme are clearly set out and reinforced during the application process, and as previously noted students are given a chance to try out the online environment. Students are supported in study skills on an ongoing basis through webinars and other materials. There are also benefits and challenges for students studying at a distance; while there are less distractions from other students they are also more isolated. Students are encouraged to, and some have, set up study groups by region. While distance also presents a challenge to staff, there are no specific time difference constraints; meetings between Chevron and the University are held through Skype, email and telephone, and travel is readily accessible. Communication is strong and effective, and dedicated administrative support contributes to the smooth running of the programme.

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