



Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: University of Bolton and Western International College, Ras Al Khaimah

February 2014

Executive summary

The University of Bolton (the University) established the collaborative partnership in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) in 2008 in association with the infrastructure provider Western International College (the College). The site where the College is located is shared with the American University of RAK. The purpose of this initiative was to provide high-quality UK higher education programmes to the expatriate community working in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The College attracts significant numbers of local students and believes that its strength is best value UK higher education in the UAE, providing a service for RAK-based schools.

The College provides all of the facilities, resources and staffing (approved by the University). The University provides courses, quality assurance processes and academic support. The courses are offered under a franchise relationship between the University and the College. The College offers undergraduate programmes in accountancy, business management, computing, civil engineering and mechanical engineering; and postgraduate programmes in business administration and information technology. There are currently 178 full-time undergraduate students and 40 part-time postgraduates.

The ethos of the College is to produce professional, academically qualified practitioners and the University sees this as contributing to its mission 'to unlock the potential within individuals and organisations through the excellence and responsiveness of our teaching, research and student support'.

The academic and pastoral student support provided to students within the curriculum and through extracurricular activities is identified as a positive feature of the provision. Also of note are the opportunities for students to develop their employability skills within the curriculum and through work-based activities with industry. The partnership with the College has matured and positive actions have been taken by the University to devolve greater responsibility and oversight of the campus to the College, supported through the introduction of annual health checks by the University.

In light of the growing responsibilities devolved to the College, the locus of academic leadership at the campus now needs to be reviewed and attention needs to be directed towards the development of research activity and staff development, with appropriate financial support for implementation. With the development of greater autonomy for the campus, staff at the College would benefit from being more effectively engaged in annual monitoring and programme review and approval. Processes for assessment and feedback

also require strengthening. Student recruitment remains a challenge in some areas, leading to low student cohorts, and this has the potential to impact on the learning experience of students. The IT infrastructure within the College also requires strengthening.

Report

Introduction

1 The University of Bolton (the University) has provided higher education since 1966 and was formally designated as a university in 2005. Student enrolment is approximately 13,000. The University employs 700 academic and professional staff and operates in seven countries. A strategic objective of the University is to be a leading supplier of international professional higher education delivered through a model of blended and supported lifelong professional learning to emerging professionals in the Middle East, Asia and parts of Africa, in conjunction with selected international partners. In 2012 the University identified four international clusters of activity acting as strategic hubs to create academic communities fostering academic and staff development opportunities through partner networks. These included Africa, principally Malawi, Zambia and Mauritius; the Middle East, Oman and Ras Al Khaimah (RAK); the Far East, principally Vietnam and China; and Europe, principally Germany and Greece.

2 The University aims to become known in the sector for being at the forefront of transnational education (TNE) and a centre of excellence for partnership working. It aims to double the number of students studying with the University in overseas centres, and to establish new strategic partnerships for the delivery of overseas programmes in a number of new international locations.

3 The partnership agreement with the College was signed in November 2008. The College in RAK was established in 2008 in association with the infrastructure provider Western International College. The site on which the College is located is shared with the American University of RAK, sharing common facilities for the refectory and recreation. The site has the physical capacity to deliver to a student population of circa 1,000 students. Students have expressed some concerns with respect to the capacity and prioritisation of the shared facilities.

4 The purpose of this initiative from the University's perspective was to provide high-quality UK higher education programmes to the expatriate community working in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, the campus attracts significant numbers of local students and believes that its strength is best value UK higher education in the UAE, providing a service for RAK-based schools. The University's Off-Campus Division (OfCD) strategy emphasises cultural and professional relevance to enhance the student experience. Currently, efforts are being made to increase recruitment from the northern Emirates and international recruitment.

5 The College provides all of the facilities, resources and staffing (approved by the University). The University provides courses, quality assurance processes and academic support. The courses are offered under a franchise relationship between the University and College.

6 The campus offers undergraduate programmes in accountancy, business management, computing, civil engineering and mechanical engineering; and postgraduate programmes in business administration and information technology. There are currently 178 full-time undergraduate students and 40 part-time postgraduates. There is intent to offer an MSc in Construction from 2014, following the review of the programme at the University during 2013-14. The College has also expressed interest in running a programme leading to the award of BSc International Tourism Management.

7 The College has 13 full-time academic staff and 10 part-time academic staff, who draw on their professional practice by supporting the employer engagement agenda and

providing opportunities for work placements. Modules are delivered to students through traditional attendance on campus, supported by some e-learning within modules. All teaching and assessment is conducted in English. The philosophy of the campus is to produce professional, academically qualified practitioners which the University sees as contributing to its mission 'to unlock the potential within individuals and organisations through the excellence and responsiveness of our teaching, research and student support'.

Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

8 The University carried out extensive due diligence checks when it established the partnership with the College. Two processes were implemented: institutional appraisal and validation of the collaborative programmes. The two processes may be conducted in parallel, but are treated as conceptually distinct. Institutional appraisal focuses on the general organisational framework, partner environment and capacity for collaborative higher education provision, while validation scrutinises the academic standards and learning opportunities.

9 The institutional appraisal and validation processes for the College were conducted as a two-part event because of the nature and scale of the proposal. Members of the panel of the appraisal received a copy of the due diligence report. Programmes for approval had been pre-approved as the University's programmes. The first event was the institutional appraisal at the College in October 2008, conducted by a panel of five, including two external members.

10 A validation event was held at the University in October 2008 to consider the approval of programmes for the College. The panel was chaired by an Emeritus Professor of the University and consisted of two external nominees; a consultant for the Business School; Director of School of Health and Social Sciences; Head of Collaborative Partnerships; a senior lecturer; and secretary. Five of the members of this panel had been on the panel for the institutional appraisal. Meetings were held with a range of senior managers from the University and the College and with the programme teams. The panel received the Operations Manual, programme specifications and sample programme handbooks. The panel report was forwarded to Academic Board for approval and the programme handbooks were forwarded to the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit.

11 A RAK campus project board met at the University to oversee the set-up of the campus and it was recommended that this should continue as a steering group to ensure that support from the University was maintained. A University Academic Director was based in RAK. The Operations Manual set out a requirement for an Advisory Board to support and counsel the College, giving a perspective on the work and education environment of RAK and advising on networking opportunities between the College and local community. The project board provided this oversight.

12 The collaborative agreement with the Western International College FZE was signed in November 2008. It provides authorisation for the College to offer a range of programmes delivered at the campus in RAK leading to awards of the University. The contract is due for renewal in 2014. Arrangements for the partnership are set out in the Operations Manual and are updated as needed by either partner. Annual reviews of the partnership are conducted and function as a precursor to the contract review.

13 Initially the importance of an Academic Director at the campus was highlighted by the University's validation panel to ensure academic leadership from somebody who was familiar with UK higher education and the Bolton approach, and this was reaffirmed in the

review of 2010. This was set out in the Operations Manual as a requirement to provide direction and leadership for College staff.

14 When the University's OfCD and the Academic Director in RAK were established in 2013, it was agreed that there would no longer be a need for an academic leader on-site. During the visit, the review team was informed that it is now a team of College academic coordinators who provide academic leadership for the College. The review team formed the view, however, that an equivalent quality of academic leadership to that previously provided was not evident. The University is **recommended** to reconsider how academic leadership is provided at the campus, including the development of research and staff development.

Making the link work

15 The arrangements for managing the partnership with the College have evolved significantly since the development of the Academic Memorandum and accompanying Operations Manual in 2008.

16 The University's Academic Board (now Senate) retains overall responsibility for the academic management and control of programmes and for the oversight, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of academic standards and quality. The operational management of academic standards is executed through the campus's Board of Study, which reports to the University's Senate.

17 For academic content, and design of programmes and modules, responsibility remains predominantly with the University but non-academic activities are managed autonomously by the College. Learning materials are prepared by staff in RAK and not provided by the University. There is an intention to shift greater responsibility for academic management to the College with the maturity of the partnership and the review team was informed that this process has begun.

18 A matrix setting out the University's responsibilities for off-campus programmes was devised in October 2012. All overseas partners are managed by the Academic Partnership Manager based in the OfCD. A quality monitoring system is used to track quality processes, but this system is currently being updated and the tracking of quality processes is currently being dealt with through the virtual learning environment (VLE). The review team heard that this transition has caused some difficulties with implementing some quality processes during the last year, for example online surveys.

19 Academic coordinators at RAK oversee the assessment process and liaise with their University contacts. More contact takes place in subjects, such as accountancy where Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) exemption is received and students must follow exactly the same learning schedule as in the UK.

20 The programme leaders in RAK have responsibility for the day-to-day management of the elements of the programmes delivered at the College. They prepare programme quality enhancement plans and take part in staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs). Programme leaders are the key link for students.

21 The University appoints a Link Tutor for each programme at the College. The Link Tutor liaises with the RAK programme leaders and provides advice in respect of quality assurance, interpretation and implementation of the University's procedures, practices and requirements for teaching, and agreements with the College on admissions requirements for the appropriate programme at an operational level. Liaison is primarily conducted through emails and the VLE and tends not to include visits.

22 The admissions requirements are the same for equivalent programmes delivered at the University and at the RAK campus. The requirements are set by the University. Any non-standard applications are referred to the University's OfCD for decision. Any exemptions required for entry are presented to a board for decision. Enrolments to the University's database are managed by the University on receipt of a spreadsheet from the College.

23 There are continued challenges with the recruitment of students and some difficulties for international students obtaining visas. Recruitment is managed through campaigns, online marketing, open days at the College, open days in schools and a recruitment drive overseas and working with agents. The University sets target student numbers but not minimum numbers. One programme is running with as few as two students against a target of 10, and last year a programme ran with five students against a target of 10. Low student numbers are further exacerbated by problems with retention. In recognition of the potential impact on the student learning experience of very low student numbers, the University is **recommended** to keep under review the number of students recruited to courses.

24 Initial student induction takes place over two days supporting students' understanding of processes, communication and academic regulations. Induction has been delivered entirely by the College since January 2014, having previously been supported by the University. Module induction is provided in the first class and ongoing induction is provided as part of module content. An induction checklist is provided for new and continuing students to ensure that they are fully prepared for their transition. This sets out what is expected of them and the documentation that they should receive.

25 English language support is provided before entry and during students' studies. A local company in RAK administers language support tuition. All modules cover academic writing early on in the course to assess students' English language competency. Study skills and core skills support are provided through a member of the College's teaching staff. External examiners have made reference to the need for improvement in academic writing.

26 Specialist counselling services are not offered, but a student adviser provides advice and guidance. Assessments of and programme-specific support for students with disabilities are in place.

27 All students are allocated a personal tutor. Staff are trained for their tutor role and they believe this makes a positive contribution to the student experience. Students meet their personal tutor during induction and tutors are then expected to meet with the students five times a year for ongoing development and review of performance. Students receive information about the role of the personal tutor, and expectations of the student and the personal tutor are set out in information for students.

28 The personal tutor scheme is integrated with the personal and professional development (PPD) scheme. PPD is an integrated and assessed part of the curricula. It includes mock interviews, public speaking sessions and a record of students' academic progress. The academic and pastoral student support provided to students within the curriculum and through extracurricular activities is a **positive feature**.

29 Class sizes are small and contact time is greater than at the University's campus in the UK. Students and staff told the review team that they value this enhanced interaction in learning.

30 Students have full access to the University's online resources. This supplements the relatively limited physical library on-site. Information on the College's library's requirements is collated through approval events and through ongoing feedback from staff and students.

Reading lists are compiled in the University but College staff can add to them and staff are asked for library requests at the start of the academic year. Programme quality enhancement plans are rolling plans and part of annual monitoring, and learning resource requirements are incorporated into these.

31 Specialist facilities at the College are of a standard that matches those of the University home campus. A technician team from a specialist company that supplies and commissions material testing and other lab equipment is associated with the campus. There is a local IT technician to support day-to-day functioning. Computing subject staff identify broad College resource requirements and provide support. Recognising the size of the College, computing subject staff are expected to play a dual role.

32 Students have experienced some challenges with the College's IT resources, including limited access to Wi-Fi, problems with configuration, obsolete machines, dated operating systems that are incompatible with some software, and viruses picked up on campus. Wi-Fi is recognised as problematic in terms of internet speed and connectivity, but College staff told the review team that they consider that sufficient access to the internet is provided through the hardwired provision. To alleviate some of the difficulties, students have been asked to refrain from downloading large files, streaming unnecessary media and connecting additional devices while on campus. The review team considered that the IT infrastructure capacity may be an issue for the delivery of MSc IT and it will impact on the use of learning technologies for teaching. According to the Board of Studies minutes in January 2014, computers in the library have been replaced and there is ongoing work from the IT department to remedy some of the issues. The University is **recommended** to improve the IT infrastructure at the campus to ensure adequate student access to Wi-Fi and quality of IT equipment to support learning, teaching and specialist computing courses.

33 The University's VLE is used for sharing learning materials and resources with students and staff. Staff in the UK and RAK have access across campuses' VLE sites. Some student projects are conducted in groups across the University and RAK using the VLE.

34 The University identifies the student voice as an important component of the OfCD strategy for the development of sustainable transnational student and staff networks. Student representatives are elected each year for all courses. They attend SSLCs, previously course committee meetings, which are held once per semester for each subject. Attendance levels of students at SSLC appear to be variable with some meetings only having one or two students present, although it is not always possible to tell from the minutes as student representatives are not always identified.

35 Some of the student representatives attend the Board of Study which provides an opportunity for students to give feedback on their programmes and provides oversight across courses identifying common themes. Minutes of the SSLCs are received at the Board of Study. The meetings are chaired by the Manager for Academic Quality Administration. Minutes of the meeting are received by the OfCD in the University and are then distributed to faculties. The OfCD reports to Senate. However, none of the students who met the review team were aware of the Board of Study and attendance appears to be low with at times no students present.

36 The student representatives who met the review team talked of the Student Council and hosting their own student meetings where they used a suggestion box to collect student feedback. Any issues raised are then addressed through the SSLCs. The Manager for Academic Quality Administration supports the Student Council and helps to run extracurricular activities.

37 Programme and module feedback is collected through surveys and a suggestion box is available. An online survey is used, although due to system problems these were not collected for 2012-13. Feedback collated is provided through the VLE to the OfCD for oversight purposes. Students are provided with feedback on action through a 'you said, we did' update, which is provided through the Board of Study or may be emailed or presented in class. Minutes of the Board of Study are sent to the course representative who are expected to share them with their peers.

38 A student exchange group visited the UK from the College in August 2012. Students can apply to go on UK-advertised field trips and an exchange programme is in place. The review team met a student from the University studying her second year in RAK.

39 A staff conference supporting teaching, learning and pedagogy was held at the College in 2011, including staff from the UK. Collaborative Partnership forums are offered at the University, but the review team did not meet any staff in RAK who had attended.

40 Research activity in the College is very limited and there is no direct support for research. Two members of staff in RAK have presented papers at conferences and are research active, but there is limited time to spend on research. Campus staff would like to study for PhDs with the University but have not, to date, had an opportunity. Limited funding from the College appears to be available for staff development, despite the University's expectation that its partners provide support for staff to further their academic qualifications. A reduction of 50 per cent is offered by the University on tuition fees for staff from partnerships. Two staff from the College act as flying-faculty staff for the University and therefore have the opportunity to see the University's other campuses and partners. The University is **recommended** to ensure that support is in place, including financial support, for staff development in research and learning and teaching.

41 Students have the opportunity for industry visits as an integral part of their programme. There is an intention to set up industry advisory boards in 2014 to advise on curriculum content. Summer internships are offered which support the contextualising of assignments and future employment aspiration. Some of these have led to placements. Last year six interns were recruited after successfully completing placements. About 50 per cent of students take up internships. Currently 45 companies are associated with the College.

42 The Accountancy course leads to ACCA exemption and the Civil Engineering course is working towards Joint Board of Moderators accreditation. The employment of part-time staff also strengthens industry input, although this can make it more difficult for students to contact staff. Excellent links with employers are noted in the University's annual health check of the campus and very positive feedback was provided by local employers. Presentations from mechanical engineering students on their internship programme have been established and these are attended by local employers. Details of student destinations are systematically collated at graduation. The support for students to develop their employability skills within the curriculum and the engagement with industry to provide work-based opportunities is a **positive feature**.

43 Staff are appointed and employed by the College. The University receives the CVs of newly appointed staff. Staff turnover is low and in the last year there were only two new appointments. All teaching staff have master's degrees and 70 per cent of staff are employed on a permanent, full-time basis. Induction for staff is managed in RAK and increasingly staff development is also delivered by the College. Predominantly, induction is provided by the Manager for Academic Quality Administration and is focused on introducing the University systems and processes. Most staff have experience of teaching and therefore it is believed that they need little support to prepare for teaching. Staff development is

supplemented by staff visits from the University and through access to online support. A tutor handbook is provided. College staff are encouraged to link up with staff in the University, but this is not a formally managed system, though it is facilitated by the Manager for Academic Quality Administration.

44 Administrative staff are inducted by the College's Director of Administration and some staff from the University visit the campus. Any interaction with the University is managed through the Manager for Academic Quality Administration electronically and involvement in programme approval and feedback is also managed this way. No specific support was provided for induction to the library systems for the new librarian at the College, but she reported to the review team that it was possible to navigate the system without support as it was straightforward. At the point when the College was established, the University librarian had visited RAK to support set-up.

45 The Academic Coordinator also supports induction for academic staff, providing mentorship and peer review observations of some teaching sessions. Academic staff used to be provided with significant teaching practice sessions and academic input from the Academic Director. However, support is only offered now through the Manager for Academic Quality Administration. There is an intention to introduce peer observation. Observation for new members of staff had previously been undertaken by the Academic Director. The staff do not have access to the Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education (PGCHE) funded by, or provided by, the College or the University. However, two staff are funding themselves to complete the PGCHE with another UK university.

Quality assurance

Academic standards and quality of programmes

46 Academic management, oversight, monitoring and evaluation of academic standards and quality are the responsibility of the University's Senate. Arrangements for operational maintenance of academic standards and quality have been revised such that the College's Board of Studies has responsibility which reports to Senate and to relevant Standards and Enhancement Boards at the University. The College action plan is received at Senate. SSLCs report to the College Board of Studies and to the relevant SSLCs and the Standards and Enhancement Board maintains oversight of partnership developments.

47 At the time of the review visit, a new committee structure had just been put in place and the first meeting had not yet taken place. An Off-campus Standards and Enhancement Board will oversee the campus Board of Study and report to Senate. SSLCs will report to the Off-campus Quality, Teaching and Learning standing panel.

48 The OfCD strategy refers to achieving a high level of compliance with the University's quality processes by embedding effective support and monitoring strategies within the OfCD. A full range of OfCD quality monitoring processes have been established through the OfCD Board of Study, Quality committee and the Learning and Teaching committee. The committees were approved through Senate in October 2012.

49 Procedures relating to initial approval, periodic review, annual monitoring, modification and quality management of the programmes are the same as those for comparable programmes at the University. The details are set out in the Quality Assurance Manual and the validation documents.

50 Annual health checks of partnerships have recently been introduced by the University and the first one was carried out in September 2013. This was supported through a staff visit incorporating student induction and staff development, and introduction of

planned changes to the moderation, external examining and annual course monitoring arrangements. The introduction of the annual health checks and the developments with the maturity of the partnership to devolve greater responsibility and oversight to the College are **positive features**.

51 Until 2013-14 annual monitoring was led by the subject group in the UK and the process led to the production of a Programme Quality Enhancement Plan (PQEP). The report was completed by the course manager in the University supported by the Academic Coordinator and Quality Administration Manager. PQEPs are sent to the Academic Partnership Manager. Now PQEP reports are completed by the RAK course managers supported by the Academic Coordinators and Quality Administration Manager. The PQEP prior to 2013-14 covered all courses within a subject area in the UK and in all partnership provision. It is not clear how timely the production of the enhancement plan is, as the PQEP provided for 2012-13, following review in 2011-12, was dated September 2013 and no 2013-14 plan was provided to the review team. The external examiner reports reviewed for the period of the annual monitoring (2011-12) were for 2010, 2011 and 2012. Staff are reminded at the meetings of the Board of Study of the need to continue enhancement activities in line with the PQEPs.

52 Periodic reviews of programmes are undertaken usually via a five-year cycle and reviewed as part of the review at the University. The Academic Review undertaken by the University requires that programmes are reviewed and judged against a series of expectations including but not exclusively: the use of online learning to enrich the learning experience for students; subject knowledge and information skills; employability and professional development; internationalisation; environmental sustainability; and social, public and ethical responsibility.

53 An internal review of the College was undertaken in 2010. It was a two-stage review, the second stage being a panel visit to RAK with an external panel member and meetings with students and staff. As a result of the review, programmes in Built Environment and Engineering had approval withdrawn, but existing students were supported to complete their programmes. In 2011 a review that revalidated the College's engineering programmes took place where panel members, including external panel members, met staff and students from both campuses.

54 The design and redesign of programmes are led by University staff in the UK. Currently, construction project management is being developed for implementation in the UK and RAK. The Academic Coordinator for Engineering and Computing is leading on the development from RAK. College staff feel that there is greater scope now for contributing to programme development and not simply delivering programmes in exactly the same way as at the University.

55 There has recently been a complete restructure of the University's academic provision. The Business School was the last to complete this process. Staff in the College had an opportunity to comment on programme developments. The changes for partners were managed through the OfCD. Partners are not usually included in approval panels or as part of the presenting team, although they may be interviewed by the panel through Skype. Meetings were held with prospective students, the management team from the University, and two members of staff from the University programme team and a meeting with employers. The outcomes identified conditions, recommendations and good practice for the College, but College staff were not a part of the review process.

56 A revalidation of mechanical engineering programmes in 2012 did not include external panel members and there were no meetings with students and staff from the College. There was no specific reference to the College in the panel's report.

However, computing staff reported a teleconference session with the panel for review for computing. The panel did not include or meet external examiners or students and the panel's report did not provide evidence of the presence (virtual or physical) of College staff. It was reported that external comments on the proposal had been sought, received and responded to. The University is **recommended** to engage staff from the College more effectively in annual monitoring and programme review and approval.

Assessment and certification of awards

57 The University recognises that there is a need to strengthen quality assurance processes, particularly those relating to assessment, feedback and assessment boards.

58 Assessment requirements are set out in the University's undergraduate curriculum framework. Assessment is described as being at the heart of the learning journey, encouraging and valuing learning and development. There is an emphasis in assessment design and feedback on ensuring that the assessment is an integral part of the learning process and a requirement for formative feedback to be provided in all modules. For any 20-credit module there is a maximum of two assessments.

59 All assessments are set by and internally moderated by College tutors and externally moderated by the external examiner. Previously, the University Link Tutor oversaw the setting of assessments but now acts in an advisory role.

60 There appear to be some difficulties in the setting of the assessment calendar, communication of assessment deadlines to staff and implementation of assessments in a timely fashion. A request from the College has been made to UK staff that submission dates are not changed because of the impact on other assessments. A tentative date for the commencement of examinations for the first week in May was shared at a Board of Study in April. Seventy per cent of students failed to meet a submission date which coincided with holidays due to the change to the publication of submission dates.

61 Assessment and examination arrangements are set out in the Academic Memorandum. All academic and assessment regulations are the same as those at the University. Decisions from the assessment boards are communicated to students through the College. Provision is made, however, for a lighter touch through moderation as module delivery matures and the University gains confidence in the assessment process.

62 It was agreed in 2010 that there is no second-marking system by the University for modules where College tutors have demonstrated appropriate standards of assessment. Current practice is that all work is first marked and then an internal College moderator checks the marking against the answer scheme. A predetermined sample of work plus all fails are moderated. All staff are engaged in moderation. An external examiner has raised some concern with respect to evidence of internal moderation and about moderation across modules, and staff have expressed some confusion over the principles of internal moderation. However, internal moderation is a relatively new process and has worked effectively in some areas. For example, in business, internal moderation led to the decision to remark all student work. The sample of work for external moderation is the same as that for internal moderation. Moderation arrangements are overseen by the academic coordinators and the Quality Administration Manager in RAK.

63 There is no single feedback policy but guidance is available on good practice. Training is provided before trimester two marking. Students receive feedback on a standard assignment cover sheet. There is a need to improve the quantity of feedback and training is planned for College staff. However, some external examiners report good feedback. Normal return time is three weeks but staff aim to turn around feedback to students within two weeks. However, the team noted that there are some concerns with respect to the timing

and quality of feedback and delays in the return of results. The University is **recommended** to strengthen quality processes for assuring assessment and feedback to students.

64 The University appoints the external examiners and where possible it will be the same external examiner that oversees the equivalent programme at the University. Centre external examiners are appointed to oversee the process. Module external examiners do not visit centres, but centre external examiners do. It is often difficult to tell on the external examiner reports whether comments pertain to the College, the home campus or both.

65 From January 2014 the first tier module board will take place at the College, chaired by a member of the University, Head of Academic Quality OfCD. The Centre Chief Examiner will attend the Board and be invited to join the Awards Board via teleconference. The Chief Examiner noted that it was not possible to compare the performance of RAK students with those at the University or other UK higher education institutions. This is a new initiative commencing this academic year and will resolve the issues with respect to attendance of campus staff at assessment boards through video conferencing.

66 External examiner reports are referred to in course committee meetings in the UK and the minutes of the meetings are sent to the Manager for Academic Quality Administration. The reports are sent to course coordinators who are involved in the response and then reported in PQEBs, SSLCs and Boards of Study, although copies of the report are not shared through Boards. Students who met the review team were not aware of external examiner reports but understood the purpose of the external examiner role.

67 Students' understanding of plagiarism is supported through induction. Students submit their work through anti-plagiarism software both for summative and formative assessment and to help increase their understanding are given informal warnings when plagiarism is detected.

68 Student regulations and disciplinary procedures are the same for the University and College, but the Academic Director or nominee can take account of local and cultural differences. Where local processes are exhausted students can refer to the University. Mitigating circumstances decisions are taken at the University, but on the basis of an advised outcome from the campus which is usually supported. The students are aware of the appeal process.

69 Students studying at the College receive identical certificates for awards to home students. The association with the College and RAK-based delivery is indicated on the record of achievement.

Information on higher education provision

70 The partnership agreement sets out requirements with respect to literature, signage and materials in any form requiring prior approval of any marketing or promotional material published and distributed in respect of programmes. A branding manual and templates are available. Any amendments require prior consultation with the University. The College website is managed and hosted from the University's server in the UK.

71 Checks of publicity material of partners, including web presence, are included as part of the annual health check. However, concerns have been raised with respect to the webpages for the campus displaying out-of-date information and material, and there has been a lack of clarity as to the responsibility for oversight. Requirements and restrictions for publicity material are set out in the Academic Memorandum and the University retains responsibility for the accuracy of all public information.

72 The student handbook is an off-campus version of the University handbook, but programme and module handbooks are produced locally based on a template provided from the University, and a campus handbook is provided. The programme handbook includes the programme specification, programme calendar, communications and staff details, timetables, programme support, student feedback and representation at committees, learning resources, careers, prizes and scholarships, and student societies. Students receive copies of handbooks before their arrival at the campus, and those who met the review team reported being satisfied with the accuracy of information provided.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the academic and pastoral student support provided both within the curriculum and through extracurricular activities (paragraph 28)
- the support for students to develop their employability skills within the curriculum and the engagement with industry to provide work-based opportunities (paragraph 42)
- the introduction of the annual health checks (paragraph 50)
- the developments with the maturity of the partnership to devolve greater responsibility and oversight to the College (paragraph 50).

Recommendations

The University of Bolton is recommended to take the following actions:

- reconsider how academic leadership is provided at the College, including the development of research and staff development (paragraph 14)
- keep under review the number of students recruited to courses, recognising the impact on the student learning experience of very low student numbers (paragraph 23)
- improve the IT infrastructure, ensuring adequate access to Wi-Fi and sufficient and quality IT equipment to support learning, teaching and specialist IT courses (paragraph 32)
- ensure that support is in place, including financial support, for staff development for research and learning and teaching (paragraph 40)
- engage staff from the College more effectively in annual monitoring and programme review and approval (paragraph 56)
- strengthen quality processes for assuring assessment and feedback to students (paragraph 62).

University of Bolton's response to the review report

The University welcomes the QAA's report on its provision in Ras Al Khaimah. The University and Western International College are particularly pleased to note the findings identified as positive features and discussions are underway to address the recommendations in the report. The University and the College were also pleased to note that a number of the recommendations identified areas that the University and the College had already started to address prior to the review, such as greater involvement of College staff in annual review and periodic review processes; College staff have been involved in these processes since the start of the 2013-14 academic year. Similarly, work had already started to improve the issues identified with the arrangement of assessment deadlines and the provision of a consistent standard of feedback to students. An Annual Review of Partner Operations process has been introduced to address potential issues caused by low recruitment and the University and the College will continue to work closely to improve all areas of provision.

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