

## Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

December 2013

### Annex 6: Amsterdam FoundationCampus

#### Introduction and background

Amsterdam FoundationCampus (AFoC) was opened in 2012 as a partnership between FoundationCampus (FoC) and the Faculty of Economics and Business (the Faculty) of the University of Amsterdam (the University). AFoC operates from the premises of the University. The first students commenced their studies in September 2012.

AFoC offers two programmes: the three-term Undergraduate Foundation Programme (UFP) and a one-term Master's Foundation Programme (MFP). Within the UFP there is a single pathway leading towards admission to the BSc in Economics and Business, which is taught in English. A new social sciences pathway is under consideration. At the time of the review, there were 51 students on the UFP programme. Numbers are likely to increase in the future as the campus becomes fully operational. Students come from a broad range of countries, mostly outside Europe. Providing they obtain suitable grades on the UFP and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), students can progress to the degree programme. The MFP has not yet recruited a viable intake.

AFoC has seven teaching staff: one is full-time and the remainder are sessional. In addition, there are three full-time and one part-time administrative members of staff.

The responsibilities of FoC, AFoC and the University for the management of academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and public information reflect the common framework provided by the FoundationCampus Academic Quality Assurance Manual 2013 and FoC's central policies, programmes and curricula. However, some features of AFoC are different. These differences relate to admissions requirements, and the provision of a mathematics module within the UFP, geared to the admission requirements of the University.

There is a close working relationship between AFoC and the University facilitated by the proximity of the offices of key staff. The University retains central oversight of the partnership, but the main links between the University and AFoC are at faculty level through the Dean and the Admission and Exchange Office. The close working relationship between AFoC and the Faculty at the University is **good practice**.

The University actively monitors the students who progress from AFoC and an annual report on AFoC is presented to the Executive Board at both Faculty and University level. In addition to ongoing liaison, there are regular formal meetings each term with the Faculty's international office, and the University's departments of student services and accommodation.

The partnership is currently underpinned by a Letter of Intent which was signed in May 2012. This document provides the legal basis for the operation of AFoC but lacks the detail of the binding agreements in place in the other embedded colleges. There was an intention,

expressed in the Letter of Intent, to sign such an agreement by 1 September 2012, before the first students commenced their studies. At the time of the review, the document remained unsigned. The implications of this situation are noted in paragraphs 17 to 19.

The students at AFoC provided a student written submission which was prepared by cohorts that commenced in September 2012 and January 2013.

## **Key findings**

### **Academic standards**

There can be **confidence** that academic standards at AFoC are managed appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of FoC.

### **Quality of learning opportunities**

There can be **limited confidence** that the quality of learning opportunities at AFoC is assured and enhanced appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of FoC.

### **Public information**

Reliance **can** be placed on the information that AFoC produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

### **Good practice**

All features of good practice identified in the overall FoC report applied at AFoC. The review team also notes the following **good practice** at this College:

- the strong working relationship between AFoC and the University (paragraphs 3 and 16)

## **Recommendations**

All recommendations identified in the overall FoC report applied at AFoC. The review team makes the following recommendation in relation to this College:

The team considers that it is **essential** for AFoC to:

- Sign a comprehensive, written and legally binding agreement or contract with the University before any more students are admitted (paragraph 19).

## **Detailed findings**

### **How effectively does Amsterdam FoundationCollege fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards at this college?**

1 Academic standards are managed jointly by FoC and AFoC in accordance with FoundationCampus's Quality Assurance Manual 2013 and its choice of external programme verification schemes, NCFE and Pearson.

2 The FoundationCampus Academic Board has oversight of academic standards at the embedded colleges. The AFoC centre head is a member of this Board, which receives annual monitoring reports (AMRs) for each programme prepared by FoC's Chief Academic Officer. As a new campus, the 2012-13 UFP AMR, which was in the final stages of

preparation at the time of the review, will be the first to feature AFoC. AFoC has contributed to the report and, when it is received, will share it with the University. As noted in the main report, there is no annual academic review by FoC of AFoC. However, a report on AFoC is prepared internally in the University for its committees.

3 The UFP offered in AFoC was tailored to meet the needs of the University's Faculty of Economics and Business undergraduate degree, taught in English. New modules, and amendments to existing modules taught at AFoC, have been approved by Academic Board. AFoC works closely with the Faculty to ensure that its students have the requisite knowledge and skills to be successful university students. This is **good practice**.

4 Steps are taken to mitigate the challenges that the location of AFoC outside the UK poses to managing standards in line with UK expectations. For example, there is a regular cycle of meetings, many of them virtual, across the FoC embedded colleges organised by function, subject and programme in which AFoC participates.

### **How effective is the management of student assessment?**

5 Students at AFoC take centrally set exams. AFoC is provided with examination papers and marking schemes by FoC. Scripts are double-marked locally and then moderated centrally by the programme leader. Additional guidance on marking is provided to the embedded colleges through a virtual meeting, where AFoC can raise any difficulties identified on the proposed paper.

6 Mock examinations are also provided by the central FoC. Formative assessment is determined locally within the central guidance provided by FoC. For example, AFoC developed assignments to improve essay writing which were not available in the central assessment resources.

7 Teaching staff from AFoC do not attend assessment boards but are made aware of any issues that have arisen regarding their teaching or marking by the centre head who does attend the boards.

8 Students confirmed that they were well informed about the nature of the assessments on their programme and the grades that they would need to achieve to progress. They were content with the scheduling of assessments, which allowed them the opportunity to resit mathematics if necessary and also to take IELTS at an appropriate point.

9 FoC has a policy on academic offences which applies across all campuses. Students confirmed that they were well informed about how to avoid plagiarism and had access to plagiarism-detection software to check their work.

### **Where appropriate, how effectively are UK external reference points used in the management of academic standards?**

10 As a higher education provider operating in the Netherlands, AFoC is required to follow the Dutch Code of Conduct: International Student Higher Education. This code covers such matters as provision of information to students, admissions and registration, monitoring student attendance and performance, and the contractual obligations of providers of study programmes.

11 AFoC is made aware of the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) through FoC's quality framework. The centre head indicated that she was aware of the Quality Code, its contents and its role in higher education, as well as FoC's mapping exercise. Academic staff who met the review team also indicated that they were aware of both the Quality Code and the Dutch Code.

12 The overall structure and content of the two programmes offered at AFoC are determined centrally by FoC in conjunction with external benchmarks: NCFE for the UFP and Pearson for the MFP. The teaching of English on both programmes is structured in relation to the IELTS which students must pass at a high level to achieve progression to the University.

### **How effectively are external examining, moderation or verification used to assure academic standards?**

13 The four UK external examiners for all FoC programmes report centrally. The Dutch higher educational system also employs external examiners in a similar way to the UK, so local staff are familiar with their role. The external examiners for the University are not involved with AFoC. Staff at AFoC can access UK external examiners' reports on the intranet, but usually rely upon being made aware of issues by the centre head.

14 External examiner reports are not provided directly to students. Student representatives who attend a programme committee receive copies of the AMRs, which include external examiner reports and FoC's response to them.

### **How effectively is statistical information used to monitor and assure academic standards?**

15 So far the numbers progressing through FoC's programmes at AFoC have been small, and both AFoC and the University have monitored carefully the progress of each individual student. For the first intake, weaknesses demonstrated in the first term at the University were fed back to AFoC immediately to allow for adjustments to be made to current teaching. Staff at AFoC meet weekly to discuss students' progress.

16 Both AFoC and the University noted that as numbers increase, a more statistical approach to monitoring will be needed. AFoC collects data on student performance that allows progress to be assessed continuously and which is analysed in AMRs. The University formally monitors the progress of its students and plans to make this information available to AFoC. This will enable AFoC to include the University data sets in its future annual monitoring.

### **How effectively are responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities fulfilled?**

17 A draft Cooperation Agreement between CEG UFPLtd (CEG): FoundationCampus, AFoC and the Faculty of Economics and Business was drawn up in 2011. This draft agreement, which mirrors the agreements that underpin other FoC embedded colleges, details the roles and obligations of the respective parties, the terms under which students may progress, and the legal and managerial framework under which the centre is intended to operate. In May 2012 a Letter of Intent was signed by CEG and the Faculty of Economics and Business which proposed the establishment of AFoC and agreed the provision of premises by the Faculty, the registration of AFoC students as if exchange students, and marketing.

18 The Letter of Intent commits the parties to signing a formal binding agreement by 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter. At the time of the review, the document remained unsigned. FoC and AFoC explained that the draft was with lawyers who were working on the details and a document was expected to be signed in early 2014.

19 The review team was concerned that although the partnership was operating effectively along the lines set out in the draft Cooperation Agreement, AFoC was currently only legally underpinned by a document, the Letter of Intent, which contained little detail.

Moreover, this situation had persisted for a lengthy period of time during which three cohorts of students had been recruited. This situation was contrary to the guidance in Indicator 7, *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code, and gave rise to significant concerns about the future management and enhancement of FoC's programmes at AFoC. It is **essential** that a legally binding agreement is signed between CEG and the University.

### **How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?**

20 The report of the 2012 Review of Educational Oversight of the London FoundationCampus was used as a reference when setting up AFoC, particularly in relation to staff development. AFoC is required to fulfil the requirements of the Dutch Code relating to international students which influences practices in areas such as admissions. Staff are also aware of the provisions of the Quality Code regarding expectations for the quality of provision which underpin central FoC policies and procedures.

### **How effectively does Amsterdam FoundationCampus assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?**

21 Staff recruitment is managed locally with central human resource involvement from FoC. Selection is guided by the need for specific knowledge and skills to prepare students effectively. Applicants are required to demonstrate their teaching skills through the preparation of lesson plans.

22 Teaching is supported and appraised by the centre head. New staff are observed and guided intensively in the first weeks of teaching. All teaching staff are observed once during each academic period. Staff receive prior guidance on how the observation will be conducted and the criteria to be assessed. After the observation has taken place, the member of staff receives detailed written feedback and has the opportunity to discuss the outcomes with the centre head. It is planned to introduce peer observation in the next academic period. Staff also receive feedback on their teaching through end-of-module questionnaires, tutorials and student representative meetings. The review team heard about actions that had enhanced the quality of teaching and learning as a result of feedback.

23 FoC subject leaders play an important role in assuring the quality of teaching and learning. They provide staff within their subject group across all embedded colleges with schemes of work and teaching resources. Virtual subject group meetings discuss currency of materials which are shared between teaching staff. AFoC staff who met the review team were appreciative of the support of subject leaders and groups together with the ability to contribute to enhancement through their own lesson plans and learning materials. Cross-centre programme leaders are intended to play a similar role but as yet this has not developed fully.

24 Students indicated that they were content with the style and quality of teaching they received, and were appreciative both of the content of the UFP and the introduction that it provided to university studies.

### **How effectively is student feedback used to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?**

25 FoC has a student charter which sets out the mutual rights and obligations of FoC and individual students, including seeking student opinion.

26 Students at AFoC complete the same post-induction, post-module and post-programme surveys as students on other FoC programmes. However, in Amsterdam these

are completed on paper rather than online for faster feedback and a better response rate. The results of the surveys are analysed and incorporated into the AMR. The results are also shared with the student representatives.

27 Students at AFoC have other opportunities to give feedback on their programme and raise issues. One such opportunity is provided by the weekly tutorial meetings where individual students can raise concerns. A formal system of student representatives is also in place and a staff-student liaison committee is in place. Students volunteer for the role. The student representatives meet with the centre head fortnightly. At the first meeting, representatives receive a briefing note explaining their role at AFoC and as a member of the UFP programme committee, with key contact details. Meetings are formally minuted and action taken in relation to matters arising from previous meetings is reported and recorded.

28 Students stated that AFoC listens and responds to their concerns. For example, students found that some of the mathematics teaching was going too fast. This was raised in the student representative meeting and action taken to adjust teaching.

29 Students who met the team were aware of the programme committee, although they had not yet attended a meeting. The timing and location of some programme committee meetings has made it difficult for Amsterdam students to participate.

### **How effectively do FoundationCampus and Amsterdam FoundationCampus assure themselves that students are supported effectively?**

30 Students received a pre-arrival pack with information about arrival arrangements and life in Amsterdam as an AFoC student. On arrival there is a one-week induction during which students receive a Student Handbook, Programme Handbook and a University information pack. The Student Handbook is customised for Amsterdam but based on a template common to all FoC student handbooks. The Programme Handbook is produced centrally for all FoC students. Students indicated that they found the induction and handbooks helpful.

31 AFoC students have a one-hour group tutorial each week with one of two teaching staff who act as personal tutors. These tutorials follow a centrally developed scheme of work which ensures that a full range of academic and personal topics are covered. Students may also follow up personal issues individually. Weekly drop-in academic tutorials are available where students can raise matters of subject understanding.

32 Students are asked to declare special needs when applying. Where appropriate, support is put in place jointly by AFoC and the University. Students have access to University student support facilities including the Student Psychology service.

33 AFoC does not provide a formal social programme but facilitates the circulation of information about, and participation in, events at the University and in Amsterdam. Students have full access to University clubs and societies including the students' union, International Student Network, business societies and arts activities. AFoC students study the Dutch language to facilitate participation in social activity.

34 Students stated to the team that they were very positive about the support they received while at AFoC. In particular, they appreciated the personalised support provided and the confidence they were able to build in themselves.

## **How effectively does Amsterdam FoundationCampus manage the recruitment and admission of students?**

35 The Dutch Code for international students requires that admission processes are rigorous and that AFoC only admits students with a reasonable expectation of progression to the University. University admissions criteria are higher than those for other FoC embedded colleges that offer progression. To progress from the UFP, a student must achieve 6.5 on IELTS with no element less than 6.00; a 60 per cent average across academic subjects; and 60 per cent in mathematics. To recruit students at the correct level, the entry requirements for AFoC have been set higher and include a mathematics entry test. The mathematics test is completed in the applicant's home country, at a CEG or agent's office or via an online video link. It is marked by the AFoC mathematics tutor.

36 Students are admitted through the central recruitment processes based in Cambridge, except in the case of China where they are handled by the Beijing office. All offers are made by the central team. There are clear criteria for admissions in terms of local and overseas qualifications in a range of countries. These are specified in the embedded college promotional literature. AFoC marks the mathematics test for all candidates and checks the documents for borderline cases. Applicants for the MFP have to be pre-approved by the Faculty before an offer can be made by FoC because of the technical nature of the master's programmes to which it provides progression, which focus on econometrics and other quantitative subjects.

37 The Faculty and AFoC have agreed a future cap of 100 students admitted to the University through the current UFP pathway, with no more than 15 per cent of the intake coming from a single country to preserve diversity on the programme. The Faculty and AFoC cooperate in cross-marketing their programmes. This allows both parties to broaden their international reach, and to match student level to programme entry.

38 Some of the students who met the review team had been recruited through agents who were seen as helpful and who had supplied helpful information.

## **What are the arrangements for staff development to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?**

39 AFoC has a core of full-time, managerial and professional staff. Teaching staff are sessional, many of whom have been recruited recently. Some sessional staff are also University staff.

40 Where appropriate, the professional staff had been mentored by staff in other FoC embedded colleges and networked regularly with their counterparts in the other colleges.

41 Sessional staff are paid to attend staff development activities. Continuing professional development (CPD) days were arranged last year. However, the reading weeks are used at AFoC to prepare for assessment rather than for CPD.

42 The AFoC Student Recruitment and Support Officer (SRSO) had attended training courses at the University. Teaching staff who were not employed by the University were unaware of any staff development opportunities open to them at the University. However, staff from the Faculty of Economics and Business who met the review team indicated that there was no barrier to making such opportunities available if they were relevant.

43 AFoC does not have a formal staff development plan. This would be beneficial as the campus grows.

**How effectively do FoundationCampus and Amsterdam FoundationCampus ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?**

44 The Letter of Intent signed by CEG and the Faculty commits the Faculty to providing AFoC with appropriate premises to run its programmes. Furthermore, it agrees to issue AFoC students with University student cards which permit them access to library, computing, catering, accommodation and sports facilities on the same terms as Faculty exchange students.

45 The AFoC programmes do not require any specialised teaching rooms or equipment. Availability of teaching rooms is a limiting factor and has proved challenging as AFoC operates on shorter timescales than the University's space planning. However, AFoC staff noted that a workable system had now been agreed.

46 Students stated that the classrooms they used were satisfactory and confirmed that library, IT and other facilities were accessible and appropriate for their needs.

**How effectively does Amsterdam FoundationCampus's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this college?**

47 FoC publishes information about AFoC on its website and in its prospectuses. It provides these brochures and additional material about the Netherlands, Amsterdam and the University at briefings for agents. Students that met the review team indicated the information they had received about their programme prior to coming to AFoC was accurate and helpful. In particular, admission and progression requirements were very clear. The only area in which students would have liked more information at an early stage was alternative progression routes other than to the University.

48 The handbooks provided to the students prior to and on arrival have been noted above. Students found these accurate and helpful. In addition, they receive detailed outlines and information for individual modules. The UFP Programme Handbook contains general information about the programme as well as assessment regulations, appeals and complaints procedures.

**How effective are Amsterdam FoundationCampus's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing at this college?**

All published material is produced centrally by FoC which secures sign-off by the Faculty of Economics and Business. The University confirmed that spot checks are carried out on the website and materials to check that they are accurate.

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