



This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

# International Quality Review

Mid-Cycle Review

Emirates College for  
Advanced Education

**Review Report**

May 2024

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## About this mid-cycle review

This is a report of a Mid-Cycle Quality Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Emirates College of Advanced Education. The mid-cycle review was conducted face-to-face by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Ian Welch
- Mr Mark Cooper.

The full International Quality Review (IQR) in April 2021 resulted in a [published report](#). The QAA review team concluded that Emirates College for Advanced Education met all 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#). The team identified five features of good practice and made two recommendations.

This mid-cycle review evaluates progress against the key actions since the IQR and considers any significant changes that may impact on the ability of Emirates College of Advanced Education to continue to meet the ESG standards.

## Outcome of the mid-cycle review

1 From the evidence provided, the review team concludes that Emirates College for Advanced Education is making **satisfactory progress** since the 2021 International Quality Review and that the period of validity of the IQR be extended to April 2026.

## Summary of IQR outcomes

### Overview of the institution

2 Emirates College for Advanced Education (ECAE; the College) was established in 2007 to provide undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and professional development opportunities for educators in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is fully owned and financed by the Abu Dhabi Government and has received two international accreditations in 2021. The College's strategy focuses on enabling future educators, unlocking transformative potential through signature programmes, cutting-edge research and global partnerships. Its values include Emirati Identity for future generations, collaboration for fostering social cohesion, joyful learning for growth, research for impact, and creativity for innovation.

3 ECAE is committed to excellence in the UAE's social and education sectors. They foster excellence by combining research, theory and practical expertise in programmes, partnerships and policy - and practice collaborations. ECAE emphasises research engagement, encouraging faculty to conduct locally relevant, high-impact research. They also support educators in becoming research-engaged professionals, focusing on locally relevant innovations that can lead to policy change. The College also upholds cultural values and supports educators in preparing students for future global citizenship.

4 The College prioritises educational excellence and lifelong learning, focusing on research-informed, locally-contextualised programmes and collaborative learning spaces. It offers pre-service and in-service programmes for teachers, educational leaders and micro-credentials to promote professional growth. ECAE also conducts research and innovation to generate evidence-informed education practice and policy transformation. It supports faculty capacity-building and investigates technology applications and their effective utilisation in practice and policy transformation. The College also aims to leave

a sustainable mark on global developments while deepening its roots in Emirati culture and values.

## Good practice identified by the 2021 International Quality Review

5 In 2021, the QAA review team identified the following features of good practice at ECAE:

- The strong college-wide culture for quality improvement and enhancement, through the inclusive leadership demonstrated by the Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department and supported by the Vice-Chancellor, which proactively drives quality forward at the College (Standard 1.1).
- The way that the College has harnessed existing processes and capitalised on them in enhancing students' learning opportunities during the migration to online delivery during the Covid pandemic (Standard 1.3).
- The resourceful, reflective approach of the College to staff development opportunities and their impact on the student learning experience and research-informed teaching (Standard 1.5).
- The role the community of practice forum plays in supporting staff in enhancing their teaching and learning (Standard 1.5).
- The thoughtful, committed, collaborative engagement of the College with students through the delivery and ongoing enhancement of support services (Standard 1.6).

## Recommendations of the 2021 International Quality Review

6 In 2021, the QAA review team identified the following recommendations for ECAE:

- The College should publish an explicit extenuating circumstances policy, including criteria for applications and processes for making decisions (Standard 1.3).
- The College should make publicly and explicitly clear the circumstances under which it may make short-notice changes to the terms and conditions of study and how it would safeguard the interests of students in alignment with the College's student-centred philosophy (Standard 1.4).

## Changes since the last IQR review visit

7 Dr May Laith Al Tae'e was appointed as Vice-Chancellor and the General Secretariat of the Executive Council (GSEC) restructured ECAE's Board of Trustees in November 2022. The new board includes federal-level Ministers and policy makers, including Her Excellency Sarah Yousef Al Amiri, Minister of State for Public Education, and Her Excellency Khulood Matar Sultan Al Dhaheri, Executive Director of the Education Partnership Sector at ADEK.

8 The College has also undergone a strategy development exercise, resulting in a clearer formulation of its Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Priorities. The organisation has made significant changes to its programmes, focusing on aspiring and serving teachers. In addition, ECAE has introduced a suite of pre-service and in-service programmes, with a clear and sustained practice orientation. The pre-service programmes are unique in the UAE for providing a fully-mentored, immersive pre-service learn-to-teach experience, while the in-service programmes are practice-oriented and empowering teachers and leaders as future-ready, research-informed generators of homegrown pedagogic and school improvement innovations.

## Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis

9 The College published a comprehensive action plan following the IQR in January 2022. This established how the College would address the two recommendations and five items of good practice identified in the IQR report. The mid-cycle review team were able to confirm that the College is making good progress against all actions. This progress is outlined below.

10 The College has developed and implemented a clear policy that defines extenuating circumstances which outlines the application process and specifies the remedies available to students in such situations. Their updated Assessment and Grading Policy includes extenuating circumstances, with the revised policy published in the Directory of Institutional Documents. The document defines extenuating circumstances and lists examples such as significant illness, family crises and disability. Furthermore, it outlines the process for students to apply for consideration of extenuating circumstances, which involves submitting an application to the Graduate Program Chair, who consults the Extenuating Circumstances Panel to accept or reject the student's claim and offer relevant solutions.

11 The College has also taken appropriate steps to ensure transparency and protect students' interests by including relevant information in the Graduate Catalogue and Student Handbook, which is accessible to students. It states the circumstances under which short notice changes to the terms and conditions of study may be made, along with measures to safeguard student interests. The team met with senior managers who confirmed that the Graduate Catalogue clearly communicates that new policies and policy revisions required by the Ministry of Education, the Commission for Academic Accreditation or the Department of Education and Knowledge in Abu Dhabi. These take precedence over previous relevant policies, and ECAE ensures any changes and policy revisions are adequately communicated to students and other stakeholders, with effective measures taken for a smooth transition.

12 ECAE has maintained its strong culture of quality improvement and enhancement, as evidenced by the successful induction of mid-level faculty in academic leadership roles related to programme review and development, and increased automation of data systems. ECAE has also sustained its resourceful approach to staff development opportunities, such as the iLearn online learning community for both faculty and the community-at-large, which positively impacts the student learning experience and research-informed teaching. The team met with faculty and learning support staff who highlighted that the iLearn sessions, presented by both ECAE faculty and guest speakers from other institutions, demonstrate ECAE's commitment to providing diverse and relevant professional development opportunities for its staff, and awareness-raising of educational matters with the community-at-large with high levels of engagement and interest from the ECAE community.

13 ECAE has introduced new quality assurance and enhancement initiatives, such as the IRE Effectiveness Report, which assesses the effectiveness of IRE activities and their impact on academic and administrative units' quality.

14 The College has also developed guidelines for the legitimate use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic work and is exploring a new feedback platform - 'One Blue Platform' - to streamline and enhance the course and faculty evaluation process. These developments, along with the achievements and initiatives highlighted in the IRE Effectiveness Report, demonstrate that ECAE's quality assurance and enhancement arrangements are appropriate and responsive to the evolving institutional context. The team met with senior managers who confirmed the positive impact of these initiatives on the overall quality assurance and institutional effectiveness processes.

15 The College has made significant progress in harnessing existing processes and capitalising on them to enhance students' learning opportunities in the migration to online delivery during the Covid pandemic. The team met with faculty and learning support staff who discussed how ECAE consolidated its blended and digital learning systems, allowing for a smooth transition to online learning, and invested in and developed its IT resources while consulting with students to ensure that additional resources aligned with their needs.

16 The College has provided training and support to faculty to ensure effective online learning, addressed challenges faced by students, created provisions within the Library and Learning Support Hub to identify and support students in need, provided 24-hour IT support and adapted teaching and learning materials and activities to suit the online environment. The evidence gathered from meetings with senior managers, faculty, learning support staff and students suggests that ECAE has successfully built upon its existing processes and infrastructure to enhance students' learning opportunities, despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic, demonstrating its commitment to maintaining high-quality education.

## **Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures**

17 The College has taken proactive steps to address the challenges posed by AI and academic dishonesty, as evidenced by the development of comprehensive guidelines for the legitimate use of AI in academic work. During the team's meeting with faculty and learning support staff, it was evident that they have been actively involved in the development and implementation of these policies and guidelines, contributing to workshops on integrating AI into the curriculum and engaging in discussions about its ethical use. The guidelines cover key areas, such as principles and institutional values, teaching and learning, assessment, academic integrity, data classification and usage, and research and dissemination. They also include a sample disclosure statement for students to acknowledge their use of AI tools in assessments and an example of how researchers should acknowledge the use of AI in their work. The team met with students who confirmed that they have been informed about these policies and guidelines and appreciate the College's efforts to provide guidance and workshops on the responsible use of AI. Additionally, the College has adapted its policies to address academic dishonesty, with senior managers emphasising the need to move quickly with actions around AI and plagiarism in a dynamic environment. The College's proactive approach to addressing the challenges posed by AI, demonstrates its commitment to maintaining academic integrity and providing appropriate support to faculty and students in navigating this evolving landscape.

18 The learning and innovation networked communities (LINC) in collaboration with the College was set up as a strategic partnership with the Emirates Schools Establishment and public schools in Abu Dhabi aimed at enhancing the educational sector across the UAE. This initiative has played a crucial role in supporting partnerships and facilitating collaboration between research and practice. The team met with faculty and learning support staff who emphasised that LINC enables communication with a range of stakeholders including policy makers, bridging the gap between research and practice, and facilitating the identification of future research opportunities that are relevant to the needs of teachers and the education sector - thus impacting on student experience and meeting their professional interests.

19 Student exposure to the LINC initiative has positively influenced their perceptions of the value of pursuing advanced degrees, such as PhD, as they recognise the potential for their research to make significant contributions to the field of education and drive meaningful change in policy and practice. The students expressed a strong desire for the reinstatement of the PhD programme, which they believe would serve as a unique selling point for the College and provide a comprehensive postgraduate career development trajectory. They

emphasised that the PhD programme would be influential in completing their educational journey and enabling them to make significant contributions to their field and the wider UAE national context for the development of the education system.

## **Findings from the observations of facilities and learning resources**

20 The review team had the opportunity to tour the main ECAE campus and participated in a virtual tour of the other two sites, confirming that the College ensures the equivalence of resources and access to resources across all its locations. During the meeting with senior managers, it was highlighted that the two sites, including the Ajman Teachers Training Institute, have mirrored classrooms, with faculty travelling between sites to ensure consistent teaching quality. The IT infrastructure and academic support services are also equivalent across all locations, with the team noting the importance of IT support in facilitating this comparability.

21 The College has invested in virtual classrooms that enable equivalence, featuring smart boards, screen accessibility and multiple cameras - further emphasising the crucial role of IT support. Additionally, the team met with students who expressed their satisfaction with the Library and Learning Support Hub, praising the accessibility of online library resources across all sites. The meeting with faculty and learning support staff revealed that the library staff work closely with faculty to ensure that the library's resources align with the curriculum and support students' needs, with the budget production process entailing a formal request from the library for resource needs.

22 The evidence gathered from the campus tour, virtual tour and meetings with various stakeholders demonstrates that ECAE has taken effective measures to ensure that students have access to comparable resources and support services, regardless of their location.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Email: [accreditation@gaa.ac.uk](mailto:accreditation@gaa.ac.uk)

Website: [www.gaa.ac.uk](http://www.gaa.ac.uk)