



Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas Holdings UK Ltd, April 2018

International College at Robert Gordon University

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU) is making commendable progress with implementing its action plan from the April 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The ICRGU underwent a Higher Education Review in April 2016. Since then there have been no changes in student numbers, premises, ownership, programmes or Principal. There are 46 students currently studying there.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The review team considered a range of evidence, including strategic, policy and programme documentation, information on ICRGU's website and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Meetings were held with senior, teaching and support staff from the College, and a link academic from the University, to discuss progress made during the past two years against the action plan from the April 2016 review. The review team also met undergraduate students and alumni who were currently undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University. The QAA action plan has been updated for the academic year 2017-18, with a status check undertaken in January 2018. ICRGU has also developed its own consolidated action plan. The team found that ICRGU has made commendable progress in building on the two features of good practice (paragraphs 4, 6), in addition to two points for consideration raised by the 2016 report (paragraphs 4, 5 and 12). In the 2016 review, ICRGU received a commendable judgement for the quality of learning opportunities. Actions have led to improvements in the management of the provision; there is highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points and the information the College produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

4 The collaborative approach to studio-based joint teaching on the architecture programme has continued to be developed and is monitored through the annual monitoring reviews. Students value the collaborative approach. The model is now also operating in four modules within the Built Environment programme. Students appreciate being taught within the main University facilities and by University staff for part of their programmes. An evaluation of this approach has been shared with the Navitas Learning and Teaching Network and Learning and Teaching Committees. Student views on progression, transition and integration have continued to be captured and actioned upon. Outcomes are considered by the College Learning

and Teaching Board. The tenure of the link tutors has been extended to four years. The virtual learning environment (VLE) has been updated to the latest version of the software, and all academic staff have been trained in using this. Students confirmed that the VLE is an effective aid to learning, and were aware of improvements taking place. They commented on the ease of access, the wealth of useful information now posted, including the online careers information. A significant focus is placed on digital literacy and this has been embedded fully within the ILSC curriculum. New technologies have been used in several programmes including architecture, built environment, pharmacy and mathematics. Students and alumni were appreciative of the emphasis placed on digital literacy skills, preparing them well for future study. ICRGU has engaged with the Jisc benchmarking tool for digital literacy to understand and update approaches to digital literacy. The impact of these developments is evaluated through student feedback and the Quality Enhancement Team.

5 ICRGU has implemented its own consolidated action plan as part of its commitment to continuous improvement. The updated QAA action plan has been absorbed into this. Actions from annual programme monitoring feed into the consolidated action plan. ICRGU's action plan feeds into the Navitas UK action plan. ICRGU's action plan has facilitated discussions on enhancement, activities for staff and students, and improvements to facilities. The action plan identifies student accommodation and digital literacy as areas requiring further attention. The plan identifies actions for each subject area, all of which have been completed. There are no ongoing targets set, or indications of how actions are to be evidenced, monitored and evaluated. Actions relating to the action plan are reported through ICRGU's Learning and Teaching Board.

6 ICRGU has developed further opportunities for the student voice to be heard. The system of student representation operates well. Representatives volunteer rather than be elected. Roles and responsibilities are made clear, and Student Forum meetings are held regularly. The College uses a 'you said, we did' approach to feed back to students, including prominent graphic displays in the College corridor. Students are well integrated into the University. Many students attend some classes within the main University, and architecture students, for example, participate in field study trips organised by University departments. Further social integration has occurred during the past two years as students now live in University accommodation. Alumni are now represented on the management of the Student Union and are helping to build a link between the Union and the College, and integrate a new student ambassador system. Students are well prepared for the transition to the University. The effectiveness of transition activities and arrangements are monitored by student and staff feedback, and evaluated through the College Enhancement Team. Alumni and University staff contribute to this process. The Business School has appointed staff specifically to help with transition.

7 ICRGU operates a robust admission process and follows the Navitas UK policy, procedures and regulations for the admission of students, which are aligned with the Quality Code, Chapter B2. Local arrangements for admission are agreed between ICRGU, Navitas UK and the University. The admission policy is published on the portal, along with a complaints and appeals procedure. All Navitas UK staff, ICRGU staff and recruitment agents are required to abide by a Code of Ethics which aligns with UK Council for International Student Affairs guidelines. Navitas UK also runs seminars and webinars to inform and update recruitment agents. Formal offers of admission are produced by agreement with all three parties and issued centrally by Navitas UK. Academic entry criteria for all ICRGU pathways have been formally agreed with, and approved by, Robert Gordon University. Any specific amendments to these are discussed with the relevant school and the international office and approved thereafter. English

entry requirements are set and approved by the University and comply with UKVI's Tier 4 Guidelines. International students must meet the English language entry requirements, assessed through the use of Home Office approved Secure English Language Tests (SELTs). In exceptional cases, Navitas UK may use an approved English language test of its own.

8 All applicants supply a declared statement of intent to study. The College regards the process as having been much improved over the past year. Applicants are not interviewed as standard procedure. Non-standard applicants are discussed with the University's Admissions office, and interviews are carried out by Navitas UK central staff. Qualifications and overseas instructions are checked through UK NARIC, and authenticity of certification produced is checked by a compliance manager at Navitas UK. Compliance checks are undertaken at agreed and random times of year by Navitas UK central Admissions and Recruitment Centre. An Admission Forum operates across the Navitas UK network.

9 Around 90 per cent of students are recruited through agents in their home countries, while others had received in-country visits from Navitas staff at their home institutions. All students met by the review team had made good use of the detailed information provided on the website. The College works with the University and Navitas UK central team to ensure detailed and relevant local information for students at the points of enquiry, application and pre-entry. Students and alumni confirmed that the information on the College website was detailed and helpful. Pre-application information was thorough, and helped to ease arrival in Aberdeen and at ICRGU. Students (79 per cent) rated the pre-departure information provided as good or better. Students were very appreciative of the speedy responses to queries and the ease of application and registration. International students must meet English language entry requirements, assessed through the use of Home Office approved Second English Language requirements.

10 Navitas UK sets out the policy for the annual monitoring of ICRGU's provision, and this is aligned to the University's procedures. Annual programme monitoring takes place in October and November each year. It includes the consideration of feedback from staff, students, link tutors and external examiners. The report feeds through both to the University Academic Development Committee and to Navitas UK in November. Both institutions consider the report shortly after completion. An action plan outlines actions to be completed by the next intake of students, in February each year. In addition to monitoring the provision delivered at the College, the annual monitoring report also monitors student performance of those who have progressed to the University through tracer data. ICRGU has permanent access to this data, and so can monitor it during the year. Some changes to modules have been the result of tracer studies. The annual monitoring report includes both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from moderation discussions and reports, feedback from students and staff, and progress and achievement data.

11 In addition to annual quality monitoring, an Institute Led Periodic Review was conducted in 2017. The report highlighted several points of good practice and recommendations. Changes implemented included the increase in the number of books students were permitted to borrow, the embedding of video clips into the VLE and increased activity with the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Findings confirmed the relevance of the relationship between the College and the University and were reported to the JSPMB.

4 The embedded colleges' use of external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

12 ICRGU has made wide use of the Quality Code in the past two years. Staff met by the team had all been involved with mapping the Quality Code. College Performance Reports are reviewed annually against the Quality Code. Chapter B3 had been used to develop procedures for peer and management observations, to improve student induction, to consider feedback on academic work, and to enhance student engagement. ICRGU has worked with students to look at how indicators were being met. Staff are also encouraged to engage with external staff development, such as through the Staff and Educational Development Organisation (SEDA) and the HEA. In admissions, the College refers to the requirements and guidelines of UKVI. The architecture programme is benchmarked against professional body expectations. The Jisc NUS benchmarking tool has been used as a means of gauging student digital experience.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

13 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's and its embedded colleges' continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider and its embedded colleges of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Phil Markey, QAA Officer and Dr Helen Corkill, QAA Reviewer, on 18 April 2018.

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