



Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements: desk-based analysis of Navitas Holdings UK Ltd, November 2021

International College at Robert Gordon University

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Navitas UK Holdings Ltd International College at Robert Gordon University (the College) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the November 2020 [Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 The International College at Robert Gordon University is a Navitas University Partnership College Europe pathway college affiliated to the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (the University). All students are studying university-approved programme elements. The partnership is underpinned by a Recognition and Articulation Agreement originally signed in 2010 and now operating under an extension agreement 2020-25. There have been no significant changes to the provision in the last year. No new programmes have been added to the portfolio.

3 The number of students studying at the College in November 2021 was 95 split across nine courses. The management structure includes the College Principal and Director, Director of Marketing and Admissions, three Admissions Officers, a Student Recruitment Coordinator, College Services Manager and Officer and 10 academic staff on fractional appointments.

Findings from the desk-based review

4 All actions identified by the QAA team in the November 2020 review have been addressed effectively and proposed actions have been implemented (paragraphs 5, 6, 7). The review had one feature of good practice and two recommendations. The College action plan includes the details of the actions undertaken, timescales, details of who was responsible for taking them forward, success indicators and the mechanisms for oversight and evaluation. The College committee structure ensured monitoring of the action plan and a comprehensive range of other quality monitoring activities (paragraphs 8, 9).

5 The feature of good practice identified from the 2020 review was the innovative and creative systems developed in collaboration with students to deliver collaborative blended learning utilising a range of technologies including those with which students are more familiar. Initially, some of the blended learning approaches were developed as consequence of the constraints on face-to-face learning, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The advantages of some aspects of online learning were identified by staff and students. As a consequence, blended learning has now been embedded into the delivery of all courses. Lectures are recorded and, along with other learning materials, are uploaded onto the online learning platform. Interactive learning has been facilitated by the use of the platform Zoom

and the formal use of social media. Feedback from the Student Engagement and Satisfaction Survey and at Student Forum meetings provided evidence that, despite some preference for face-to-face teaching, students engaged with the structured blended approach and were positive about its impact. The CPD arrangements for staff were used to disseminate the good practice.

6 The recommendation to ensure that the proposed review and development of the College action plan takes place and is documented, has taken place. The action plan has been updated and approved by the College Senior Management Team. Also, the action plan was an item on several College committees including the Learning and Teaching Board, Operational Advisory Committee, and is a standing item on the College Senior Management Team meeting agenda to ensure continual oversight.

7 The final recommendation to ensure that the Compass programme operates under one title and is made known to all students at the start of their studies and prior to any individual needs' assessment, has been taken forward. The Compass programme is designed to support students who may be at risk of non-completion of their studies due to a range of academic and personal issues. This recommendation arose due to confusion over a previous title and some misunderstanding amongst students as to the nature and purpose of the programme. An audit of all relevant documents by senior staff confirmed they all reference the student support programme as the Compass programme. The programme has also been introduced to new students at orientation sessions with a further session being delivered part way through the term. A change to the referral system to the programme suggested by students was accepted. Further monitoring of the impact of the programme will be required to assess its effectiveness.

8 The College internal quality monitoring processes are well established and work effectively. The committee structure (Operational Advisory Committee, Academic Advisory Committee, Marketing Advisory Committee and the Joint Strategic Partnership Management Board) ensures that the operations, academic, marketing and admissions functions are all reviewed throughout the academic year. The College Enhancement Team and the Learning and Teaching Board meet every semester to discuss topics relating to programme delivery and resourcing and enhancing practices across the college. All courses are reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process. Student Forum minutes and College Enhancement Team minutes are received by the Board and this helps ensure enhancements to the learning environment are taken forward.

9 The Academic Advisory Committee is a sub-committee of the Joint Strategic Partnership Management Board and is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of the academic environment of the College with respect to the collaborative partnership guidelines including academic outcomes achieved by students, the curriculum approval process for new curriculum initiatives, implementation of the quality assurance policies including course monitoring by the College, and the effective transfer of students from the College to the University. The Academic Advisory Committee is chaired by the partner university, and its membership includes key staff from the College and the University. Based on the evidence available it provides an effective forum for an exchange on academic and operational matters and good practice between key staff in the College, and in the relevant university schools. While the minutes of meetings provide details of the topics discussed, it would be helpful if more consistent use was made of action points and follow up at subsequent meetings to provide evidence that actions were taken forward.

10 The student performance data provides information on eight programmes of study. For three of these programmes - first-year degree in Engineering, foundation degree in Nursing, and first-year degree in Accounting and Finance - all students (100%) who enrolled successfully passed their qualification (9, 14 and 6 students respectively). For the first-year

degree in Architecture, seven out of nine students passed, and two students failed (78% pass rate). Of the 20 students on the first-year degree in Management, 16 successfully completed the programme of study (80%). On the foundation degree in Pharmacy, eight out of nine students passed their qualification (89% pass rate). Of the 11 students on the first-year degree in Computing, nine successfully passed their qualification (82%). Of the 16 students on the pre-master's Management, one failed the qualification (94% pass rate). The Annual Monitoring Report requires analysis of the student performance data, significant achievements and/or issues requiring attention. It provides an evidence base which is then considered by the Learning and Teaching Board and the Academic Advisory Committee. This process enables the College to have confidence in, and be satisfied with, the quality and standards of the course and, where required, ensure issues requiring attention are identified along with appropriate actions.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

11 The college has a comprehensive set of policies and regulations that are designed to meet the requirements of both the College and the partner university. The Quality Manual sets out the framework through which the academic quality and standards of the provision are assured. Although the Quality Manual includes a mapping against the older UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), the College has mapped their policies and regulations with the revised Quality Code, clearly demonstrating how the Core and Common practices are integrated within all aspects of the College activities.

12 The College recognises that the admissions process needs to be robust to ensure that only students for whom there is a reasonable expectation that they are capable of completion are admitted. The College has high student retention and success rates (paragraph 10) and considers these are partly accounted for by setting, and maintaining, appropriate entry criteria. The College reviews its admission process annually and a revised process was introduced in May 2021. Considerable staffing resource is devoted to ensuring that the admissions process is fair, transparent and meets college, university and regulatory/student visa requirements. In addition, the College has recently introduced an 'Applicant intent to study' form. This form was provided to all students with a study gap of over seven years. Evidence that the approach to admissions is successful is the oversight of the process via the committee structure, positive student feedback, low visa refusal rate and the good progression and achievement rates (see paragraph 10).

13 Other examples of how the College ensures that Core and Common practices are demonstrated include the following. The Course approval process has robust mechanisms in place to ensure that changes/enhancements are considered by all stakeholders and are clearly communicated within the College, the University and with prospective and current students. Annual monitoring reviews are carried out for all courses. Changes are made to ensure the standards set, continue to be met and the quality of the provision enhanced. The Academic Advisory Committee, Operations Advisory Committee, and Marketing Advisory Committee discuss academic, student support and marketing and recruitment reports. Oversight of college activities is provided by the Joint Strategic Partnership Management Board.

14 The College has a number of mechanisms in place to ensure that students are actively engaged with their learning. The Student Forum meets regularly and includes representatives from each course. Students also complete the Student Engagement and Satisfaction Survey and First Impressions Survey. Information is then considered by the College Enhancement Team which meets every semester to discuss topics relating to enhancing practices across the college. Minutes from these meetings are received by the Board to ensure that initiatives are taken forward.

15 The College makes use of a variety of external reference points. These include the use of external panel members during programme development and the periodic review process. External examiners and the use of staff from the partner university also provide external expertise to the provision. Navitas University Partnerships Europe (the College parent company) recently appointed external advisers for external benchmarking purposes with part of the remit being to assure that the Quality Code expectations are being met.

Background to the desk-based analysis

16 The desk-based analysis serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review/annual monitoring. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring process or review.

17 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Catherine Symonds, Reviewer, and Adam Surtees and Dr Julian Ellis, QAA Officers, in November 2021. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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