



Educational Oversight-Exceptional Arrangements: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas UK Holdings Ltd, November 2022

International College at Robert Gordon University

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the Navitas UK Holdings Ltd International College at Robert Gordon University (the College) is making acceptable progress since the [November 2021 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

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.

3 Recruitment has increased from 95 students in 2020-21 to 169 students in the reporting period (2021-22). This reflects the return to international travel, pent-up demand, and a return to confidence in studying overseas. The greatest increase in student numbers has been in pre-master's programmes with 83 students being recruited in 2021-22 compared to 50 in the previous year. For 2022-23, there are 24 new students recruited to the PGS1 Business programme, three to the PGS1 Engineering and three to the UGS2 Accountancy and Finance programmes. There are 12 part-time and seven full-time staff.

4 There have been no material changes since the previous review.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 Actions from the 2020 QAA review have all been addressed. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment numbers have returned to approximately the same levels and teaching in the classroom, assisted by online tools, has been well received. Support is provided through the Compass Scheme (see paragraph 8) and students were positive about all stages of the student life cycle. Progression rates remain high, confirming that entrance qualifications, including IELTS levels, are set appropriately and the curriculum for each programme is suitable.

6 According to the last QAA annual monitoring review in November 2021, all actions identified in the November 2020 QAA review have been addressed. The current action plan, together with the minutes of various committees, confirms the recording and monitoring of actions undertaken, alongside timescales, responsibility, success indicators, oversight mechanisms and status.

7 The team was informed that post-COVID-19, the focus is on teaching in the classroom - an aspect welcomed by students. Support is provided through the application

of various online tools and a recently-appointed Navitas technician provides support for staff. Academic staff confirmed that the equipment and software installed by the University and the College, during the COVID-19 pandemic, are useful in enhancing teaching and learning.

8 The recommendation to ensure that the Compass Scheme operates under one title has been actioned. It is now made known to all students at orientation sessions and prior to any individual needs' assessment. Students confirmed the purpose of the scheme and its intended audience. Academic and support staff described the scheme as offering academic and pastoral support, and guidance on wellbeing. The scheme includes regular checks on students' attendance and progress; and provides pastoral and cultural support. Where necessary, students are referred to specialist professional advisers. The team was informed of the importance of the scheme for students under-18.

9 Students found the recruitment, admissions and arrivals process clear, well-organised, helpful and welcoming. Online and library resources were easy to access. All students are enrolled on a communications module that supports group presentations and develops essay writing skills. Students spoke highly of this module and Nursing students commended the modules that develop numerical skills, supporting drug calculations and relevant numeracy techniques. In addition to the Compass Scheme, the University provides a Study Buddy Scheme. This is a new system in which a student who is progressing well meets one who is experiencing some difficulties - such as academic referencing - once a week to offer hints and tips for study. Students described its operation and felt that it was a useful support mechanism particularly for those who started in January rather than September.

10 Students confirm that summative assessment criteria are clear, that they are supported through formative assessment and are informed of feedback schedules. Academic integrity is discussed with students and is understood. The student voice is considered, with trained student representatives who meet regularly, and the student voice is discussed in committees. All Navitas students complete the same student survey, with questions similar to the National Student Survey. The College generates good response rates and receives positive responses. The College has the highest Net Promoter Score in Navitas. This score is the key student satisfaction metric and captures the extent to which students would recommend the College to a friend.

11 The student performance data details students' progression on 10 programmes of study from 2019-20 to 2021-22. Recruitment was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21. Most courses saw a drop in numbers and four courses did not recruit in that year. These four programmes were: the first year in Architecture; the foundation Pharmacy year; the first year in Accounting and Finance; and the pre-master's in Public Health. In the following year (2021-22), the first year in Architecture, the first year in Engineering and the pre-master's Engineering programme did not recruit. Of the seven programmes operating in 2021-22, three had 100% progression rates; these were the foundation year in Pharmacy (18 students); the foundation year in Nursing (17 students); and the pre-master's programme in Public Health (8 students). Two programmes had high progression rates with 93% for the first year in Computing (14 students) and 97% for the pre-master's programme in Management (70 students). The first year in Management had a slightly lower progression rate of 84% (21 students). Finally, the first year in Accounting and Finance, with a small cohort of three students, had a progression rate of 67%. The programme Annual Monitoring Report includes analysis of the student performance data, external benchmarks, risks identified and an action plan.

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

12 The College has a robust set of college policies and regulations, presented in the Operations Manual, informed by the Revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and localised from the Navitas Policies and Regulations. Core and Common practices are integrated within all aspects of the College activities. Other external reference points include the use of external panel members during programme development, external examiners, and recently-appointed Navitas UPE English and Mathematics consultants. The team was informed that the Quality Code is incorporated into a range of activities, such as student services, admissions and quality monitoring.

13 The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) began accrediting MPharm degrees with a preparatory year as a separate course to the MPharm degree in 2020-21. Prior to this, the accreditation of the MPharm degree allowed students entry to pre-registration training. An initial accreditation event by the GPhC for the MPharm degree with preparatory year at the College, continuing into Robert Gordon University, took place on 15 and 16 June 2022, alongside the reaccreditation of the four-year MPharm degree at the University. Both pathways were approved subject to two conditions, plus a second part approval event to be held in 2023-24.

14 The accreditation of the MPharm degree with preparatory year is a new requirement introduced by the GPhC because a course variant has emerged over recent years at several universities. An MPharm degree with preparatory year is a single course that leads to a Master of Pharmacy award. Recruitment is separate from the accredited four-year MPharm degree and is assigned a different UCAS code. Applicants accepted on the preparatory year are allocated a five-year visa. An MPharm with preparatory year must meet all the GPhC's initial education and training standards for pharmacists in all years of the programme.

15 The College noted that there were no recommendations from the GPhC visit and report but failed to record that there were two conditions. Following the event in June 2022, the University submitted evidence to address the conditions and the GPhC accreditation team was satisfied that the criteria related to these conditions have moved from 'not met' to 'likely to be met', and will be reviewed at the part 2 event in 2023-24. The two conditions are documented in the accreditation/reaccreditation report that was available to the review team on the GPhC website. Senior staff were unable to recollect the detail of the conditions without prompting but confirmed that the University is responsible for the response. The College could not release details of the GPhC accreditation report as the outcome of the event is not official until it has been reviewed by the registrar of the GPhC. The GPhC team make a recommendation to the registrar and it is for the registrar to decide, based on the report provided, whether to approve, change or reject the team's decision. The GPhC report was received by the College after the submission of information to the review team. The conditions that GPhC imposed relate to the University and not directly to the College but issues will be responded to in the College action plan where relevant.

16 The first GPhC condition was to prepare an analysis of applicants versus entrants by protected characteristics to determine whether the admissions process is disadvantaging any applicants, and to produce a detailed action plan documenting how any differences in progression or awarding will be addressed. The University has responded to this condition, providing separate data for the MPharm with preparatory year. The response indicates significant differences within some protected characteristics. In 2019-20, this reflected the small cohort size. Additionally, the number of enrolments is generally half the number of applicants, due to visas not being granted to all successful applicants, thus making it difficult to control for protected characteristics. Admission for all college pathways is handled locally, and not centrally by Navitas, and all interviews for the MPharm preparatory year are

undertaken by university faculty. The preparatory pathway has a high success rate in progressing students to the Master of Pharmacy programme and this is demonstrated across all protected characteristics.

17 The GPhC learning outcomes are not taught or assessed during the preparatory year, but other aspects of the programme - namely admissions, progression, student support and fitness-to-practice - link to the GPhC standards. The second condition was to provide a robust mechanism for setting pass criteria for summative assessments. This condition appears to refer only to the university-delivered elements in Year 2-5 of the MPharm with preparatory year. The University responded to this condition by explaining the three types of assessment in use and the standard setting method applied. This method is the Ebel standard setting that operates through a matrix of difficulty versus relevance/importance. For both conditions, the School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences within the University has an action plan in place and a monitoring system operating through committees. The current College action plan, however, makes no reference to the outcomes of the GPhC report.

18 Although it did not lead to a condition, the GPhC review team was also concerned at the low entry requirements for admission to the preparatory year. Senior staff and academics indicate that the high IELTS levels demanded, together with the focus on chemistry, biology and mathematics curricula, prepare the students effectively for transfer. Additionally, progression data indicates that the preparatory year enables students to make good progress. From 2023, the selection process for the MPharm with preparatory year will require an interactive interview component that includes discussion of ethical scenarios, and the interviewer must be a trained assessor. The team was informed that all interviews for the MPharm preparatory year are undertaken by fully-trained university faculty.

Background to the monitoring visit

19 The monitoring visit 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. 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 visit or review.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Jenny Gilbert, Reviewer, and Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, on 18 November, 2022.

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