



Review of UK Transnational Education in the United Arab Emirates: Heriot-Watt University Dubai Campus

February 2014

Executive summary

Report

Introduction

1 Heriot-Watt University (the University) was established in 1966. The University is organised into six schools and two postgraduate institutes. The University's main campus is in Edinburgh, and there are also UK campuses in the Scottish Borders and Orkney. The Dubai campus was the first Heriot-Watt overseas campus; a second has now been opened in Malaysia. The Dubai campus is located in the Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) Free Zone, with Eikon International Holdings as its Approved Infrastructure Provider (AIP). Heriot-Watt was the first university to establish a branch campus in DIAC, and is the biggest in terms of student population.

2 Eikon is a company registered in Dubai, privately owned by a family with significant experience of delivering international education in India. Eikon provides the University's space and most of the infrastructure (but not all; for example, laboratory equipment is provided by the University). Eikon also provides staffing for a number of functions and services including, for example, IT, student services, transport, accommodation and visas. The University has total responsibility for academic provision and staff, as well as the quality of the student experience; it sets and monitors the standards of the outsourced services.

3 The Dubai campus opened in 2005 with 120 students from the University's Schools of Management and Languages, and Mathematical and Computer Sciences. Between 2005 and 2011, all the University's academic departments launched programmes, and the University rented additional space to accommodate increased student numbers. In 2013, it completed the second phase of a two-phase expansion into a new, purpose-built facility in DIAC. The Heriot-Watt International Strategy stated that student numbers on the Dubai campus increased by 36 per cent to 1,700 in 2010. According to the 2012-13 Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) census, 2,999 students were studying at the Dubai campus. The University states that student numbers now stand at some 3,500. In 2013-14, the University is already 30 per cent ahead of the target numbers it has planned to reach by 2016-17.

4 The latest KHDA census data indicates that students of some 80 nationalities are represented in Heriot-Watt Dubai, most of them in single-figure groups. While a significant number of Emiratis are registered (58), the largest national groups are from India and Pakistan, who respectively make up about a third and about a sixth of the student population.

5 The University's portfolio of some 58 programmes in Dubai was selected to match the demands of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) employment market. In 2012-13, 279 students were enrolled on foundation courses, 1,833 on bachelor's degrees, and 887 on master's.

6 The University employs the teaching staff at the Dubai campus. All Dubai-based staff are full members of academic schools.

7 The University's 2010-11 financial statements show a turnover of £10.1m, with a profit before tax of £1.3m. The University's 2010-11 financial statements show a turnover of £10.1m, with a profit before tax of £1.3m.

Business Plan was approved by the PME, prior to the signature of the AIP agreement in June 2006.

15 The University states that, in June 2006, it commissioned an internal audit by an external consulting firm. This Dubai Campus review considered the actions leading to the development of the Dubai Campus. The report made seven recommendations in relation to arrangements for Heriot-Watt branch campuses, relating to establishing the business case; roles and responsibilities of partners; financial controls and performance; project management; and contracts and risk management. These recommendations informed how the University set up its second overseas branch campus in Malaysia. A central development

is the establishment of an Oversight Board, comprising members of the management team and the Court. The Board reports regularly to the Court. Due to confidentiality constraints, the Dubai Campus review was not provided to the review team.

16 The University commissioned consultants to undertake due diligence investigations of the parent company of Eikon, Merit International. The University states that their consultants' report covered financial background and standing of the institution; academic reputation in India; relationships with international partners; and student recruitment ability. Due to confidentiality constraints, this document was not provided to the review team.

17 The matters covered by the consultants' report, as listed by the University, do not include inquiries as to the legal and regulatory environment within which the branch campus was to work, and the team noted that in the Heriot-Watt Dubai Campus Business Plan, which was a reference point for project management and the management of risk, there is a statement that 'it is assumed' that 'in the performance of any duties and tasks both parties are in full compliance with any applicable regulatory and minimum legal requirements'. The University states that Dubai Knowledge Village provided a detailed academic application pack, which provided the guidelines, procedures and documentation required for setting up the branch, and contained details of the AIP arrangements and details of licensing and registration processes. The University states that it was not permissible to provide this document to the review team, since it is copyright protected. The University affirms that the legal and regulatory environment aspects were considered during the set-up phase.

18 As indicated above, the review team's access to key due diligence documents was very restricted. However, the University took professional advice from consultants and legal advice from Scottish and UAE-based lawyers, and has been annually licensed to operate by KHDA following the submission of its initial application. There are therefore grounds to assume that the University took its decisions with a soundly based assessment of the financial, legal and academic risks.

19 While the Dubai project was being developed, a

representative in negotiations; and identifies the University-appointed resident manager of the branch. The University did not provide the team with a copy of the written agreement

them in arrangements for governance and management, not just of the branch but of the whole organisation. Students confirmed that the international value of a Heriot-Watt degree had been an important factor in their choosing to study at the Dubai campus, and that, despite the distance from Edinburgh, they considered themselves to be Heriot-Watt students. The integrity and focus of the University's strategy as a global institution is identified as a **positive feature**.

27 Learning materials, including those on the University's e-learning platform, are common to all locations, though staff confirmed that there are opportunities for contextualising materials like case studies to make them locally applicable. The Scotland campuses are the 'home' locations for most of the course leaders (the University uses the term 'course' rather than 'module') who produce the learning materials, but senior staff stated that, in some cases, courses are led from the Dubai campus, and it is planned that more course leaders will be based in Dubai and other branch campuses as they develop.

28 English language entry requirements are the same at all campuses. There is no establishment for English language instruction at the Dubai campus, though English language is built into the preparatory foundation course, intended for students who do not meet standard degree entry requirements. Support for those students accepted on to the degree courses who have met minimum requirements is limited, though available to students on request.

29 Students start their programmes with an induction package designed to introduce them to the University's services and facilities, especially library, careers and student representation, but the induction week is also used to explain academic expectations, such as the avoidance of plagiarism.

30 Library provision at the Dubai campus is limited as regards space and book stock, though students confirmed that this applies more to some programmes than others. A full range of e-learning materials is available, including the e-books and electronic journals that are available in Scotland. Students who met the review team spoke particularly positively about the virtual learning environment. Students also spoke highly of the laboratories and workshops.

31 Student services of all kinds are more limited than those typically enjoyed on UK campuses. There is a single careers adviser, assisted by interns, who is involved with student induction, provides careers workshops, supports students in compiling CVs and maintains a careers website where students can lodge the CVs. Language support is available from academic staff, and courses are available to students who request them. Advice and guidance is offered on routine matters by the administrative staff employed by Eikon. The Student President is highly active in finding out and responding to students' needs. Students valued all these services, and spoke very positively of the individuals who delivered them, but senior staff of the University acknowledged that, as yet, provision does not match what is available in Edinburgh. There is no counselling or academic advice service, but posts in these areas are planned, and, long term, the learning and teaching strategy intends that the quality of supporting services should be at a high level everywhere. In light of its strategic statements and intentions, the University is **recommended** to keep the level of provision of learning resources of all kinds at its Dubai campus under review and encouraged to progress its intentions regarding developments in these areas.

32 The University states that teaching models for provision at the Dubai campus vary to some degree by school, but typically combine internationally and locally recruited full-time, part-time and casual staff. Though at the outset the Dubai campus relied to some extent on lecturers visiting from the home campus, this is now less common. Only highly specialist

programmes, such as the MBA and programmes from the Institute of Petroleum

constraints, such as 'across all variants, courses must have identical learning outcomes and core curriculum. Variation is permitted in content and form of assessment'.

38 Approval involves the completion of a proposal dealing with logistical and financial aspects of a proposed course, accompanied by a set of templates providing outline information on course structure (covering awards, course titles, and credits);

43 Monitoring is by programme and school and is based on tabular templates, which include data provided by the Academic Registry. Students complete course feedback

47 The IPE report covers the student learning experience, academic standards and quality, and academic enhancement. It includes recommendations in all these areas, and identifies good practice in some. Reference to activities at the Dubai campus are infrequent in the report, and it appears that no discussion with Dubai-based staff or students took place, even by electronic means. The reports and the events appear thorough, though the report was not accompanied by an action list.

48 The contents of the single report available suggested that, despite the University's best intentions, integration is not complete, and the Edinburgh-based and Dubai-based reviews are bundled rather than integrated. In addition, Academic Review of the branch-campus activities would be stronger if evaluation by external subject experts were direct rather than indirect. However, the review team considered that the University had made concerted efforts to extend Academic Review to the Dubai campus, that the procedures were evolving, and the University's record of monitoring the effectiveness of its procedures indicated continuous improvement.

49 The University has systems of routine student evaluation for various aspects of its offer in Dubai. There is a standard University course evaluation form, administered online. Library and careers services request students to evaluate their provision. Students complete the graduate destinations survey and the Dubai Student Survey, much as in the UK. Students who met the review team had differing views about the extent to which they believed that the University was responsive to this form of feedback, but most felt that the views they expressed were considered and responded to. Students were aware of and some had used the University's complaints procedures.

50 Students' unions and all forms of 'lobbying' organisations are illegal in Dubai, and the kinds of democratic structures available to students at the Edinburgh campus could therefore not be reproduced at the branch campus. However, the University has put a great

Board of Examiners received and considered analysis of the different groups; to comment on the quality of the work of the Dubai students; and to 'comment on the standard of achievement of the different cohorts'. In the group of 16 reports provided to the review team, not all examiners in fact answered these questions, though most did. External examiners confirm that they are given the opportunity to compare achievements of students at the Dubai campuses with those at other campuses, and are in some cases offered statistical analyses. In many cases comments are offered on the relationship between the cohorts. In general, examiners confirmed that standards are comparable, though in one case an examiner states that the standard of achievement is higher, and in one that it is lower. The latter states that the reason for lower performance is due to the fact that 'students in Dubai take extended leave for personal and family reasons'. Staff did not recognise this as a significant problem, though they did suggest that in some cultural groups a death in the family usually involved a break in studies of about a month. Staff indicated that in such cases arrangements were made to provide work that mitigated the effects of absence.

62 Staff confirmed that external examiners do not visit the Dubai campus, though on occasions video-conference connections have been set up for examination boards. At least one examiner suggests that she would be in a much better position to fulfil her role if she were able to see the work of the Dubai students in situ, though she is in a strongly practical subject (Fashion and Textiles). Another examiner comments very positively on the contribution made to his understanding by his visit to a 'project open day': though he does not draw this conclusion, it is reasonable to assume that his understanding was correspondingly disadvantaged by his not visiting a similar event for Dubai students.

63 There is some variation in the arrangements for formal induction of examiners, and some state that they had had none, though it is worth noting that this group confirm that they had had sufficient advance information to enable them to fulfil their roles. On the other hand, one external examiner falsely believed that Dubai students were undertaking a distance-learning course, an impression that would surely not have survived effective induction.

64 The University responds to external examiners' reports via the AMR process, among other means. It was possible to track these responses through some comparison of reports with some of the completed AMR reports provided to the review team, and it can be confirmed that responses were effective.

65 The Handbook states that reports are submitted first to the Academic Registry, and to schools for review and action. A response is prepared by the school and approved by the Dean. The response is sent to the examiner with a covering letter signed by the Deputy Principal. 169.97 359.【 ）]TJETBT1 0 0 1-4(ate)10(s)6(t)-4(h)11b1169.97 359.¶cance provide and anETBT1

is not to record location of study on certificates or transcripts, on the grounds that its procedures and practices ensure that all students have the same experience in terms of academic contact and quality, irrespective of location of study. Moreover, KHDA requires that the certificate does not distinguish between a degree awarded after study at the Dubai campus and a degree awarded on the basis of study at a home campus.

Information on higher education provision

68 The University states that its External Affairs department works closely with a dedicated marketing unit based in Dubai. The most important publicity outlet for the Dubai offer is the Dubai prospectus, which is available in hard copy and online. The prospectus for Dubai is produced in collaboration with colleagues at the home campus. The Dubai team, including academics and the Head of the Dubai Campus, compile the information for the Dubai printed prospectus, with advice from the University Head of Marketing. The prospectus is then checked against the online prospectus, updated and verified in Dubai. The Dubai Head of Marketing signs off on the accuracy of the prospectus, while the Director of External Affairs maintains a quality control role and has final sign-

Recommendations

Heriot-Watt University is recommended to take the following actions:

in light of its strategic statements and intentions, keep the level of provision of learning resources of all kinds at its Dubai campus under review (paragraph 31)
consider how the teaching expertise of part-time staff on fixed-term contracts can be encouraged and supported (paragraph 36)

keep arrangements for feedback and return of marked work to students under review, and ensure greater consistency between schools in these matters (paragraph 58)

keep under review University policy and practice in relation to the Quality Code, in particular in the use of views external to the institution in programme approval, and sharing reports of external examiners with students (paragraph 66).

