

Review of UK transnational education in Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China): University College Birmingham and Aston Institute HK

May 2018

Executive summary

University College Birmingham (UCB) established the private provider partnership with Aston Institute in 2010. The partnership agreements cover three top-up programmes: BA (Hons) Business Enterprise, BA (Hons) International Hospitality & Tourism Management and BA (Hons) Marketing Management. A strategic decision was made, even though UCB gained degree awarding powers, that they would continue to seek accreditation of programmes with the University of Birmingham (UoB) where UCB has expertise. UCB has a long-standing relationship with the University of Birmingham, whose brand is very popular in Hong Kong. S

The maintenance of academic standards is made clear in UCB's Quality Manual. UCB's Student Services and Standards Committee oversees the effectiveness of the quality assurance and service delivery. It sets and monitors performance against appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements. The University's Academic Board receives reports of quality activity and enhancement, and the Curriculum and Quality Development committee is responsible for supporting and monitoring the programmes. The University of Birmingham has oversight of the quality of UoB accredited programmes.

Overall, the programmes are well managed and students well supported in achievement of the academic award. The University considers the arrangements with Aston Institute to be effective and both institutions support the partnership.

Introduction

1 University College Birmingham (UCB) established the partnership with Aston Institute in 2010. The partnership agreement

23 A self-appraisal is produced as part of the programme evaluation, and stakeholders contribute by completing a questionnaire, which feeds into the annual cycle of institutional self-appraisal. Annual returns submitted are signed by appropriate senior personnel from both institutions. Those submitted demonstrate no changes have been made to the programme during the last year and overall student satisfaction remains high; student numbers admitted and those successfully completed are stable.

24 A Periodic Review procedure is carried out every five years and includes staff, students and external stakeholder feedback. The Periodic Review for the Hospitality and Events Management and Business School carried out in May 2015, however, made limited reference to international block teaching. The review team **recommends** appropriate consideration be given to block teaching in future reports.

25 The Assistant Dean visits Hong Kong and teaches at least once a year as well as carrying out face-to-face meetings with the Principal and Director regarding existing programme development, to follow up on any quality issues, recruitment forecasts and to explore new opportunities.

26 UCB conducts an annual Collaborative Provision Review and the University of Birmingham conducts a biannual check of websites for collaborative provision

31 The General Student Regulations 2017 includes information about Plagiarism and Discipline Code and the Quality Code for Moderation 2015 makes it clear that it abides by Quality Code B6.

32 The Exam Boards ensure a Lecturer represents each Module. An Exam Unit Report is produced, the reports however contained limited information/analysis about Block teaching other than a general comment that block teaching students do not perform as well as full-time UCB students. The review team **recommends** consideration should be given to include more details about block teaching students.

33 Information on how to appeal or make a complaint is contained within the Student Handbook. Students confirm they are aware of the process. No formal complaints have been received. Complaints are first raised with the Block Administrator in Hong Kong and normally addressed informally. The process for appeals and complaints however is clear; once UCB channels have been exhausted the complaint/appeal is referred to the University of Birmingham before eventually going to Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

34 The University of Birmingham accredits all three degrees. The review team concludes that the arrangements for assessment are clear, rigorously applied and consistent with the expectation of the UK Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning.

Quality of learning opportunities

35 Student admissions are managed by UCB's dedicated Admissions Office and the International Office. Aston Institute forwards all applications to UCB for consideration prior to an offer of a place being made. Applicants are assessed for equivalent level 4 and 5 qualifications and/or evidence of prior supervisory and management experience. Applicants are assessed by the Assistant Director for International Recruitment and verified by the Assistant Dean for Block Provision. Information about APEL/APA is provided to students, and a request for evidence of content and assessment of previous programmes is requested on application. This is reviewed by the Dean/Assistant Dean and Director of International Affairs who carry out a matching exercise comparing modules of previous programmes. A mapping form is sent to the Admissions Office before an offer is made. Those who do not have the experience are required to undertake an online Bridging Module from the BTEC programme; local academic support is provided. All applicants are required to have an International English Language Testing System score of six or equivalent.

36 Applications and offers are accepted up until four weeks prior to the start of each block (with the exception of Research Design where there are no new admissions). Students are then pre-enrolled by the UCB Block Administrator and the UCB Finance department to provide them with a log-in and password to the UCB portal. Full enrolment of each student and permanent UCB accounts are created after induction and on receipt of all necessary completed enrolment forms and verified ID.

37 The programme structure reflects the programmes delivered at UCB with some minor alterations to suit the block mode of delivery. The teaching style is adapted in order to fully engage students in the evenings after a full day at work. Each programme consists of five modules, a 40-credit research design and four 20-credit modules. Each module contains 36 hours of teaching during an4(ex)13(pe)3(r)-3(i)5(en)]TJETQq0.000008871 0 1.5 Tm0 g0 G2 reW*nBT/F1

and Aston Institute contact details. The students are given instruction on the use of the CANVAS VLE.

39 A Module Study Pack is issued four weeks prior to the module commencing. The pack contains details of the module, lectures and topics, reading materials and details of the assessments. The learning outcomes (LO) for the module are clear and appropriate for level 6 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and it is also made clear which LOs are being assessed. The Study Pack is published on the VLE and a hard copy is made available via the administrator in Hong Kong. The pack for the module is compiled by the Module Leader and teaching team. It is internally verified by the Module Moderator (for assessments) and the Assistant Dean for accuracy prior to publication.

40 A Programme Handbook also provides details of aims, LOs and the timetable of teaching sessions. Details of assignment submission including drafts are also included as are the tutorials allocated for each block.

41 Two weeks prior to delivery of a module a copy of lectures, additional exercises and reading are made available on the VLE. Students confirm the information is very helpful and helps them prepare for the module. Hard copies of the information are also produced as handouts and made available to students by the Block Administrator at the beginning of each teaching session. Detailed guidance for the scheduling of the block programmes is available.

42 All students have access to UCB CANVAS VLE for the duration of their studies. The
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for monitoring and reviewing tutorial arrangements. The Programme Manager acts as the Personal Tutor for academic and pastoral support.

46 The Assistant Dean at UCB is responsible for the overall programme management and staffing of each block. The Assistant Dean is supported by a Block Administrator and designated Block Programme Manager. The Block Administrator at UCB and Block Administrator at Aston Institute are in regular communication. The Block Administrator is the main point of contact for lecturing staff at UCB and the Block Administrator in Hong Kong is the local contact for students. The Hong Kong Block Administrator is held in high regard by both students and staff. She coordinates teaching facilities, ensures the availability of study space for students outside of the teaching block weeks, provides general student support, and communicates group queries and feedback to the lecturing team and programme managers at UCB. Having a dedicated Block Administrator ensures a close and effective relationship and is a **positive feature**.

47 All staff are employed by UCB and are experienced at delivering to international students, specifically Chinese students; the majority are established within the teaching teams to ensure consistency of delivery. New members of the Hong Kong block teaching team are always accompanied by experienced staff who have previously taught on UCB programmes in Hong Kong, some of whom have over 20 years' experience of delivering in Hong Kong or overseas. UCB has a robust recruitment and induction process for its staff and the majority of the lecturers are accredited by the University of Birmingham which enables them to access the facilities. A team of three lecturing staff are scheduled for each teaching block to ensure adequate teaching resources are available throughout the week, this is arranged around their teaching timetable at UCB. Having the same module team as in UCB is a **positive feature**.

48 All lecturers undergo an annual Professional Development Review conducted by their line manager or by another approved reviewer. They are also subject to annual teaching observations conducted by the line manager or another nominated person, an electronic record is made on ProObserve.

49 The programmes are well managed,

checked and the Student Programme Handbook is drafted and reviewed regularly by the Programme Manager.

53 UCB processes for ensuring accuracy and reliability of student, programme and marketing information is well documented and effectively operated. It meets the requirement of the Quality Code, Part C.

Conclusion

From the evidence provided by UCB, and from the discussions with managers, administrators, staff and students of both UCB and Aston Institute, the review team formed the view that the University of Birmingham and UCB's arrangements for oversight of the partnership are robust and clearly articulated. The team is also of the opinion that the collaborative provision of the three parties meets the University of Birmingham and UCB's requirements in terms of vision, mission and values. The partnership is valued by staff who are clearly passionate about their role and students see them as inspirational. Students would like UCB to offer a wider range of programmes including postgraduate, and UCB confirmed plans are in place to develop postgraduate programmes. Although there is evidence of alumni being invited to deliver guest lectures on certain modules, the panel felt this could be extended to other modules, as this input was highly valued by students. The panel also thought employers could be involved more in the future developments and support of students on the programme.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the teaching blocks are every two to three months which means there is regular contact with the teaching team (paragraph 18)
- the industry experience of the Lecturers (paragraph 45)
- having a dedicated Block Administrator ensures a close and effective relationship, the Block Administrator in Hong Kong is held in high regard (paragraph 46)
- having the same module team as in UCB is a strong feature (paragraph 47).

Recommendations

The University College Birmingham is recommended to take the following action:

- appropriate consideration be given to block teaching in future Periodic Review reports (paragraph 24)
- consideration should be given to include more details about block teaching students in the Exam Unit report (paragraph 32).

University College Birmingham's response to the review report

University College Birmingham regards the report of the partnership in Hong Kong which was considered within the QAA TNE review as very positive. The relationship with the Aston Institute is a very stable

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