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

February 2014

Executive summary

Heriot-Watt University (the University) opened its Dubai campus in 2005. Since then the number of students has grown from 120 to 3,500. The University's portfolio of 58 programmes matches the demands of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) employment market, and includes foundation, undergraduate and master's courses. Students come from 80 nationalities, the largest groups being from India and Pakistan, who respectively make up about a third and about a sixth of the student population. In 2013, the University completed the second phase of a two-phase expansion into a new, purpose-built facility.

The University's accommodation in Dubai and most of the infrastructure is provided by Eikon International Holdings, a company registered in Dubai. 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. The University employs the teaching staff at the Dubai campus. All Dubai-based staff are full members of academic schools.

The University follows a strategy of alignment for all its transnational education: students may have diverse learning experiences, but standards are identical wherever Heriot-Watt programmes are offered. The University has worked closely with the Dubai authorities to ensure that it meets all UAE and Dubai regulatory requirements. All awards are made by the University and the qualifications are licensed by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) on an annual, programme-by-programme basis.

The review identified positive features, including the imaginative and concerted way the University manages student representation and the extent to which it has succeeded in incorporating Dubai students into an institution-wide student body. The review found that the University's integration of policies, structures and staff responsibilities across the whole organisation flowed from the carefully thought-through implications of its International Strategy, and was reflected in its arrangements for governance and management, not just of the branch, but of the whole organisation. The review identified some actions for the University, including improving training and support for fixed-term, part-time lecturers, progressing its intention to align student services capacity more closely with what is provided at its UK campuses, and keeping assessment feedback and turnaround times under review.

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 has worked closely with the Dubai authorities to ensure that it meets all UAE and Dubai regulatory requirements. All awards are made by the University and the qualifications are licensed by KHDA on an annual, programme-by-programme basis. The latest confirmation of the University's continuing good standing with KHDA congratulates them on its 'great commitment' and reports no 'outstanding issues' in relation to its status. The University states that its qualifications are recognised in Dubai by all public and private entities for all purposes. Due to federal restrictions, degrees awarded on branch campuses are not recognised for government employment in the rest of the Emirates.

8   Developing provision for international students at the University's campuses in Scotland and for international students remote from its Scottish campuses has been a major strategic activity for the University since the mid-1990s, and one in which it has shown considerable success. The University consequently has much experience of delivering study programmes globally, mainly through a wide network of Approved Learning Partner (ALP) institutions and independent distance learning. The strapline to all the University's strategic plans is 'Distinctly Global', and 'Internationalisation' is one of three headline aspects of the overall Strategic Plan 2013-18. The Strategic Plan commits the University to doubling the scale of its international activities (the establishment of a second branch campus - the Malaysian campus - was one of the internationalisation priorities and is now achieved). Increasing student numbers at the Dubai campus by 50 per cent was identified as a Key Performance Indicator in the Plan. The University states that the Dubai campus generated 12.4 per cent of its overall income in 2012-13, and that this proportion is likely to rise.

9   The University now has considerably more students abroad than on its home campuses. It has 29,500 registered students in total, comprising 8,630 students in Scotland; 3,500 students on the Dubai campus; 60 students on the Malaysia campus; and 17,800 on international (transnational) programmes, including independent distance learners and those studying with its 49 ALPs.

10   In respect of the branch campuses, the University is responsible for all academic aspects of the programmes on offer. Students are given the same learning material, follow the same academic structure and calendar, and are assessed to the same standards as at the home campuses.

11   The University follows a strategy of alignment for all its transnational education: students may have diverse learning experiences, but standards are identical wherever Heriot-Watt programmes are offered. Therefore, although the initiative to develop a campus in Dubai was a new departure for the University, it was an extension of the existing International Strategy in key respects.

Set-up and operation

Establishing the branch

12   The initiative for a branch campus arose as part of a planned search by the University's International Unit for opportunities to develop academic initiatives overseas. In the course of this search, the Management Committee of the first of the free zones, Dubai Knowledge Village, invited the University to join the higher education cluster then under development in the second free zone, DIAC.

13   On the basis of the approach from Dubai Knowledge Village, the then Heriot-Watt Deputy Principal (International Academic Development) wrote a brief concept paper for its Planning and Management Executive (PME) explaining the nature of the opportunity and the considerations to be borne in mind in evaluating it, and proposing next steps. This led to a formal proposal from the PME with much more detail, including initial ideas on distribution of responsibilities between academic and infrastructure providers, a teaching model, academic plan and costs. The formal proposal also identified a project manager and a project board to take the proposal forward, and specified University procedural requirements, including approval by the University Court and Senate.

14   The University Court was kept closely informed of progress and received the proposal, reports from its Staffing Strategy Committee and Finance Committee, and also ascertained the view of the Senate, which considered the academic aspects. An academic action plan was considered by the project board and Schools, and a Dubai Campus

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 project risk register was maintained by the project manager. The high-level risks associated with the project were kept under review by a Risk Management Strategy Group. The review team did not have access to detailed papers, but the University's account of the way they managed the risks of the project suggested that they were thorough.

20   A finalised agreement between the University and the AIP was signed in June 2006. The Academic Infrastructure Provision Agreement details the responsibilities of the University and Eikon. The University is responsible for the teaching and academic input in accordance with its licence obligations with the Authority. Eikon provides the AIP Services to the AIP Service Standard.

21   The University supplied the review team with a copy of the signed and notarised Resolution of the Heriot-Watt Management Board, which guarantees its obligations to the joint venture company formed to support the campus; identifies the University's legal

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 on the grounds that some of its contents were confidential, and so it is not possible for the review team to comment on its adequacy.

Making the branch work

22   The University's academic management structures were in the process of change at the time of the review. Since September 2013, the University has had a common academic structure covering its operations at all campuses. Under this structure, Heads of School have responsibility for all academic matters relating to programmes offered in their School's discipline areas across all campuses, regardless of mode or location of delivery. It is intended that, from September 2014, each of the six Heriot-Watt schools will have a common committee structure, including a school studies committee, a learning and teaching committee, and one or more boards of studies, with corresponding management roles in each school: Director of Academic Quality; Director of Learning and Teaching; and Director of Studies. Branch campuses have dedicated Directors of Studies for each school. These arrangements are described in briefing papers, widely published on the University's website, which appeared to the review team to be clear and effective in communicating principles and responsibilities to all concerned.

23   There is an Academic Council at the Dubai campus, with terms of reference, constitution and membership set by the University's Senate. The Council is chaired by the Vice-Principal (Dubai) (VPD), and includes senior staff from Dubai and Edinburgh, staff elected from the Dubai campus, and student representatives. The VPD is both Head of Campus and a member of the University Executive. Other University appointments include Associate Heads of School; teaching staff; a Dubai Director of Administration and Registrar; heads of finance and marketing/recruitment; librarian and library staff; a Careers Officer and a Development Officer and Student President. All other staff are appointed by Eikon.

24   Governance of the partnership - that is, the relationship between the University and the AIP - is by an Operational Management Committee and the Dubai Campus Executive Committee. The VPD chairs the Operational Management Committee, and the University Secretary chairs the Dubai Campus Executive Committee. The University states that its External Affairs department works closely with the Marketing section in Dubai, and that there are regular telephone conversations between the Head of Marketing in Dubai, Director of Student Recruitment and the Director of External Affairs to discuss the marketing strategy, publicity of news stories and other developments. The Head of Marketing and Student Recruitment in Dubai has a formal reporting line to the Director of External Affairs at the Edinburgh Campus, and the Director also has responsibility for the Recruitment and Admissions team. The University manages academic quality and standards matters (including assessment), and student records, certification and transcripts. Day-to-day administrative tasks such as data entry are performed by Eikon staff.

25   The University's Academic Registry is responsible for maintaining the academic policies and guidelines within which the programmes and students at the Dubai campus operate. There is a specific External Programmes Officer based in Edinburgh who is responsible for administrative liaison with the Dubai campus. The University stated that these arrangements worked effectively. In particular, though administration of admissions is carried out by staff employed by Eikon, decisions about admissions were always by University academic staff.

26   The review team noted the integration of policies, structures and staff responsibilities across the whole organisation, and considered that the University had thought through and implemented the implications of its International Strategy, reflecting

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 Engineering, use 'flying faculty'.

33   Staff are recruited after advertisement and interview, involving panel members from the home campus. Advertisement is for 'Lecturer/Teaching Fellow', and appointment to one or the other grade is dependent on assessment of research capability. The review team was informed that the University intends that 65 per cent of appointments should be to the 'lecturer' grade, though at present it is only in Built Environment that lecturers are in the majority. The University generally wishes to intensify its research activity; however, teaching fellows are required to engage in scholarship and transfer between grades of staff is possible. Staff appointed to permanent posts are regarded as full members of the schools to which they are appointed. The University also appoints a number of part-time staff on fixed-term contracts.

34   The review team was informed that teaching staff are 'encouraged' to take a higher education teaching qualification (Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice - PGCAP), though it is not a requirement. Permanent staff are subject to probation and development review, like staff at the home campus. Dubai-based academic staff have regular and frequent contact with those teaching related subjects and courses at the home campus by email and phone. However, there appears to be no formal programme of staff development. There are no formal arrangements for observation of teaching, either by mentors or managers, except as part of the PGCAP. Fixed-contract, part-time staff are not supported by probation.

35   Students who met the review team were complimentary about both permanent staff and staff visiting from Scotland. However, some students were critical of fixed-contract, part-time staff, in terms both of their skills as teachers and their availability, though students from the School of Textiles and Design dissociated themselves from this view. The review team was informed that part-time staff in the School of Textiles and Design were all engaged in the PGCAP, and also that the school had arranged mentoring for these staff. Staff from the School of Textiles and Design also referred to an informal scheme of teaching observation in the School, and to the way learning and teaching styles in the subject encouraged interchange of this kind.

36   There were significant differences between the University's strategies for appointing and managing permanent staff and for staff on fixed-term, part-time contracts. The former were included in standard arrangements for staff support, and were explicitly and effectively encouraged to feel part of the overall staffing complement of the University. In Fashion and Textiles, staffing management practices at a local level had encouraged a similar inclusiveness for all staff. The review team took the view that different levels of student satisfaction with teaching were related to these different practices. The University is **recommended** to consider how the teaching expertise of part-time staff on fixed-term contracts can be encouraged and supported.

Quality assurance

Academic standards and quality of programmes

37   The papers supplied to the review team by the University suggest that there is a common set of expectations about how to forward a proposal for a new course, and a set of templates to capture certain information. There is also an overarching set of policies, summarised in the briefing papers produced by the Academic Registry. Some of these have implications for programme design, such as the policy on Programme Titles, Learning Outcomes and Courses (multi-location/multi-mode programmes) which imposes certain

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); course notes (covering key features such as which courses are compulsory, progression requirements, etc.); course description (covering aims, outcomes, and teaching, learning and assessment policies for the course); and course set descriptors (aims, syllabus, learning outcomes, assessment methods for related groups of synoptically linked courses). The course proposals provided by the University suggest that coverage of these templates has varied over the period during which courses have been established at Dubai, and some have been consolidated, but the basic shape and coverage of the document set has remained constant.

39   The University's procedural document Disciplines, Programmes and Courses: Summary of Approval Processes (2011) made some changes to extant procedures, including changes to terminology. In particular, what was a module is now a course, and what was a course is now a programme. Under the procedure 'course approval has been fully devolved to Schools', new courses and changes were formerly reported to the University-level committees, and approval of programmes and disciplines are for the Undergraduate Studies Committee or Postgraduate Studies Committee (Studies committees) as relevant. The papers supplied by the University suggest that courses are approved in groups rather than individually, though a substantial document is still generated. In all but three cases, the information is recorded as 'for information' (that is, not for judgement) in the Studies committees' minutes.

40   The Studies committees approve on behalf of Senate. All the approval papers supplied to the review team predate 2011, but they appear comprehensive in respect of such matters as learning outcomes, assessment requirements, and so forth. The University takes the view that since the same programme is delivered in Edinburgh and Dubai, and programme approval is School-based, no difference in procedure is required for Dubai delivery. However, the review team confirmed that Dubai-based staff are involved in giving assurance that necessary resources are in place, where the development is initiated in Edinburgh. It appears that as the campus develops, the procedure for the delivery of an existing University programme at Dubai is initiated by Dubai staff on the basis of market demand, so they are engaged at the outset. University programmes delivered in Dubai are also subject to a process of approval by KHDA before delivery.

41   It has been noted in previous reviews that the University's approval procedures involve no external view, and consideration of 'the benefits of greater participation by external subject specialists in its programme approval process' has been identified previously by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as an 'area for development'. The University has determined to make no change in this aspect of its procedures, on the grounds that external specialists are often involved in programme development and are required at other points, such as examination and periodic review.

42   The University states that all its academic provision is monitored annually through the annual monitoring and review (AMR) process, which primarily aims to monitor and review academic standards and quality; the student experience; and progress towards the University's strategic objectives in learning and teaching. Key objectives of the AMR process are to integrate assurance and enhancement; engage in discussions with Schools within a dynamic, interactive process; and incorporate review of Academic Performance data. The procedure is outlined in a briefing paper published on the University's website.

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 forms, which are the same for all campuses. The completed forms are centrally analysed and the results fed back to schools to inform AMR. The paperwork is completed by Schools. Partner AMRs are reviewed by Associate Deans and the Academic Registry; School AMRs by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and Academic Registry. The reports are considered at meetings between the reviewers and senior members of schools, and the outcomes reported to the University Quality and Standards and Learning and Teaching Board. The committees produce a joint report for Senate and University Executive on the outcomes of the procedure as a whole. In relation to the Dubai programmes, annual monitoring is covered by the reports of the various schools to which the programmes belong.

44   Some reports supplied to the review team by the University were compiled before the 2012 arrangements, which appear more template driven than those they replaced, and some after. The reports are of varying quality, but the best of them are critical and scholarly documents providing the University with thorough analysis and a well-founded basis for action. The use of data (for comparison of the achievements of students on the same courses based in Dubai and in Edinburgh, for instance) is extremely good in some, and less so in others. On the evidence of the reports, the use of the template has been effective at ensuring more consistency between reports, and key data is always included. This has perhaps been at the cost of some loss of detail and sophistication in the best school reports. The latest iteration of the reporting cycle requires campus-by-campus input to the AMR. On the basis of the evidence supplied, it can be confirmed that activities on the Dubai campus are dealt with thoroughly, that extant reports form a good basis for the University's continuing oversight of its activities in the UAE, and that the new campus-by-campus sections should enhance this oversight.

45   The University's Briefing Paper 2: Periodic Review: Academic Review states that the University has had a linked system of periodic review, which includes enhancement-led Academic Review based on disciplines and schools; Internal Audit, also based on schools, but assurance-led, and focusing on risk; Thematic Review, focusing on a University-wide learning, teaching and assessment topic; and Professional Services Academic-Related Review, focusing on the University's learning and teaching strategy. The briefing paper states that the review of academic activities at the Dubai campus is integrated with Academic Review. Academic Review responds to the requirements of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework, and the outcomes are reported annually to SFC. The contents of the briefing paper are expanded in the comprehensive procedural papers covering Academic Review on the University's website, now in their third version.

46   Most of the review reports provided to the review team predate the 2012 arrangements. However, the Academic Review of the Institute of Petroleum Engineering (IPE) was conducted subsequently, in February 2013. The two-day review took place in Edinburgh, and was chaired by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). Two external specialist academics were included in the six-person team. There were two student members and the President of the Students' Union acted as an observer. The review was informed by an earlier Academic Review of November 2012, focusing on IPE at the Dubai campus. This review took place at the Dubai campus, and was also chaired by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). The panel included Edinburgh-based and Dubai-based staff, and a Dubai-based student. IPE's response to the Dubai report was included as an appendix with an action plan indicating timelines and persons responsible. Senior staff confirmed that the mechanism of separate, preliminary review in Dubai is now established as the way in which branch-campus delivery is integrated into Academic Review, and referred to a recent review of Built Environment programmes, where there had been a similar Dubai-based event.

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 deal of energy and ingenuity into establishing student representative structures that compensate for the absence of a union. There is a Development Officer and Student President, a salaried post supported by the University, who chairs a Student Council, composed of seven members representing different constituencies. School officers appointed for each school are selected after interview and have explicit reporting and representative duties. School officers keep in contact with student class representatives, who are members of Staff-Student Liaison Committees for each programme. School officers provide monthly reports to the Student President and Council on the basis of the information they collect from the class representatives.

51   The Student Council and its officers were highly valued by students, and very active and effective in representing students to the University and its partner, notwithstanding the constraints on their acting politically. The imaginative and concerted way in which the University manages student representation is identified as a **positive feature**.

52   The University has written regulations covering all aspects of assessment for modular first degrees and taught master's. All Heriot-Watt undergraduate degrees offered at the Dubai campus are modular; the regulations for Heriot-Watt taught master's apply to all such programmes, wherever delivered.

53   The first-degree regulations cover a range of matters including, inter alia, titles, credit volume and level, periods of study, accreditation of prior learning, attendance, and arrangements for assessment and progression. The regulation prescribes that there shall be external examiners, defines membership and powers of assessment, progression and award boards, and prescribes an outline marking scheme. The taught master's regulations cover an appropriate subset of these headings.

54   Assessment strategies are approved at programme level by means of the templates required, in particular the course description, which covers aims and outcomes and the assessment activities that will test them, and for groups of linked courses a course set descriptor, which covers the same matters at the course level. As indicated above, there is no external input. However, the information appeared comprehensive enough to provide a sound basis for judgement about the validity of the assessment methods described.

55   The University operates a Common Assessment and Progression System (CAPS) whereby grades in the range of A-F are assigned and the University awards credit points in accordance with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS).

56   In essence, the University's alignment policy and the requirements of the UAE regulatory authority mean that the same coursework assignments and examination question papers are set for home and Dubai campuses; examinations are conducted in the same way and under the same conditions; marking and moderation of student work and examination scripts is the same; and there are the same requirements for feedback to students on assessment performance. The same assessment board, with the same external examiners, determines outcomes for home and Dubai students on the same courses.

57   The University's guidelines on moderation suggest that 10 per cent of work is reviewed as a minimum. Moderation is carried out first in Dubai, and the sample is then sent to Edinburgh for checking. Where assessment is not by written scripts, such as assessment based on presentations or portfolios, arrangements such as photographing (for garments in Fashion and Textiles) or video conference (for presentations in IPE) are established.

58   It appeared that despite school policies on feedback to students on assessment, students' experience was variable. There was evidence that some students experienced delays in return of work, though the University's policy is for a turnaround of two to three weeks. Some staff suggested that, though generalised feedback on assessment performance overall was always provided, individual feedback was provided only when requested. Senior staff acknowledged that historically there had been problems with the University's performance overall on return of marked work, and that this had been reflected in NSS scores, but that considerable progress had been made in this area. Students confirmed that, following complaints about this matter, quality of feedback and turnaround times for assessed work had improved. The University is **recommended** to keep arrangements for feedback and return of marked work to students under review, and ensure greater consistency between schools in these matters.

59   The University provided the review team with a range of documents dealing with arrangements for assessment boards, including guidelines on examination procedures, the categorisation of decisions on outcomes, the award of discretionary credits, links between University credit and the SCQF, and various arrangements for dealing with special circumstances. None of these documents mentions Dubai explicitly, but the arrangements cover delivery of University courses wherever delivered.

60   The University's comprehensive website includes various procedural documents including a Handbook on External Examining For Taught Programmes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate) (the Handbook), which provides guidelines on selection and appointment, responsibilities including reporting requirements, procedures for the scrutiny of reports within the University, and follow-up actions.

61   External examiners for home-campus programmes are the same as those for the Dubai campus programmes. External examiner reports therefore cover all instances of the programmes they examine; however, there is a specific section of the report template where the examiner is asked, in relation to programmes delivered in Dubai, to confirm that the

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. It can be confirmed, therefore, that procedural mechanisms exist to check that reports are received and that actions are planned.

66   Students stated that though they were aware of external examining arrangements, they did not see external examiners' reports. Senior staff of the University stated that the reports are not shared with students as a matter of policy. In light of national expectations, the University is **recommended** to keep under review University policy and practice in relation to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), in particular in the use of views external to the institution in programme approval, and sharing reports of external examiners with students (see paragraphs 41 and 54).

67   A student based at the Dubai campus receives the same form of certificate and transcript as a student based at any other campus of the University. The certificate records the name of the student, the name of the award and the date of graduation. The transcript shows the courses passed and the number of credits gained. Neither certificate nor transcript shows the location of study. Previous QAA reports note that the University's policy

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-off.

69   Students at the Dubai campus are provided with dedicated handbooks for their programmes. In most schools, there are separate handbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate students; typically a single handbook covers all programmes at the same level in the school.

70   All handbooks effectively provide key information, contact names and numbers, and indicate where fuller information can be found on procedural, regulatory and similar matters. The handbooks also include in convenient form the kind of material that would be expected in a programme specification, including information on individual courses. Students confirmed that advance information was complete, accurate and timely.

71   Undergraduate students can apply to transfer to a Scottish campus at any time after their first year in Dubai. A number of students each year choose to take up this option and recently students from Scotland have chosen to transfer to the Dubai campus for part of their studies.

72   Both postgraduate and undergraduate students confirmed that they considered themselves to be students of the University, and that it was particularly valuable to them to feel that they were judged by the same standards as any other student of the University. The extent to which the University has succeeded in incorporating Dubai students into an institution-wide student body is identified as a **positive feature**.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the integrity and focus of the University's strategy for a global institution (paragraph 26)
- the imaginative and concerted way in which the University manages student representation (paragraph 51)
- the extent to which the University has succeeded in incorporating Dubai students into an institution-wide student body (paragraph 72).

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).

Heriot-Watt University's response to the review report

Heriot Watt University welcomes the publication of the QAA Review Report relating to operations at its Dubai campus. The University is pleased that the review team identified a number of areas of good practice, and is committed to implementing all recommendations to further enhance the student learning experience.