Navitas UK Holdings Ltd

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

May 2012

Annex 4: International College Robert Gordon University

Introduction and background

International College Robert Gordon University (ICRGU) recruited its first cohort of students in November 2011. Programmes currently on offer are:

- First Year Degree in Accounting and Finance
- First Year Degree in Computing
- First Year Degree in Engineering
- First Year Degree in Management
- First Year Degree in Media and Communications
- Pre-Master's in Management

These are delivered by ICRGU staff under the standard delivery model, where the College staff teach all of the programmes. Students who are successful on the first year degree programme progress to year two taught and assessed by The Robert Gordon University (the University). There is no integrated provision where Navitas students are taught alongside University students on the same programme.

Originally, the College and Edinburgh International College were to be managed as a single entity, but, in discussion with senior staff at ICRGU Navitas revised this decision and a College Principal and Director has now been appointed separately for each college. Management of the two Scottish Navitas colleges will now mirror the arrangements in England and Wales.

The normal structure of Navitas committees has been set up with all having met once, and the Academic Advisory Committee (AAC) twice. The University indicated it regarded the committee structure as robust and fit for purpose.

Robust systems are in place for the approval and monitoring of programmes by both Navitas and the University. Rigorous moderation of assessments is also undertaken by the University. The student voice is effective and new arrangements being introduced will reinforce this.

There are robust systems for ensuring the accuracy of public information in both the College and the University.

Key findings

Academic standards

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that there can be **confidence** that academic standards at International College Robert Gordon University are managed appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of the provider and the partner higher education institution (HEI).

Quality of learning opportunities

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that there can be **confidence** that the quality of learning opportunities at International College Robert Gordon University is assured and enhanced appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of the provider and the partner HEI.

Public information

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers International College Robert Gordon University that reliance **can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

All features of good practice identified in the main report applied at ICRGU.

Recommendations

No matters requiring action by ICRGU were identified.

Detailed findings

How effectively do Navitas and ICRGU fulfil responsibilities for the management of academic standards at this college?

1   The Recognition and Articulation Agreement (RAA) was signed with the University in 2010. The RAA signed was said to be the current standard agreement used by Navitas, but staff of the University indicated it had been significantly redrafted by the University. The review team had sight of an RAA document on site which was presented as the current standard agreement, but it had been significantly censored, so that a full appreciation of the nature of the agreement was not possible.

2   The RAA seen on-site made extensive reference to an Operations Manual. This was confirmed still to be in draft format, under development by the General Manager of Navitas, and its purpose was to make operational the Navitas's College Policies and Regulations documents. When development of the Operations manual is complete, it would go to the Joint Strategic Partnership Management Board for confirmation by the University. The University had so far not seen this document.

3   Securing standards depends on the programme approval process used by the University, together with the involvement of the University link tutors. The latter had been

appointed at a senior level within the University to ensure proper development of the role and to give the University security in relation to standards in the early stages of the relationship. The intention was to cascade these job roles to less senior staff as the relationship and the role of link tutor became more developed. The review team regard this as good practice on the part of the University.

Approval

4   The University has decided to utilise a variant of its own programme approval process to approve the programmes to be offered in ICRGU as progression routes to further study within the University. However, no externality had been incorporated in the approval process as the curriculum had already been approved for delivery within the University. The approval panels are chaired by the University's Deputy Principal and the other two members are professorial-level staff. Minutes from the panel meetings, all held in September 2011, showed a process of rigorous scrutiny with conditions and recommendations being identified for action by ICRGU and the link faculties of the University.

Annual Monitoring

5   ICRGU uses the Navitas standard process of completion of a monitoring report at the end of each semester, with an annual overview report also being produced. It is planning to incorporate a student representative into the module review panels, but confirmed this has not yet been made operational. The University is able to access ICRGU's monitoring outcomes through the Academic Advisory Committee (AAC), with papers flowing into its committees at institutional and faculty levels. The University confirmed it would not be carrying out any separate annual monitoring using its own procedures.

Periodic Review

6   Though the provision is less than a year old, the AAC has discussed the approach which will be taken to support periodic review. It was anticipated ICRGU provision would fall within the University's Institution-led subject review procedure, while there was said to be provision within the RAA for a separate, five-yearly review of all provision.

How effective is the management of student assessment?

7   College staff set and mark assessments based on a validation condition set by the University. University staff moderate the assessments before they are presented to students and the students' work once it has been marked by College staff. This was confirmed by University staff and also in the AAC minutes. Technically, this only applies for assessments contributing at least fve per cent to a module mark, but the University indicated that in the early stages it was reviewing all work. Students confirmed they are clear about assessment requirements and they received good quality and timely feedback on assessed work. Normal progression and Module Boards are held with link tutors attending.

8   Students were aware of the Navitas Confirmation of Attainment statement (CAS) they would receive when they progressed from ICRGU to the University. They are recruited under the University's CAS numbers and the University accepted that it had ultimate responsibility for standards on ICRGU part of the programme, successful completion of which led to automatic progression to the next stage of the programme within the University. Notwithstanding this, the University regarded ICRGU students as having affiliate student status only, and the progression from ICRGU delivered part of the programme to the University delivered part as an articulation arrangement. Therefore, the University only issues its Diploma Supplement in relation to the final three years of the undergraduate programme which students take within the University. This means that students have no

certification of their first year degree studies, including the credit achieved and level at which this was achieved, since the Navitas CAS statement does not include this detail. This is also true of students on the pre-master's programme. As associate students, any student who successfully completed the first year of an undergraduate programme within College, but was then unable to proceed for personal reasons, would not receive an exit award from the University. The review team concluded that the certification of learning achievements at the first year undergraduate level within Navitas is something which should be reconsidered for the benefit of the students.

How effectively are UK external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

9   Reference to the elements of the Academic Infrastructure is embedded in the approval process, and ICRGU appeared to rely on the University in relation to quality assurance of programmes. Teaching staff are not familiar with programme specifications but used the definitive module guides effectively.

How effectively are external examining, moderation, or verification used to assure academic standards?

10   There is no external examining of either the undergraduate or the pre-masters programmes. However, University staff moderate both the assessment vehicles and the assessment outcomes.

How effectively is statistical information used to monitor and assure academic standards?

11   The Navitas standard management information system known as MAZE, generates data that is used in the preparation of comprehensive module reports and to inform the semester and annual reports which go to the AAC. This was confirmed by University staff. ICRGU's use of MAZE was seen by the review team as being effective.

How effectively are responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities fulfilled?

12   Students rely on learning resources provided to ICRGU through the RAA, and also have access to all learning resources of the University including support services. Teaching staff indicated that, should they need additional learning resources to support delivery, requests would be routed via ICRGU management structure. Students confirmed they regarded the availability of learning resources as very good, and they made use of University provided library and information, and information technology resources. They are also clear about accessing the virtual learning environments of both ICRGU and the University, and had received training for both. ICRGU uses standard Navitas Quality Improvement pro formas to identify areas for development and improvement.

How effectively are external points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

13   The Academic infrastructure, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements are used as reference points in the development of curriculum.

How do Navitas and ICRGU assure themselves that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

14   ICRGU uses a combination of manager observation of teaching; analysis of student feedback; and analysis of module assessment results and trends to gain an overview and to ensure the quality of teaching and learning is maintained and enhanced. The review team regard this as effective.

How is student feedback used to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

15   ICRGU uses the standard Navitas approach of locally designed module and programme questionnaires to elicit student feedback. The outcomes of module feedback questionnaires go to Learning and Teaching Board. Students are currently represented on the Student Forum which has met fortnightly since the beginning of 2012. There is also an intention to include students on the Learning and Teaching Board and the module review panels, but this has yet to be implemented. Students confirmed they had been briefed in their role as representatives by ICRGU and the University Students' Union.

How effectively do Navitas and ICRGU assure themselves that students are supported effectively?

16   Personal support for students takes the form of initial programme induction, information available through the student handbooks and student portal, routine one-to-one sessions between staff and students and, where students are identified as needing it, through the Navitas Student in Jeopardy scheme. At the time of the review visit, ICRGU was in the process of introducing a new personal tutor scheme. Students confirmed they are able to access staff by email and by making appointments. However, in practice, the small student numbers coupled with the approachability of both teaching and administrative staff made seeking support quick and easy to achieve.

How effectively does ICRGU manage the recruitment and admission of students?

17   ICRGU has an Admissions Officer who receives student applications. Those which meet standard entry requirements are processed at this level and offers made. Non-standard applicants are referred to the College Principal and Director who may discuss them with the University's International Office. Most students had come to the College via agents appointed by the Navitas Group and are satisfied with the support these agents provide.

What are the arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

18   ICRGU is planning to introduce a peer review process, but it is not yet in place. A College staff development workshop also took place at the end of February 2012, and staff are also able to access staff development activities offered by the University through its Department of Education Learning Teaching and Assessment. ICRGU does not currently use PhD students to deliver its programmes. There was some evidence of research informed teaching.

How effectively do Navitas and ICRGU ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

19   Learning resources are detailed at programme approval and recorded in the definitive module documents. By scrutiny of student feedback and regular contact with students, staff are able to ascertain if problems are arising.

How effectively does Navitas' public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this college?

20   In relation to pre-entry information, students said they had found this complete and accurate. It had frequently been provided by Navitas in-country agents. Agents were appointed by the Navitas Group, but agents who actively recruited for ICRGU have a closer relationship. Students were also satisfied with the quality and accuracy of on-course information provided via student handbooks and the student portal, though they were keen to point out that staff were very approachable and accessible, so that information requests could be quickly resolved.

How effective are Navitas' arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing at this college?

21   Public information is available in hard-copy and web formats. Both are subject to rigorous checking and signing off by Navitas and by the University. A three-monthly 'sanity check' is made on ICRGU website to ensure legacy material is not allowed to continue indefinitely on the site.