



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education, December 2021

### The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the monitoring visit was conducted online and included meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the outcomes and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision, since the December 2020 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 Since the review in December 2020, Al-Maktoum has enrolled 100.5 full-time equivalent students onto its programmes with teaching undertaken as a blended approach due to the pandemic. This is an increase of 33.5 (33%) although there was no recruitment to the Advanced Diploma in Arabic Language and, due to the college receiving approval only recently, no students were enrolled to the Advanced Certificate in Business, Advanced Diploma in Business, or the Professional Diploma in Organisational Learning. The College may consider recruitment to these programmes in January 2022 and a full marketing campaign will be in place for September 2022.

3 There has been no overall change to the number of teaching staff but a previous external teacher on the Arabic Language Programme is now employed as an internal teaching fellow. The College has also increased the availability of all academics to engage in one-to-one meetings by telephone and online, and have developed a 'Meet Your Lecturer' system where lecturers are expected to arrange one-to-one discussions with students in weeks five and nine. These measures are welcomed by students. All new programmes will need to be monitored at the next visit.

4 The College continues to work principally with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), as its awarding organisation and the University of Dundee. A new agreement with Trinity College Dublin will commence in September 2022.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The Team concludes that Al-Maktoum has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision. The three recommendations in the 2020 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)) have been addressed although some minor editorial changes are required to documentation as discussed in paragraph 10 below. Actions have led to improvement although it is too early

to assess their full impact, particularly in relation to periodic review. The College continues to meet the regulations and maintain the academic standards of its awarding body, SQA and the University of Dundee, and to engage with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

6 It has reviewed and implemented the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook. These documents now provide in-depth information, about each unit of each programme, and highlight the aims and outcomes of each programme. However, in relation to the higher national programmes, a minor editorial change is required to clarify marking for students.

7 A new Quality Assurance Framework has been developed and forms part of the College's Academic Governance. It is too early to assess the impact of this change. Following a review of the periodic review process in place at the time of the HER(AP), together with discussions with an external consultant, separate procedures and documentation have been developed and were approved for the start of the academic year 2021-22. There are now revised processes for Peer Review, Annual Programme Review and Periodic Review that all consider the student journey, voice, quality of teaching and student feedback. These revised processes will need to be reviewed at the next monitoring visit.

8 The HER(AP) of December 2020 concluded that the College met all the Common and Core practices and that the level of risk was low in each case. The review findings were initially discussed in a joint meeting of both boards of studies, held immediately after they became available. An action plan was developed, published on the College website and emailed to students. Measures to address the recommendations were discussed within the College's committee structure, prior to revised procedures and documentation being approved by the College's Academic Council in September 2021.

9 The review recognised the College's timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that enabled programmes and student engagement to continue with minimal disruption, as a feature of good practice. The College has since built on the experience it gained during 2020-21, particularly by developing new procedures to encourage and monitor student engagement. It has revised timetables for the Arabic languages and Professional Diploma programmes that have enhanced quality for students and has closely monitored both attendance at online sessions and engagement with studies on the virtual learning environment to alert staff to potential issues. All absentees are contacted immediately to offer support. Measures to reinforce the integrity of assessments are further discussed in paragraphs 10, 11 and 21 below.

10 The College was recommended to ensure that its Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook accurately reflected the assessment practice across the full range of the College's programmes. Both documents have been revised and now specify the academic requirements of all the College's awards. However, in relation to the higher national programmes, a minor editorial change is required to reflect the fact that not all units are marked numerically or as a grade, and that what students are required to demonstrate or achieve to pass is defined in individual unit descriptions. The students reported that they were fully briefed prior to undertaking assessments and that any queries they had were dealt with efficiently by unit organisers. Programme-specific handbooks have been developed although these have yet to be introduced.

11 To ensure the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of SQA, the College applied for, and received, prior verification for all changes to assessments during the pandemic. Measures such as the recording of lectures, increased availability of academics for one-to-one meetings, and the development of a Meet Your Lecturer scheme are safeguarding the standards of the awards.

12 The College was also recommended to update its quality assurance procedures and revise the associated documentation so that these accurately reflect internal monitoring systems. In response, the College developed a Quality Assurance Framework, describing the College's approach to the management of academic standards and quality. It includes details of the membership, terms of reference and reporting lines of committees, and references relevant policies and procedures. The central role of boards of studies in programme monitoring and review is indicated. Both boards have reviewed the effectiveness of their own operations and recently, in order to avoid duplication and increase efficiency, the College has decided to merge the two existing boards of studies in to one. This minor change will also need to be reflected in the framework. At this stage it is too early to assess the full impact of these changes.

13 The College was also recommended to further develop its existing periodic review process. The updated procedure relates to the College's customised awards. It incorporates reference to appropriate external reference points including Subject Benchmark Statements and professional body requirements. It requires input from a range of stakeholders, including students. The published schedule indicates that the first programmes to undergo the new procedure will be Arabic Language programmes in 2022. The periodic review process can only be tested once it has completed a full cycle.

14 The aims, outcomes and curricula of the College's higher national programmes are determined and kept under review by SQA, as the validating body. A revised curriculum for the HND Business was released by SQA in May 2020 and adopted for the new cohort of students starting in the College in September 2021. The higher national programmes largely comprise mandatory units. The College keeps its choice of optional units under review so that the programmes meet with SQA requirements, match staff expertise and align with requirements of the articulation agreement it has with Abertay University.

15 The revised Summative Assessment Policy, Student Handbook, processes for Annual and Periodic Review and the revised Quality Framework were all approved by Academic Council in September 2021.

16 The College's Academic Quality and Standards Committee continues to monitor academic programmes and student performance. Despite difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of student retention and completion during the academic session 2020-21 were satisfactory. Across all the college programmes, out of 54 students that registered, three either withdrew or were withdrawn, and three failed.

17 The College has addressed all points of good practice and the recommendations in the action plan with continued evaluation of the success indicators throughout the year. The one point of good practice has been enhanced, with the development of the Online Examinations and Remote Access Policy, the Recording Educational Activities and Lecture Capture Policy, and a Meeting Your Lecturer system. The College has made good progress on the three recommendations in the action plan. The revised Summative Assessment Policy, Student Handbook, Quality Assurance Procedures and Periodic Review Process have received approval at the appropriate committees but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these new actions.

18 In December 2021, Al-Maktoum had 100.5 full-time equivalent students enrolled on its programmes which is an increase of 33.5 (33%) from December 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-21, students undertook their studies mostly online while managing additional issues within their own employment and family circumstances during lockdown. Despite these pressures, 48 out of 54 (89%) students were successful in passing their programmes.

19 There were three withdrawals - one from the Advanced Diploma in Islamic Studies and two from the Executive Diploma in Finance and Entrepreneurship. The College tried to

contact these students to re-engage them with their studies but they have failed to respond. Results are discussed in each of the Programme Coordinators' reports which are subsequently considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and at the joint Board of Studies (previously Board of Studies A and B).

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

20 The College makes effective use of external reference points, including the SQA quality assurance criteria, *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* and the Quality Code. A comprehensive mapping of all sections of the Quality Code has been undertaken with updates reported at all levels of the College's academic governance structure.

21 Al-Maktoum College strengthened its Core practices (S1, S4) during the pandemic to ensure alignment with SQA policies and maintain academic integrity of assessment/examination papers, as well as assessment processes. All assessment changes were verified by SQA and an internal Verification Form was developed to capture and document comments on incidences of plagiarism on Turnitin. Additionally, the College introduced the Online Examinations and Report Assessment Policy with Pre-delivery, Delivery and Post-delivery Assessment forms. It also reviewed the Summative Assessment Policy and the Student Handbook (paragraphs 6 and 10) together with the Annual Programme Review Policy and the Periodic Review Policy (paragraph 7). These measures have strengthened the College's processes and provide clarity alongside increased transparency and governance.

22 Within the 'Expectations for Quality: Core practices' (Q4), the College has upgraded all IT packages on the computers available to students, redeveloped classrooms with high-quality technology and software to allow delivery of hybrid, online and blended teaching with dual screen technology and software that links the screens and teaching platform. A subscription to NaTakallam to provide additional practice sessions for Arabic language has been welcomed by students.

23 Engagement with students (Q5) and student support (Q9) has been enhanced and includes an extended Induction Programme, and Meet Your Lecturer sessions. The latter provides one-to-one meetings with lecturers to discuss any concerns with studies, assessments or pastoral matters. Meetings are summarised and documented and, with the student's permission, student administration or the Programme Coordinator informed where necessary.

24 Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education continues to engage with its collaborating universities and other external agencies such as Advance HE, IHE and UUK.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

25 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

26 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr David Wright, Reviewer, and Dr Margaret Johnson, QAA Officer, on 7 December 2021.

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