



Navitas UK Holdings Ltd

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

May 2012

Annex 8: Plymouth University International College

Introduction and background

Plymouth University International College (PUIC), formally known as Plymouth Devon International College, was established in October 2009 in collaboration with Plymouth University (the University). The College delivers educational pathways which may incorporate Navitas provision initially with the student then proceeding to University provision leading to an award. A Recognition and Articulation Agreement sets out the legally binding arrangement between the PUIC and the University.

Details of the courses available at the College are available below:

- English Language Program 1
- English Language Program 2
- English Language Program 3

- University Foundation in Business and Enterprise
- University Foundation in Law
- University Foundation in Life Sciences
- University Foundation in Science and Engineering
- University Foundation in Sciences

- First Year Degree in Business
- First Year Degree in Economics
- First Year Degree in Maritime Business
- First Year Degree in Marketing
- First Year Degree in Accounting and Finance
- First Year Degree in Tourism
- First Year Degree in Hospitality
- First Year Degree in Tourism and Hospitality
- First Year Degree in Civil Engineering
- First Year Degree in Computing
- First Year Degree in Electrical Engineering
- First Year Degree in Mechanical Engineering
- First Year Degree in Ocean Science
- First Year Degree in Robotics
- First Year Degree in Biomedical Science
- First Year Degree in Biological Sciences
- First Year Degree in Environmental Sciences Earth Sciences

- First Year Degree in Earth Sciences
- Pre-Master's in Business Management
- Pre-Master's in Tourism and Hospitality Management
- Pre-Master's in Publishing
- Pre-Master's in Creativity and Enterprise

Key findings

Academic standards

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

Good practice

The review noted the features of good practice as detailed in the main report were evident at this college.

Detailed findings

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

Selection and approval of partnership arrangements, including written agreements

1 PUIC does not engage in any international collaborative activity. There is a formal agreement, called a Recognition and Articulation Agreement (RAA), between PUIC and the University. Navitas provide a standard template for this agreement which can then be tailored to local requirements. This is a high level strategic document and is reviewed every 10 years.

2 Navitas adopts a corporate approach to the setting and management of academic standards and learning opportunities through the use of College Policies and Regulations and a Quality Manual. Staff at PUIC and senior staff at the University outlined the use made of these documents. An Academic Advisory Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor, meets each semester. A PUIC report, addressing Key Performance Indicators and academic

outcomes, is prepared by PUIC Director and Principal for consideration at each meeting of the Academic Advisory Committee

3 An Operations Advisory Group, chaired by the College Director and Principal, considers all matters relating to learning resources and the review team learned that students at PUIC have access to all Plymouth University resources applicable to their respective course of study although this access was not immediately evident to the students. The team heard that the computer suite at PUIC is linked directly to the University's system. Both the staff of Plymouth University and PUIC acknowledge the significance of the role of the link tutor in ensuring academic standards.

4 The review team noted that PUIC staff make effective use of College Policies and Regulations to facilitate student understanding of plagiarism. The students the review team met stated that they had access to software to assess their work for plagiarism. The review team concluded that academic standards are secure and that appropriate learning opportunities are made available to students at PUIC.

5 PUIC and the University staff are both of the view that the partnership resulted in relationships that are valued, productive and effective and that there is a mutual approach to the development of new programmes. Strategic approval by both Navitas and the University is required prior to the development of any new programme. Following initial approval, the detailed curriculum is then developed with the University being involved at a very early stage.

6 The review team noted that appropriate consideration is given to resource requirements during the developmental stages ensuring the provision of appropriate learning opportunities for students.

Approval

7 PUIC follows the University's processes and procedures for the approval of all courses. The University staff are of the view that PUIC staff are very responsive and cited the high level of cooperation experienced during the approval process for the Law programme, ensuring its compliance with The University regulations. The review team agreed with this view and confirmed that processes complied with Navitas's College Policies and Regulations relating to the approval of programmes.

Monitoring

8 In accordance with Navitas policy, PUIC engages in both semester and annual monitoring activity. Reports are prepared by the College Director and Principal and submitted to the Academic Advisory Committee (AAC) and the Strategic Partnership Management Board within PUIC prior to submission to the Navitas Learning and Teaching Committee. The University staff reported a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of the information and statistics included within PUIC reports. The partner University commended the flow of information, stating that any requests for information are responded to in a timely manner.

9 In addition to formal structures, the University staff commented on the effectiveness of less formal contact with PUIC staff, including the Liaison Forum, which facilitates communication between PUIC and the University. The review team heard of the good level of attendance at committee meetings by PUIC staff. The review team concluded that the monitoring of programmes is both rigorous and appropriate.

Periodic Review

10 The review team noted that there is a process in place for the periodic review of both programmes and the partnership itself. All relevant University provision undergoing periodic review includes PUIC programmes. This is in keeping with the self-evaluation document which states that the RAA makes provision for periodic review to be carried out by the partner University using its procedures for reviewing the management of collaborative provision. The review team concluded that appropriate arrangements for course approval, monitoring and review are in place at PUIC.

How effective is the management of student assessment?

11 Navitas' Assessment Regulations set out the expectations in relation to assessment and these, together with the stated learning outcomes, are published to students.

12 University staff are involved in the moderation of student work. The review team heard that the partner University Link Tutor plays a significant role in overseeing assessment by attending monitoring panels and progression boards. Students the team met are generally clear about assessment requirements and progression regulations. They reported having received briefings on the assessment process from PUIC staff. PUIC staff also cited the example of being the first College within Navitas to raise the use of plagiarism detection software as a means of ensuring the integrity of the assessment of student work.

13 Students reported to the review team that feedback on assessment was generally prompt and useful. The pre-master's students commended the quality of the feedback received. In addition, students reported that they received verbal feedback in one-to-one sessions when their marks were low. However, the team noted that there was some variability in the quality of the feedback provided to students.

14 The review team noted that the provision of records of achievement in the form of Confirmation of Attainment statements (CAS) is seen as the responsibility of PUIC. As Navitas does not make any awards the review team was unable to see how students received formal certification for their achievement of credit at PUIC. The review team formed the view that feedback provided to students is effective.

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

15 At a development stage, but use is made of the Academic Infrastructure, including *The framework for higher education qualifications qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements.

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

16 The review team learnt that the University takes responsibility for the appointment of external examiners, although PUIC staff are involved in the process. Assessed work submitted by students in the first year of all degree programmes is moderated by staff from the partner University. To maintain consistency and oversight, all work is submitted for moderation through the University Link Tutor and distributed to the relevant University staff.

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

17 The review team noted that PUIC make extensive use of statistical data. The Navitas management information system (MAZE) is used to produce a regular report for the AAC, which is submitted each semester. As data includes pass rates, drop-out rates and attendance it is possible for PUIC to monitor student progress and assure standards. The review team formed the view that there was effective use being made of data including the tracer studies.

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

18 Senior PUIC staff confirmed that their formal governance arrangements facilitate step change and improvements. The review team heard of and saw evidence of the robust arrangements in place for the review of teaching

19 Students complete module questionnaires, which solicit both qualitative and quantitative data. The result of all analyses is shared with teachers and summaries are made available to students. While evaluations are currently paper based, there are plans in place to move to an electronically-based system for retrieving feedback from students. The senior team were particularly proud that their College had achieved the highest response rate to the Navitas worldwide i-graduate survey. Students the review team met indicated that learning resources are good and praised the teaching staff for the level of support provided, including the provision of online materials for each class. The team noted that students had been instructed in the use of the virtual learning environments for both PUIC and the University.

20 The review team concluded that, although students were generally satisfied with the level of access to learning resources, a perceived lack of information at the beginning of their course about access to The University learning resources is an area that could be improved.

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

21 The University processes and procedures, which are aligned to external reference points, are used throughout the approval process and include setting standards for learning opportunities. Use is made of student feedback for the enhancement of learning opportunities and PUIC staff cited an example of publishing responses to student feedback on the student notice board.

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

22 Senior staff at PUIC stated that many of the teaching staff were also employed by the University and held teaching qualifications. This was confirmed when the review team met teaching staff and senior managers from the University.

23 The review team heard that PUIC implements a robust system and all teachers have their teaching reviewed at least annually, with some staff being observed more frequently. Discussions with teaching staff confirmed this. A standard template is used to prepare staff for teaching observation and to provide staff with feedback which then feeds into the staff appraisal process. Senior PUIC staff observe all new teachers within the first

four weeks of appointment. The team heard that as a result of the teaching observation exercise, a cultural awareness workshop was organised to provide staff with enhanced skills when teaching international students.

24 Teaching staff claimed that they were very student focused and the review team met students who confirmed this. The students also confirmed that the standard of teaching met their expectations. The review team formed the view that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced and that the consistent and the effective use made of teaching observations is a strength of PUIC.

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

25 The review team noted that students are able to provide feedback through formal and informal routes. Students are active members of PUIC Learning and Teaching Board and a Student Council has been established. Actions taken by PUIC as a result of feedback from students are posted on the Student Portal and published on PUIC student notice board.

26 Students the review team met were aware of the existence of a Student Charter which provided clarity about roles and expectations. The review team considered that the high quality, individualised feedback on assessments, provided in a timely manner to students was a key strength of PUIC.

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

27 The review team noted that all PUIC staff have a close and supportive relationship with the students. The students the review team met confirmed that staff are all very approachable and supportive and that they created a very safe environment for international students. The team considered the welcome pack issued to students prior to their arrival to be an effective means of preparing students for their transition to the UK education system.

28 Students receive a comprehensive induction, and the review team heard that, as a result of student feedback, individual induction arrangements are now in place for any students arriving after the start of the semester. In addition, students have access to information via the Student Portal and through an electronic student handbook. Hard copies of the student handbook are also made available and students the team met reported that they found these means of support to be effective.

29 Personal support is available from the Student Support Team who operate an open-door policy. Students the team met reported that support is effective and praised the level of engagement with individual module leaders and in particular their direct access to the College Director and Principal. The team learnt that students have access to College Policies and Regulations and programme specifications. They were also aware of the processes concerning complaints and appeals. Students reported having 24-hour access to support through an emergency number, should they require it.

30 Student attendance is monitored closely and any absence is investigated to ascertain what can be done to assist the student, including home visits if necessary. The review team concluded that the supportive culture, including the Students in Jeopardy Programme and the teamworking practices, were effective in supporting students.

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

31 Students are recruited via agents or Navitas marketing staff. Agents are subject to a robust selection process prior to being issued with a contract and are generally well established agents. The review team noted that there is a dedicated admissions team who apply a rigorous process to ensure that all offers made to prospective students are in keeping with the course entry criteria agreed through the validation process. PUIC consults with the University on admission decisions if necessary and the team heard that relationships with the University Admissions Team are effective.

32 The review team learnt from the students they met, that the information they received regarding the requirements for admission to their chosen programme and the processes to be followed were accurate. The review team concluded that the careful recruitment and effective use of agents is a key strength of PUIC.

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

33 The review team confirmed that the teaching staff were generally recruited from the University of Plymouth and that the University approves all teaching staff appointments. Following appointment, staff have the opportunity to attend an induction programme. Their teaching is observed within the first month of employment. The review team heard that the outcome of the teaching observation can trigger a staff appraisal meeting and is also used in the decision-making process for the renewal of employment contracts.

34 Staff can access in-house updating and regular briefing sessions conducted by the College Director and Principal in addition to attending the University staff development events. The review team found PUIC to be very collegial, with staff assisting each other and sharing good practice on a very regular and informal way. This way of working is facilitated through regular email and telephone contact and through the effective use of the electronic portal.

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

35 The review team learned that, while students at PUIC have access to all the University resources applicable to their respective course of study, they were not aware of this at the commencement of their programme. The computer suite at PUIC is linked directly to the University system.

36 Detailed consideration is given to the resource requirements of any new course proposed. The review team heard that the teaching team have introduced peer review of teaching materials and are moving towards having leaders for subject clusters to enhance delivery and provide additional peer support. The review team viewed that PUIC was effective in providing appropriate learning resources to students.

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

37 The review team learned that the information provided to student both prior to arrival and while at PUIC was comprehensive, accurate, and helpful.

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

There is a review of all documents, including programme specifications, each semester. PUIC adheres to the standard Navitas approach to the review of information thus ensuring its accuracy and completeness. A Marketing Advisory and Recruitment Group assist in ensuring the accuracy of marketing material. The review team viewed the arrangements to be effective.

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