

Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education

Case Study: Ensuring Quality Enhancement Across a Partnership

A light blue world map showing the continents, serving as a background for the lower half of the page.

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Prepared by the University of Stirling on its branch campus in the United Arab Emirates

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The role of case studies within QE-TNE

The provider-led case studies are an integral part of the Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education (QE-TNE) Scheme. QAA is grateful to those institutions and individuals who have produced them. The insights gained have been invaluable and we are confident that these will be widely used by those involved with delivering and developing TNE within the UK, and will contribute to enhancing practice and the quality of UK TNE.

The case studies are contributing to thematic insights, to the student experience reports and a programme of workshops planned for QE-TNE Scheme members.

About QE-TNE

The quality evaluation and enhancement of UK transnational higher education provision is a voluntary scheme for UK higher education providers. The core purpose and outcomes of the scheme are:

- strengthening the reputation of UK HE
- providing valued information and insights
- building mutual trust
- delivering benefit for TNE stakeholders.

The scheme focuses on enhancement which QAA defines as:

'Taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.'

The 2021-22 programme

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Germany were selected as the host country destinations in 2021-22 - the first year of the QE-TNE Scheme. A number of TNE arrangements were selected for evaluation visits in each host country and a range of case studies requested from providers - a full list is included in the annex.

Case studies

Case studies are provider-led and typically explore a specific aspect of their approach to TNE provision. They are intended to contribute to the quality enhancement of UK TNE through sharing insights, experience and effective practice, and provide an opportunity for providers to showcase and celebrate UK TNE, including its significance and impact.

The information gathering stage of QE-TNE enables providers to propose case study topics, providers are also able to identify matters they would like the QE-TNE Scheme to explore. QAA constructs the overall programme to represent characteristic in-country TNE arrangements for visits and case studies that will be of value to the sector and complement the visit programme.

The QE-TNE Handbook indicates the breadth of potential. Case studies may be on any area of practice, or an aspect of institutional strategy or policy. They may focus on process, from due diligence to ending a relationship, on operational delivery or oversight, on areas such as staff support and development, on the student experience or partnership working with

students; they may explore employability and evidence of value added; or they may address a response to a common challenge (such as addressing academic integrity or dealing with the pace of curriculum change).

Case studies can explore innovations and initiatives, share effective practice or illustrate learning from experience. Those with a more strategic focus may look at how a particular arrangement illustrates or has helped advance strategic purpose - for example, by leading onto a research collaboration; or illustrating an institution's policy towards student learning across branch campuses. Case studies might illustrate any of the informing principles that have shaped the QE-TNE approach. They may also look at wider issues, from embedding student-centred learning to addressing the UN's Strategic Development Goals in the curriculum.

Providers are encouraged to work with their TNE students, where this is relevant to a case study topic, or to support their students to produce a student-led case study.

There is no set format. However, case studies should be evaluative and evidence-based, succinct and focused. Case studies are prepared by providers but are edited by QAA in accordance with QAA house style.

The value of this case study for UK TNE: Some key points

This is an informative and helpful case study, not only in terms of the initiatives detailed to support and develop students' employability skills but also because those initiatives are situated within the determination to equip students with the skills and understanding to succeed in an uncertain future.

Approaches to branch campuses, including that of the University of Stirling are considered within a QE-TNE Thematic Analysis.

Sector colleagues will be particularly interested in:

- the initiatives to enhance employability, enrich student learning and campus experience and how they are also designed to enhance recognition and reputation
- the emphasis on the interconnectedness of educational activities, the importance of activity beyond the curriculum, and of developing student 'ability to integrate their traditional academic learning with new technologies, communication skills and emotional intelligence'
- the emphasis on additional skills and experiences, on emotional wellbeing and preparing students to succeed as graduates as part of a competitive global workforce.

Case Study of University of Stirling

Ensuring Quality Enhancement Across a Partnership

Background

Established in 1967, the University of Stirling was ranked in the top 20 for overall student satisfaction in the UK's National Student Survey 2021 and listed in the world's top 350 universities in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2022. Ensuring internationalisation is at the heart of everything we do, the University enhances the student and staff experience by augmenting and strengthening international links, connecting with partner universities and organisations globally, and producing research with international relevance, reach and impact. The purpose of this case study is to illustrate this approach through the University's partnership with Planet One in Ras al Khaimah.

The University established a campus in Ras al Khaimah (RAK) in partnership with Planet Core Education in 2018. Teaching is delivered by qualified local staff with prior approval from the University of Stirling, with the University responsible for academic quality and standards. Initially, our partnership offered only undergraduate programmes but in academic year 2021-22 began offering postgraduate programmes as well. Students are provided with high-quality, globally-minded learning and teaching that prepares them to graduate with the knowledge, skills and awareness required to succeed and excel in their future careers.

Degree programmes currently offered at our RAK campus are:

- BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance
- BSc (Hons) Management
- BSc (Hons) Business Computing
- BSc (Hons) Computing Science
- BSc (Hons) Software Engineering

- MSc Finance
- MSc Big Data
- MSc Financial Technology (Fintech)

Quality assurance at the University of Stirling

The University of Stirling adheres to strict quality assurance procedures aligned with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and, as a partner of the University, Planet One also works to the same standards. In addition, both the University of Stirling and Planet One together must adhere to the RAK Economic Zone Academic Zone regulations.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has a statutory responsibility to ensure the quality of higher education in Scotland and makes up one of five partners in the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). As part of this framework, the University of Stirling is subject to an external Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) every five years. The most recent ELIR for Stirling took place in spring 2021 and included Planet One. The University of Stirling achieved the highest possible outcome from the review.¹

At an institutional level, a variety of mechanisms are employed to ensure the quality of programmes offered through the partnership. Programmes are formally reviewed on an annual basis, and student feedback is collated and addressed as part of Student-Staff

¹ www.gaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-Stirling

Feedback Committees (SSFC) during the semester, and through module reviews at the end of every semester. The University of Stirling has a firm commitment to ensuring the participation from all of its students around the world in tailoring their own learning experiences and, as such, encourages student feedback through both official and informal channels, to enable this process. This not only allows for quality assurance but also gives staff the information needed to constantly update processes and curriculum for the benefit of the student and enhancement of the learning experience. An example of this can be seen through work currently being undertaken on the Accounting and Finance award that came about as a direct result of feedback from staff and students. It was noted by students specifically, that a taxation module that contributed to the ACCA qualification would be more beneficial to them than one of the more generic modules they currently studied. Agreement from staff on the ground plus the additional feedback that, in making the change, we could increase the attractiveness of the award locally, has resulted in work commencing to alter the course structure for the benefit of our students.

In addition, the University participates in the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey every year, with results considered at the programme, divisional, faculty and institutional level. Any feedback and subsequent modifications to courses taught on our Stirling campus are then directly reflected in our teaching in RAK. As part of the QAA and Scottish Funding Council quality system, every subject area of the University is subject to a formal internal learning and teaching review on a five-year cycle; the University includes its TNE as a clear part of the process. Each year, reports from partners and external examiners are collated and used in our Annual Partner Monitoring, which also takes into consideration feedback from the SSFC. Finally, the student experience is also thoroughly reviewed every five years when the Directorate for International Partnerships undertakes a quinquennial review of each partnership.

The need to support and develop staff is also recognised as a key aspect of ensuring the enhancement of the student experience and staff development needs are considered annually at an individual level through the staff appraisal process, which focuses on learning and teaching but also on involvement in other areas, such as research. Staff are encouraged to identify their own areas for development, based on self-reflection and feedback, and set themselves manageable objectives for the year ahead.

The partnership and its programmes are further closely monitored through a Partnership Management Committee (PMC) which brings together staff from both the University of Stirling and Planet One every semester to take an in-depth look at all aspects of the partnership and programmes, promoting the sharing of any best practice and ensuring any issues that may present themselves are dealt with swiftly and effectively. This has previously included discussions around a range of challenges including staffing, finance and academic integrity. However, given the close communication that exists between the partners, any challenges are usually dealt with long in advance of the PMC, where the challenges and actions are nevertheless reflected upon rarely requiring further action.

Quality enhancement: Maximising the learning experience for students

Since the establishment of the partnership, considerable effort has been made to work not only on quality assurance but also on quality enhancement to enrich the learning experience of the students. To do this, a three-pronged approach has been developed: enhancing employability; enriching the student learning and campus experience; and recognition and reputation enhancement.

In each of these three areas, initiatives have been undertaken to assist with the personal and career development of the students and to ensure the solid grounding of their future employability. As we progress through the case study, the correlation between the initiatives undertaken in RAK and the enhanced experiences of the students will become evident.

Rationale for initiatives

In alignment with the University of Stirling employability strategy² - which includes the aim to 'Produce confident, aspirational graduates who can successfully compete in a competitive global economy' - the partnership recognises the interconnectedness of educational activities that form the overall learning experience and ultimate success of its students. In 2022, as the COVID-19 pandemic eases, a student's ability to integrate their traditional academic learning with new technologies, communication skills and emotional intelligence is key to their future career success. This thinking was fundamental in the development of a variety of extra-curricular initiatives which prepare students for the post-pandemic world of work.

A core principle which runs through all of our academic provision, regardless of location of delivery, is the recognition that education is no longer based entirely on the idea of traditional, classroom learning and that well-rounded students will have been exposed to different learning methods, teachers and experiences - online, in-person, seminars, workshops, team work and student-led activities. It is well recognised that positive student mental health and wellbeing play a huge role in a student's motivation, confidence and success, therefore this was also a consideration in the development of the initiatives.

Initiatives and participation

Enriching the student learning and campus experience

As part of the objective to enrich the student learning and campus experience, three specific activities were undertaken in academic year 2021-22.³

A series of 18 guest lectures were organised over a four-month period and students were encouraged to attend these. The sessions were designed to cover a range of topics and allowed industry and academic professionals to impart practical knowledge to the students and give them insight into real-life experiences as professionals in the workplace. Topics covered in these sessions ranged from web design to corporate risk management (the full list can be found in Appendix A). Subject-specific guest lectures were delivered for students where the topic was directly related to their area of study. Non-domain specific lectures were open to all students, offering them the opportunity to broaden their knowledge bases and learn from professionals they otherwise may never have had the opportunity to meet.

In addition to guest lectures, students were also invited to take part in a series of six workshops with a technological, IT focus. These additional workshops were designed with employability in mind and with the aim of helping students to develop some of the key skills that employers will be looking for in the future. Each workshop was delivered by a different guest speaker and bridged the gap between academic learning and real-life experiences for the students. As with the guest lectures, students were invited to attend more general

² www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/internal/careers-and-employability/employability/documents/Employability_Strategy.pdf

³ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of activities took place online to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved.

workshops outwith their normal areas of study, thereby developing additional knowledge and allowing them to network and make industry contacts locally, nationally and globally.

The final, complementary initiative was the development of several campus festivals and student-led activities. These brought students together to interact in person after periods of isolation due to the pandemic. They also gave the students the chance to work together and put into practice the organisational and leadership skills they had learned throughout the year, as well as allowing them to harness their creativity and foster a sense of cohort and camaraderie, while articulating their competencies and skills. A number of students in RAK became the first to receive the [My Stirling Award](#) outside of the UK by taking part in these events in addition to completing a skills audit and reflective summary.

Enhancing employability

The second set of initiatives at RAK was created to enhance the employability of students. These initiatives included a series of eight work-readiness workshops with a focus on soft skills, including emotional balance, possibility thinking and interview preparation. The qualitative nature of the workshops meant that they were mostly vocation-focused and took into consideration the wider skill set required to succeed rather than just emphasising pure academic skill.

To complement the initiatives, a series of Human Resource-focused forums were run, in which HR industry professionals discussed current trends in recruitment along with the latest developments in their sectors. These sessions were held virtually and students were encouraged, not only to attend but also to participate fully during a Q&A session. Student feedback indicated that the forums helped them considerably, not only by giving them insight into the world of HR and recruitment, but also allowing them to network and build contacts which then assisted them in finding internships and placements later in the year.

Finally, a designated department was created (the Placement and Education Wing (PEW)) with responsibility for liaising with industry to generate placement and internship opportunities. The PEW also works with students to prepare them for job application and interview processes and collaborates across all initiatives to ensure that partnership students have the opportunity to meet industry professionals and develop their networks from an early stage. Between September 2021 and January 2022, and in spite of COVID-19 restrictions, 28 students (approximately 45% of the cohort) successfully completed internships, largely as a result of contacts that had been made through either the guest lectures, workshops or HR forums.

The ability of our students to successfully complete an internship, and the evidence that they gain a great deal from it, serves as a vital piece of feedback for Planet One and the University of Stirling that the work to enhance the learning experience for students is both highly effective and having the positive impact desired (More detailed student feedback on internship experiences can be seen in Appendix B).

Recognition and reputation enhancement

The final key element of quality enhancement relates to promotion within the education sector, community and industry. In order to ensure the futures of our graduates, Planet One makes effective use of social media platforms (predominantly LinkedIn and Facebook) to promote university activities, encouraging participation and simultaneously increasing their reputation across the UAE, the countries that form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and further afield. Planet One has worked to create engagement across the school sector by running a UAE-wide, inter-schools competition called iQuesta, thus attracting future students and increasing awareness of the University and its offering. Planet One keeps to the

forefront the fact that any increase in brand awareness will directly impact upon the future employability of current students and constantly strives to promote the partnership and foster relationships within the community and within industry.

Future plans

Following the positive impact on students of these three suites of initiatives, run as part of the strategy to enrich student learning and campus experience, enhance employability, and enhance recognition and reputation, the partnership intends to continue running guest lectures, workshops and HR forums for the benefit of future students.

As we begin to produce high-quality, well-prepared graduates and become more widely known through ongoing initiatives, community engagement and promotion, we hope to build on our previous success by attracting a wider field of industry professionals to continue to provide students with real-life insights and learning opportunities. This will continue to not only provide students with a formal, university education but also equip our students with the additional skills and experience required to move into the workforce and the potential to achieve great success. These initiatives will also lead to businesses locally, nationally and globally, recognising the added value and impact the University of Stirling students bring to their organisations.

The partnership is currently in its fourth year. This academic year (2021-22) will produce the first graduates. Given the proximity of Ras al Khaimah to Dubai, Abu Dhabi and other major cities, and the connections that students have made over the past year, there is no doubt that there will be ample opportunities for employment and we firmly believe that the quality education we are working together to provide our students will result in their future successes.

Appendix A: Guest lectures

Topic	Organisation
Quantitative Research	HOD Decision Sciences, ITM Business School, Mumbai
Qualitative Research and Questionnaire Design	Associate Professor, Devi Ahilya University, India
System Administration and related career path	IT Manager, University of Stirling, RAK
Web Designing	Assistant Professor, University of Stirling, RAK
What's Expected from a Big Data Engineer/ Application as per Current Industry Requirements	Assistant Vice-President, Keells Holdings PLC, Sri Lanka
Big Data Technologies	Big Data Developer, FAB Bank
Applications of AI and ML in real world	Product Manager, Vivenns Global
Digitization and Automation in Finance	Technology Leader, Amazon
Innovative Companies	Founder VC at 100 X
Fundamentals of Human Resources Management	Dean-SBM, SVKM's NMIMS Indore Campus, Indore, India
Data Science Applications and Challenges	Assistant Professor, University of Dubai
International Portfolio Management Through Countrywide Diversification	Associate Professor, Devi Ahilya University, India
Applications of Data Science	Data Scientist, Delta Partners
The Global Business Environment	Director, ITM Kharagpur
Corporate Risk Management	Chief Internal Auditor, Saudi Maintenance Company (Siyanco) Limited, Riyadh (KSA)
Statistical Analysis of Data	Assistant Professor, University of Stirling, RAK
Let's Dive in BFSI and CA - How it Helps to Transform	Founder and MD, Arthshashtri Corporate Services, Regional Director Middle East and Africa ICAI

Appendix B: Internship testimonials

Varsha Anil

BSc (Hons) Management, Final Year, University of Stirling, RAK Campus

Position: Partnership Research Analyst

Company: RAKEZ

'The majority of entry-level positions for fresh graduates need some amount of experience. With my Rakez internship, I will be able to get valuable experience in a professional environment that is both intriguing and exciting to work in. My internship with RAKEZ has been a fantastic learning opportunity, I've gained a lot of skills and a better understanding of what to anticipate after graduation. The internship has given me a better grasp of what I've learned in class and allowed me to apply what I've learned in the classroom to real-life scenarios. As an intern, I can honestly say that I have learnt something new every day, and I am happy and satisfied with the path my life is taking.'

Athul Prakash

MSc Finance, University of Stirling, RAK Campus

Position: Key Accounts Intern

Company: RAKEZ

'I got my internship with Rakez from June-August 2021 in the key accounts department. This period I got to learn a lot about how the corporate world is like. I was responsible to handhold key clients throughout their journey with full support on their queries to ensure their satisfaction. Build & maintain professional relationships with key clients & keep in regular contact with them through various channels in order to understand their needs & match them with workable solutions. Act as a focal point for key clients while applying for any services to ensure high-quality customer service with a minimal timeframe. Propose initiatives to improve key clients' experience & enhance the brand image as well as service portfolio for key clients. Partner closely with the Sales team to generate new leads from existing key clients in order to maximize client retention, client satisfaction & increase the organisation's revenue. Conduct calls to provide support and assistance to the key clients.

During these periods I was able to apply my theoretical knowledge into the workplace and also learn a lot from the workplace. To be part of a big team, coordinate between departments, delegate tasks and so on, helped me build good confidence. I was able to apply my marketing skills, public speaking and Microsoft skills but also was able to learn and use Salesforce, one of the best CRM in market.'

Mohammed Jaisal Thaha

BA (Hons) Accounting & Finance, Year 3, University of Stirling, UAE Campus

Position: Operations Department Intern

Company: Arabian healthcare

'My internship with Arabian wellness & Lifestyle Management LLC, Ras al Khaimah, UAE has been an extremely rewarding experience. Spending two and a half months under the supervision of experts who want to share their project management experience with you and help you understand what they have been doing for years is invaluable. I had the opportunity to understand how things are done both within and outside of the office. I was able to assist a doctor with health screening by helping him with data entry and also assisting the admin head with project management. Also got opportunity to interact with a lot of people who are working in different jobs and companies. Most significantly, I've learnt how to deal with a variety of personalities. I can only assume that as I continue my studies, this experience will be something I remember and that it will open new possibilities for me in the future.'

Praneetha Prakash

MSc Finance, University of Stirling, RAK Campus

Position: VAT and Audit Intern

Company: ADS Management Tax Consultancy

'Working with ADS Auditors has been a great experience as a novice that shifted my mindset to another level. ADS Auditors is an auditing and consultancy firm that comprises management and tax. As a beginner, it's a wonderful breakthrough in my career to grip the foundation in terms of my soft and hard skills. I learned to deal with clients, learned to use different software, time management at work, improved my presentation skills and acquired a bunch of knowledge which has been a great reward. Working with colleagues was not at all hard, we are a strong team at ADS, it's not a team, we have become a family. When it comes to reality, it is quite a challenging path for me to balance work and study. After all, we must learn and experience beyond the theories that we study. I am so much grateful to the PEW Board and Mr. Dhakshay Balachandran, and Mr. Jestine Jose, Managing Directors of ADS Auditors, for giving me this opportunity to grow in my career.'

Annex: Linked QE-TNE reports and publications

Visits and case studies for the QE-TNE in 2021-22

The following were selected in the United Arab Emirates:

- De Montfort University (visit)
- Heriot-Watt University (case study)
- London Business School (visit)
- Middlesex University (case study)
- University of Birmingham (case study)
- University of Bolton (visit)
- University of Bradford (visit)
- University of Stirling (case study)

The following were selected in the Arab Republic of Egypt:

- Coventry University (case study)
- Queen Margaret University (visit)
- University of East London (visit)
- University of Hertfordshire (visit)
- University of London (case study)

The following were selected in Germany:

- Lancaster University (case study)
- University of Law (visit)
- University of St Andrews (case study)
- University of St Mark and St John (visit)
- University of West London (case study)
- University of Worcester (case study)

Publications and outputs on each selected host nation

Overview Report

An overview report for each host nation is publicly available on QAA's website. It summarises the outcomes of all the activity as part of the QE-TNE in the destination including the initial survey of providers, the visit reports, case studies and additional information on students.

Country Guide

A detailed examination of the operating environment for UK TNE.

Student Experience Report

An analytical summary of the findings on the UK TNE student experience. It draws on all the visit reports together with further insights into the UK TNE student experience gained as part of the QE-TNE process.

Country dissemination events

These follow on from the visits and case studies, disseminating the outcomes and exploring matters identified. They normally involve QAA alongside UK providers, host country partners and organisations.

Other QE-TNE publications, resources and events

Thematic insights

The cumulative outcomes of QE-TNE are interrogated thematically to produce a series of short analytical reports on themes emerging across UK TNE provision worldwide. Typically these will focus on areas of collective challenge and of particular strength with the aim of sharing effective practice and potential learning. Topics will also be selected based on QAA Member interests and current sector concerns.

Resources, training and events

Thematic work and member feedback will result in the production of a number of demand-led resources, training opportunities and events

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