



# Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education, December 2023

## Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education (the College) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [December 2022 monitoring visit](#).

## Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The College currently has a total of 131 students enrolled during the current 2023-24 academic year. Students are enrolled on a range of 10 programmes, with awards from three universities and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). There are 12 academic staff, and 11 administration and support staff employed.

3 There are currently 26 students enrolled on the HNC Business; 6 students on the HND Business; one student on the HNC Management and Leadership; 11 students on the Introductory Certificate in Arabic Languages; 5 students on the Certificate in Arabic Languages (SQA); 17 students on Diploma in Moral Economy & Sustainable Development; 10 students on the MPhil in the Middle East in a Global Context (delivered with Trinity College, Dublin); and 14 students on the MSc in Islamic Finance (delivered with the University of Dundee).

4 Since the last monitoring visit, two new programmes were developed and launched and have now enrolled students: the MSc Strategic Organisational Learning (31 students), and the MSc Moral Economy & Sustainable Development (10 students) - both with Abertay University. A third new programme - the MSc Law and Sustainability - is not running due to low recruitment figures.

5 Existing programmes offered but not currently running are the Executive Diploma in Islamic Finance & Entrepreneurship; the Professional Diploma in Islamic Banking and Finance; the Diploma in Arabic Language; and the Diploma in Management & Leadership.

## Findings from the monitoring visit

6 The review team concluded that the provider is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision through meetings with staff and students, analysis of the annual monitoring return, and scrutiny of the accompanying evidence. The College continues to provide effective pastoral and academic support to its students (paragraphs 11 and 14), support staff to undertake professional development opportunities (paragraph 12), and develop its approach towards gathering and using student feedback for continuous improvement (paragraph 13).

7 The Educational Oversight monitoring review of December 2022 reported that actions coming from the three recommendations in the 2020 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)) have been further embedded and evaluated, and that there were no further actions identified in the December 2021 annual monitoring visit. Nevertheless, the College has retained actions from 2020 and continues to monitor and revisit them regularly. The Summative Assessment Policy and Student Handbook are reviewed annually at Academic Council. While the College's quality assurance procedures were updated and ratified in September 2021, the College is aware that once the Quality Assurance Framework has been revised and published, this action will need to be revisited. The Periodic Review process has been systematised, with the timeline for review and associated procedures examined and ratified at Academic Council.

8 In the Action Plan, the College identified seven actions in March 2022. The 'Meet Your Lecturer' scheme has been successfully incorporated into all programmes, and the students met by the team confirmed that they find it easy to gain access to their teachers for one-to-one support. Revised processes for Peer Review, Annual Programme Review and Periodic Review are now all in place, and these processes are monitored through the Board of Studies meetings and Academic Council. Quality Assurance processes continue to be monitored as the programme offer develops, with the merger of the two Boards of Study ratified at Academic Council in 2022-23. Subsequently, once the new MSc programme was developed, the decision was made to move back to separate Boards of Study for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Higher National programmes are monitored through the Board of Studies to ensure alignment with changes in the SQA. Students at the visit confirmed that the Student Handbook can be accessed at any time via Moodle, and that they consult this document for information before contacting staff. Students refer to their programme-specific handbooks for information about assessment. As SQA and QAA develop their policies and procedures, the College reviews its academic policies to ensure ongoing alignment. To improve the effective use of student feedback, the College undertook a review of Student Unit Evaluation forms which was completed by December 2022 and subsequently monitored throughout academic year 2022-23.

9 The College identified and implemented three further actions from January 2023. First, the College undertook to effectively achieve and implement the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System, with nine members of staff trained as internal auditors. The BSI conducted an external audit on 26-27 September 2023 and approved recommendation for certification, with no major non-conformities identified. Second, the effectiveness of student unit evaluation forms being completed, with a target set of more than 50% completion rate across all SQA programmes - staff at the meeting visit confirmed that this target had been exceeded, with completion rates above 80%. Lastly, the College committed to continually review external sources of information on artificial intelligence and its use in higher education. Staff confirmed that they had attended HE Advance webinars on the subject, and kept abreast of SQA, QAA and IHE guidance, enabling discussion with staff and students during the induction period in September. The Student Handbook 2023-24 and the Malpractice Policy was subsequently updated in response.

10 For the 2021-22 academic year, all students completing their programmes achieved a pass. Retention rates were reported as 'relatively high' across programmes in general, although in the case of the Introductory Certificate in Arabic Language, three student withdrawals equated to a drop of 77% of the programme cohort, given the small cohort size. Other programmes achieved 100% completion and pass rate. The HNC Business course had one student withdrawal, with all other students on this programme and the HNC Management and Leadership completing and passing.

11 Staff and students confirmed that the College continues to provide a comprehensive pastoral and academic support that fosters a supportive learning environment. The student

meeting confirmed that this positive experience of study is shared by learners working both in person and online. Students confirmed that they are supported in their learning through timely and detailed feedback from their teachers.

12 Staff can attend continuing professional development activities by submitting a request to their line manager, and information from the attendee is then disseminated among the staff body. A system of internal peer review has been in place since the last QAA visit and will expand next year to include external peer review from the College's academic partners. Staff reported that peer review was undertaken in a supportive manner that benefitted their professional development.

13 Students and teaching staff are represented on the Academic Council, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and the Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Committee, although student attendance has been a challenge in the past year. Nevertheless, the College has been successful in increasing student evaluation form completion, and students report that they are actively encouraged to give feedback throughout their studies, and that their feedback is listened to and acted upon.

14 Specific academic support is provided for students directly by their tutors, who are available online and in person at the campus, also responding to email communications promptly and providing bespoke solutions where possible. Students reported feeling very well supported by their teachers. A new Academic Skills Programme has been initiated to further strengthen student support; from the beginning of academic year 2022-23, new materials such as guides to referencing and qualitative research have been brought together and made available online to all students. Staff actively contribute to the locating and adding of new resources for students.

15 The College notes the spread of different pass marks present across the portfolio of programmes, which are a consequence of having to meet different external requirements. The College continues to look for opportunities to minimise the number of different pass marks and to clarify the communication of these to staff and students. Students at the visit confirmed that they understood their individual requirements through consulting their course handbooks and seeking guidance where necessary from their tutors. Students understood where to find information on the virtual learning environment relating to the complaints process and to academic appeals, while confirming that there was an open culture to resolve issues informally.

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

16 The College has effectively embedded the Expectations, and Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in its procedures and policies. This is evident in the Annual Programme Review which demonstrates that the Quality Code is used to ensure that expectations for standards and quality shape the delivery of the programmes. The College has made a specific commitment to make further revisions where necessary as the Quality Code continues to evolve. Further oversight is provided by the Boards of Studies and the Academic Council.

17 Further oversight of quality and standards is provided by the Colleges' partners - the University of Dundee, Abertay University and Trinity College Dublin. The content of each programme is approved by the partner university, and when developing new programmes, the College refers to the Quality Code to ensure that it is compliant with its expectations. The College also provides subject specialists with an Islamic Finance background as second supervisors to students undertaking a PhD in the relevant field at the University of Dundee.

The students are registered with the University, and the University of Dundee School of Business provides the first supervisors.

18 At the time of the monitoring visit, the College was preparing for a new master's programme to be validated by the end of January 2024, ready for the first intake from September 2024. Agreement has also been reached with Alamein University for further collaboration with Abertay University, with classes delivered in Egypt with college staff; this is currently awaiting final approval from the Egyptian Government.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was conducted by Aleks Szram, Reviewer, and Dr Julian Ellis, QAA Officer, on 14 December 2023.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000  
Web: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)