



# Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas UK Holdings Ltd, November 2023

## International College at Robert Gordon University

### 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 Navitas UK Holdings Ltd International College at Robert Gordon University (the College; ICRGU) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [November 2022 monitoring visit](#).

2 The International College at Robert Gordon University is a Navitas University Partnerships Europe pathway college affiliated to the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (the University). All students are studying university-approved programme elements.

3 Following the increase in recruitment seen last year (from 95 in 2020-21 to 169 in 2021-22), there has again been an increase in student numbers in 2022-23, with 331 students recruited across the three intakes. The majority of the increase was seen in postgraduate courses (199, compared to 92 in the previous year), reflecting post-Covid demand and a change in visa rules to permit dependents to travel. This peak in numbers is expected to decline in coming years. Teaching staff numbers have increased slightly (from 11 in 2022 to 14 in 2023), and support staff numbers have increased from seven to nine - to support the increased student numbers (see paragraph 9). The increase in student numbers is noted as a material change prompting this monitoring visit.

4 No new programmes were offered in 2022-23, though some previously approved First Year programmes did recruit, although they had not run in 2021-22.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

5 Actions from the Educational Oversight review in November 2020 have all been addressed as noted in the monitoring visit in November 2022. Student numbers in the College have increased significantly in 2022-23, but retention and pass rates have remained high (see paragraphs 10 and 11). Actions, from the QAA review, from a General Pharmaceutical Council, or identified internally have been addressed and have led to improvements. The College has suitable engagements with external reference points including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and Core and Common practices are integrated into areas of college activity (see paragraph 12).

6 The College's current Action Plan records actions to be undertaken and what their sources are, as well as timescales, ownership and success indicators. However, it is not always clear what the status (open, closed, ongoing) of each action is, and whether the evidence column records what would be needed for closure or what has been achieved so far. Detailed information about actions is found in the minutes of individual committees and groups (College Senior Management Team, Learning and Teaching Board, Enhancement Team).

7 The Action Plan contains two actions arising from the Navitas student survey - on assessment and feedback, and on learning resources. In both cases, the survey had returned scores that were lower, either than other Navitas colleges or than the other ICRGU scores, respectively. Appropriate actions were ongoing and success is to be measured in the 2024 survey. The Action Plan contains actions arising from the QAA review in 2020, as well as actions the College has identified from annual monitoring in 2021 and 2022. While the 2022 actions have been completed during the 2022-23 period, the actions from 2020 and 2021 have target dates and actual completion dates that pre-date this academic year, and so it is not clear why they remain in the Action Plan.

8 The Action Plan also contains actions arising from an accreditation visit by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) in June 2022. These actions were all completed and evidence had been submitted to GPhC for consideration at a Stage 2 accreditation visit in 2023-24. The particular areas of concern were an analysis of admissions data by protected characteristics, the mechanism used for setting pass criteria and the entry criteria and selection process for MPharm.

9 The supplied student performance data cover student performance over the three cohorts leading to 2022-23. Data are given for seven courses in 2020-21 (95 students) and 2021-22 (196 students), and for 10 courses in 2022-23 (331 students), with a number having additional entry points as well as the standard October 2022 entry. Despite the sharp increase in the number of students for 2022-23, the review team was informed that the increased teaching load was covered by some slightly larger class sizes and existing teachers taking on more hours than they would have in previous years, rather than the College recruiting a significant number of new staff. This increase in teaching load did not exceed the capacity of existing staff or make undue demands, and the evidence from students did not indicate any negative impact on the student experience.

10 The overall retention rate remains high at 94%, but this hides some areas of concern at course level, and especially entry level. The January intake for the First Year in Management course (27 students) had a retention rate of 67%, and the First Year in Engineering (nine students) had a retention rate of 78%. The devaluation of the Nigerian currency is known to have affected these cohorts.

11 Pass rates in eight of the 10 courses are above 90%, with only First Year in Engineering and First Year in Health Sciences dipping below 90%, with a single student failing in both cases (out of seven students in Engineering and nine in Health Sciences). In three courses (Foundation in Nursing, Pre-Master's in Public Health and Pre-Master's in Engineering), the pass rate was 100% (14, 7, 3 students respectively). Also noteworthy is the pass rate for the Pre-Master's in Management, where 142 students passed out of a cohort of 144 (99%). The remaining courses and pass rates are First Year in Management (32 students - 91%), Foundation in Pharmacy (20 students - 90%) and First Year in Computing (27 students - 93%).

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

12 The College has a robust set of policies and regulations. These are derived and localised from the Navitas policies and regulations. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is embedded in these policies and regulations, and Core and Common practices are integrated into relevant areas of college activity. For example, college policies on course approval lay out clearly how new pathway courses are approved. The process involves College academic staff, university academic staff and students, with professional body input where appropriate. Externality is provided with external panel members. During the lifetime of a course, annual monitoring ensures that the pathway remains aligned with university courses, and external examiners provide external oversight. Any course changes are subject to the approval of Academic Advisory Committee.

13 Further external reference points include the use of external advisers in Periodic Review, and the recent appointment of external advisers as consultants to the Navitas academic registry, providing external benchmarking across the group, and assurance to Academic Board that Quality Code expectations are being met.

14 There is a robust committee structure, with Academic Advisory Committee, Operations Advisory Committee and Marketing Advisory Committee looking at academic, student support and marketing issues, and oversight of these groups provided by the Joint Strategic Partnership Management Board.

15 Student representation is achieved through a Student Forum which meets regularly, and includes representation from each course. Students complete a number of surveys, which feed information into the College Enhancement Team. Students were clear about these mechanisms and told the monitoring team that the College was responsive to issues raised through surveys and the Forum.

16 There are clearly defined complaints and appeals processes, and students were clear about how to access these processes. The policies follow the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework, and informal complaints are dealt with at college level, while formal complaints and appeals are handled centrally by Navitas academic registry.

## Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Steve King, Reviewer, and Alan Weale, QAA Officer, on 14 November 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)