



Executive Summary

Renewal of Licensure

University of Balamand Dubai

April 4 -7, 2021

An External Review Team (hereafter ERT) was appointed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) of the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to conduct a distanced review visit at the University of Balamand in Dubai (UoBD) from the 4th to the 7th of April 2021. This was a ‘blended review’ with some reviewers on-site and others meeting remotely.

UoBD was granted its Initial Licensure from the Ministry of Education, UAE, in April 2017. Its campus is in Dubai Investments Park, a mixed-use real estate development owned by Dubai Investments. Currently UOBD has a total of 83 students: 44 in undergraduates its 6 undergraduate programs and 39 in its one graduate program. It employs 12 full-time and 12 part-time faculty and 12 administration staff.

The ERT evaluated UOBD’s *Self-Study* submitted for Renewal of Institutional Licensure and supporting documentation (appended material and supplementary documentation provided prior to, and during the review period). The ERT conducted a series of online interviews with the leadership team and groups of faculty, support staff, students and representatives of the BoT and Program Advisory Boards.

The ERT recognizes that UOBD now has a clear strategic ambition to grow and a Strategic Plan has been developed to steer this onward growth and development. As with all HEIs at this time, the plans will no doubt be subject to some of the uncertainties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the course of the review a number of positive attributes of UOBD have been identified by the ERT including the following particular features:

- A diverse cadre of academic staff who are enthusiastic to support the students in their studies and overall development.
- A new Strategic Plan which is being pursued under new leadership.
- The Outcomes Assessment Plans (OAPs) have the potential to be effective tools for promoting the culture of measurement-based outcomes assessment and making continuous improvement across all functional units and programs in the University.

- The partnership with the Dubai Investments (DI) Group brings a range of valuable support systems including HR services, financial management expertise, IT systems and technical support. Additionally, DI provides an opportunity to develop student internships across local DI companies.
- Although the Program Advisory Boards are recent in their establishment, it is evident that they have been administered efficiently and are already proving worthwhile.
- The campus location is convenient and readily accessible from highways between Dubai City and Abu Dhabi. The campus is in the heart of an Investment Park, close to the Expo site and there are plans for a Dubai Metro station.

Attention needs to be given to fulfilling the particular requirements of the *Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation (2019)*. The *Standards* have accompanying *Stipulations* that carry the same weight as the *Standards* and these in turn may refer to details in separate Annexes. The guidance for covering all relevant facets of the *Standards* and providing suitable supporting evidence is given in the *Procedural Manual for Renewal of Institutional Licensure*. The principal matters for attention identified by the ERT are summarized as follows:

If UOBD is to be successful in tackling the challenging areas of increasing student enrolment, reducing student attrition, recruiting sufficient numbers of suitable qualified faculty, enhancing research activity and outputs, and building collaborative links with other institutions and professional bodies, the University must evaluate the effectiveness of all academic and non-academic units. Some surveys have been conducted but the formal response mechanisms are generally weak and little analysis and evaluation of effectiveness is evident. All units must function optimally if there is to be any impact on the KPI targets set within the Strategic Plan.

With the University's focus on employability of graduates, externality of approach is essential in all activities. More external input is required in future rounds of review for mission and vision, strategic planning, curriculum development and benchmarking of quality and standards. The Program Advisory Boards are beginning to demonstrate the benefits that can be derived from external stakeholder engagement.

The increased emphasis on research and scholarly activity resulting from the national research priority, and as represented in the new *Standards*, is a challenge for the University. There are implications for the faculty profile, allocation of faculty teaching loads, policy development, and there are financial implications in meeting the *2019 Standards*. The UOBD leadership team is well aware of these challenges but the forward planning necessary to identify particular gaps in faculty provision over the duration of study program delivery, is not evidently in place. Research active faculty are needed across all existing and planned programs of study, particularly the graduate level Teaching Diploma program, if the time is to be made available for faculty to engage in research projects and seek external funding.

There are issues to be addressed in terms of policy/strategy development, transparency of governance, health and safety matters, communications and protocols concerned with organizational structure and CAA program accreditation. These matters are in need of urgent attention prior to renewal of licensure.

The ERT makes its recommendations and suggestions in a spirit of constructive engagement with the aim of ensuring that the *Standards for Licensure and Accreditation* are met, and to support UOBD in achieving its stated mission and vision.