



## Executive Summary

### Renewal of Institutional Licensure Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum Naval College (RBSAMNC) Abu Dhabi

29 April - 2 May 2024

An external review team (ERT), appointed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) of the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), visited the Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum Naval College (RBSAM-NC) from 29 April to 2 May 2024 to evaluate an application (*Application*) for renewal of institutional licensure (RIL). This comprised a self-study (*Self-Study*) and a set of appendices containing institutional documentation and other evidence. The findings of the ERT reflect its analysis of the *Self-Study* and observations made during the on-site evaluation in terms of requirements set out in *Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation (Standards)* and associated *Procedural Manual for Renewal of Institutional Licensure (PMRIL)*. The exit interview was held on 2 May 2024.

RBSAM-NC was established in 1999 on Saadiyat Island, moving to its present location in Al Taweelah, Abu Dhabi in 2008. The immediate objective of RBSAM-NC is to function as the Naval Academy of the UAE Armed Forces. Naval students are able to supplement their training with Diploma- and Bachelor-level higher education. Initially, the programs were offered in collaboration with Bahria University in Pakistan, with the qualifications awarded by that institution. In 2005 RBSAM-NC took responsibility for its own higher education offering. Following this period, ownership of the higher education programs changed once again; a contract was signed between the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the UAE Armed Forces and the Higher Colleges of Technology in the UAE (HCT). Since 2010 the degree has been owned and awarded by HCT in association with RBSAM-NC, with a mixture of faculty and staff involvement: some employed by HCT through its subsidiary, CERT, though permanently based at RBSAM-NC; some uniformed naval officers; and some employed through GHQ.

The Diploma in Naval Science, and the Bachelor in Naval Science (BNS) were most recently accredited in September 2023 through the HCT, as is appropriate given their ownership.

The ERT is pleased to note that RBSAM-NC continues to offer its recruits opportunities to obtain a higher education qualification through its association with HCT. It notes that the BNS Program has most recently successfully received renewal of program accreditation, through HCT, in 2023.

As on previous occasions, the ERT approached this review with two major objectives in mind: first, to ensure that current institutional arrangements (involving RBSAM-NC, HCT, and NFI) are proceeding appropriately and in line with the *Standards*; and second, to ensure that—if and when RBSAM-NC decides to offer its own higher education programs—it is in a position to do so effectively.



In several key areas, the ERT commends RBSAM-NC's current arrangements and has confidence that, if it were to offer its own higher education programs, these arrangements would continue in line with the expectations of the *Standards*.

Specifically, these cover most areas of governance and management, the areas of finance, learning, and physical resources, and community engagement.

Areas in which there are some opportunities for improvement follow.

1. There is an opportunity to rationalize policies and procedures. Since the BNS Program is owned by HCT, all academic policies and procedures are those of that institution. The appropriateness of these is a matter for HCT RIL and RPA reviews. However, it appears that they are working well for the delivery of the BNS Program at RBSAM-NC. RBSAM-NC itself has its own significant set of policies and procedures. Most of these relate to its operation as a military establishment and, thus, have no relevance to higher education and so are not relevant to this RIL review. RBSAM-NC has, in these areas, little control over this regulatory framework, as it is set by GHQ. There are, however, some institutional policies and procedures that relate directly to higher education. In some cases, these are necessary additional constraints on those of HCT, which reflect the special nature of RBSAM-NC as a military academy. Others, such as the academic integrity policy and procedure, just create an inconsistency which is confusing and unhelpful. It would be beneficial to undertake a review of current RBSAM-NC policies in those areas that are not obviously military in nature, and thus not mandated, to address such confusions.

2. Connected with policies and procedures is the situation with respect to RBSAM-NC manuals, such as the Student Handbook and Faculty Handbook. While largely addressing expectations, these do not contain sufficient information that sets out precisely what is expected of faculty and students, what rights and responsibilities are in detail, what relevant policies and procedures are, and how they should be operationalized.

3. In the area of faculty, RBSAM-NC has taken steps since the last RIL in 2020 to work with the CAA to ensure approval and exemption for its military faculty who do not hold a terminal qualification. Given the limited period of duty this involves, the task is ongoing and has been followed appropriately. There remains a limited number of HCT faculty in a similar position. They too need exemptions. Again, this is likely an ongoing process, given the natural rates of faculty turnover. Given the nature of the institution and the nature of the BNS Program, the CAA will be accommodating to these requests.

4. In the area of quality assurance, the ERT noted the complexities that RBSAM-NC has successfully negotiated in setting up appropriate joint processes with HCT in order to ensure that both academic and military needs are covered. The ERT would like to see a clear process that ensures stakeholder satisfaction with quality assurance practices, and a system for the self-evaluation of the quality assurance framework itself, based on external reviews, that ensures its fitness for purpose. The ERT would also like to see a framework for the quality assurance of administrative and support units, and their functions, as well as all survey templates included in the QAM.

5. The ERT also identified an opportunity to strengthen faculty development and training. This would focus on aligning HCT learning and teaching practices with professional naval



applications, with emphasis on the applications for the HCT faculty, and the HCT learning and teaching practices for the RBSAM-NC faculty.

6. In the area of research, the ERT is very keen that HCT faculty are encouraged to meet HCT expectations in research. Following reasonable levels of research output some six years ago, productivity fell off during the global pandemic and has not substantially recovered. There is a research framework in place with good potential, featuring in particular, clear responsibilities, a research committee, a research strategy, and incentives and support through a research budget. What is now needed is a more proactive and focused approach based on this framework that is targeted at bringing research performance back to at least its previous levels of achievement.

The ERT makes its requirements and suggestions in a spirit of constructive engagement with the aim of ensuring that the *Standards* are met and to aid RBSAM-NC to receive Renewal of Institutional Licensure.