



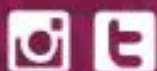
UQAIB

Good Practice Guide

Localising the curriculum



www.khda.gov.ae



What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide is intended to inform institutions about the ways in which Localising the Curriculum could be developed in the Dubai context. The guide does not expand the scope of the UQAIB requirements and addresses an issue already contained in the *UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual*. It is not prescriptive and provides exemplar options to suit different circumstances that can be adapted by each institution to meet their individual requirements.

The UQAIB validation process:

Provides the public with confidence that the learning outcomes and quality of an academic programme as offered in a Free Zone by an HEP Branch are substantially equivalent to the learning outcomes and quality of that academic programme as offered in its place-of-origin by the HEP Home, even though some of the details may be different in order to fit in with the context (social, political, economic etc.) of Dubai. (*UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual*).

The *UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual* provides for higher education providers (HEPs) to locally contextualise their validated programmes. This is not a KHDA requirement and limited adaptation may only be permitted, under circumstances outlined in the section on Adaptations of Validated Programmes, to better suit the Dubai context. A HEP wishing to amend its curriculum will need to provide a rationale for the change and evidence in support of this. If the adaptation is such that it constitutes a major change, then a Programme Endorsement application may be required.

This document provides several methods HEPs may consider using to achieve localisation of imported curriculum.

Introduction

The Dubai Free Zones provide a genuinely international higher education hub. Programmes offered by international higher education providers in Dubai are equivalent to the iterations run at the Home campus, and carry the same accredited status. This brings several advantages, including the ability for those qualifications to be fully recognised in their countries of origin. Most of all, this model helps provide a broad international choice of educational offerings in Dubai.

However, the utility of knowledge and skills is greatly enhanced when they have been acquired, developed and tested in contexts of local relevance. This can be particularly desirable for those students wishing to work or undertake further study in Dubai after graduation but the benefits of locally contextualised learning remain relevant whether the intention of the graduate is to stay in Dubai or travel abroad. Learning to localise

knowledge and skills is the key to developing adaptable graduates, able to work anywhere in the world.

As such, there are advantages to ensuring that international curricula are taught in the Dubai Free Zones in a manner that enables local contextualisation. There are various methods that can be used to assist in making international programmes locally relevant without compromising the Dubai validation process or the accreditation status of the programme at home. They apply to almost any disciplinary study, although academic staff will select those methods most fitting to their programme.

The guide presents several such methods. Note, however, that it is the responsibility of the HEP Home and their quality assurance bodies to ensure that the accredited or approved status of programmes offered in Dubai, and amended through these methods, remains valid.

Local advisory boards

One effective mechanism of ensuring that the programme is locally relevant is to establish a local Programme Advisory Board (or an Industry Advisory Board, in cases where a HEP Branch wishes the committee to oversee several programmes within a general industry grouping). The Advisory Boards could include such stakeholders as local employers, professional associations (including, where permissible, those that provide professional accreditation), academics from other institutions, and alumni.

Roles of Advisory Boards vary, but typically involve periodic review of the programme content and learning outcomes, methods of assessment and quality of graduates, with a view to ensuring that they are relevant to local needs. They are advisory only and feed into, rather than complicate, the formal channels for academic accreditation.

To ensure that the Advisory Board remains cognisant of the home academic quality assurance requirements, it is also appropriate for membership to include senior academic staff of the Home HEP.

Professional accreditation

The KHDA distinguishes between academic accreditation, being approval that a programme meets appropriate academic standards, and professional accreditation, being (approximately) approval that a programme will meet the education and training needs for entering work in a particular professional occupation.

It is expected that the number of national or regional professional accrediting bodies, or chapters of international accrediting bodies, will grow in the coming decade. HEP Branches

in the Free Zones may wish to pursue accreditation through these organisations in order to render their programmes more attractive for local employment purposes.

However, whether or not the programme is professionally accredited in Dubai or the UAE, where professional body accreditation of the programme exists at the HEP Home, the HEP should ensure that any amendments that are made to localise the programme are acceptable to that accreditation body. Otherwise, both the UQAIB validation and the international transferability of the programme will be compromised for the graduates.

Programme structure

Degree programmes are typically comprised of sets of units:

- compulsory core units, designed to establish the theoretical base of the degree;
- a range of specialist elective units, designed to elaborate upon the core within a particular focus (sometimes called the 'major' or 'specialisation');
- non-prescribed or 'general' elective units, designed to enable the student to explore a breadth of learning or, if they choose, further depth within the area of focus.

One method of increasing the local relevance of a programme without compromising its accredited status is to encourage certain general electives that are aligned with local needs. To ensure that this does not merely become a consequence of financial constraints in the number of electives that a HEP Branch may provide, the KHDA allows a reasonable number of electives to be provided wholly online.

Minor amendments to core and specialist elective units may also be accommodated, provided that the amendments are well justified, and approved by all relevant academic and professional accreditors as remaining equivalent for the purposes of credit transfer.

The rest of the methods presented here concern content and assessment.

Localised content and case studies

In some cases the potential to contextualise the programme, and the advantages of doing so, will be subtle. In other cases, the need to do so will be very obvious. For example, programmes about taxation laws, environmental issues, developing industries and cultural mores may be quite unhelpful in Dubai if they are not localised.

In many cases, it will be possible to swap content (for example, legislation, case studies, media coverage, data) to Dubai-relevant examples without changing the intended learning outcomes. The key is to ensure the complexity of investigation, analysis and reporting remains equivalent.

In-class discussion and activities

With the advent of the Internet and applications that take advantage of it, such as learning management systems, content can now be made constantly available to students. This brings sharper focus on how the limited contact time between academic staff and students is best used. Increasingly, the international trend is towards using contact time to assist students with making meaning of the content and assessment activities, rather than the dissemination of content.

This provides an opportunity for that assistance to be rooted in discussions and activities that seek to make local meaning of the programme learning outcomes. This will require the academic staff to have prepared local examples, locally targeted questions.

One particularly effective way of retaining the original curriculum content while also introducing a localised context is to use the 'compare and contrast' technique. Either as a set assignment, or as in-class discussions, this technique can be used to encourage students to think about and discuss the relevance and applicability of key lessons from a foreign context to a personal or local context.

Field trips and guest speakers

Field trips and guest speakers are well-established mechanisms by which the learning outcomes of a unit can be given a local flavour. It helps if the host of the trip, or the guest lecturer, is first briefed on the programme learning outcomes in order to help align the visit or lecture.

Work-integrated learning

In higher education, there are many methods of work-integrated learning, including through case studies, work simulations, supervised placements, and unstructured work placement assessed through reflective journals. In all cases, they provide students an opportunity to make meaning of their academic studies within a workplace setting. Given that the academic study may have originated from a different context, it is wise to ensure that some of the localising methods listed above (such as case studies, work simulation) have been used prior to placing a student in a work setting, so that any obvious discrepancies between theory and practice are anticipated and do not become an unexpected and debilitating disincentive to the student's successful completion of the work-integrated learning placement.

Local academic references

Typically a student's development of the learning outcomes of a programme will be supported through a series of recommended readings. Academic staff could seek to include the work of local or regional scholars in such lists. This will have the advantage of providing students with local meaning and also assist local scholarship to flourish through greater promulgation and debate.

This approach can also be used with assignments. Even when the assignment does not directly lend itself to a local contextualisation, it may be appropriate to encourage students to include local references (local scholars, articles about local cases).