



Executive Summary

Renewal of Institutional Licensure University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD) Dubai

23-26 October 2023

An External Review Team (ERT) visited the University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD) from 23 – 26 October 2023 to evaluate its *Self-Study* for the Renewal of Institutional Licensure (*Self-Study* for RIL). The exit briefing was held on 26 October 2023.

The University of Wollongong in Dubai was founded in 1993 as an “*Institute for Australian Studies*”. The institution changed its name to the University of Wollongong in Dubai in 1999 and subsequently received licensure through the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (now the Ministry of Education). In subsequent years, UOWD received accreditation for both undergraduate and graduate programs with approval for doctoral programs in 2010. Its license through the CAA was renewed in 2018. With the current Application for Re- Licensure, UOWD is in its fifth cycle of licensure.

UOWD has five schools: the School of Business, the School of Engineering, the School of Computer Science, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the UOWD College. The *Self-Study* and its companion documents indicate that UOWD currently has 5,642 students, with a decline in postgraduate students and an increase in undergraduate students in recent years. UOWD is a diverse university with a strong focus on business and engineering programs. The institution has a significant diversity of student origin, with Indian, Pakistani, Jordanian, and Egyptian students well represented. UOWD has 85 full-time faculty members, 66 of whom have terminal degrees. The student-to-faculty ratio across UOWD is 55:1.

The ERT is pleased to commend UOWD in a number of areas:

Facilities: The University has recently moved to a new campus which offers a space of high quality with facilities that are well-designed and fit for purpose.

Institutional Culture: The UOWD community, from senior management to faculty and staff, exhibits great commitment and enthusiasm, engaging in the task of making UOWD a continued success with a high level of professionalism and dedication.

Students & Alumni: UOWD students and alumni are very positive about the University, are extremely articulate, and willing to play a role in supporting the institution throughout their studies and beyond.

Graduate Employers: Employers are very happy with UOWD graduates, viewing these as among the top contenders from UAE higher education institutions for employment.

Research: The ERT commends the strong improvements in research.

Community Engagement: UOWD is strongly embedded in the community, with a broad range of activities contributing to mutual benefit.

Relationship with Home Campus: The ERT notes that a strong relationship between UOWD and UOW that is positive, productive, and flexible.



Areas in which the ERT sees opportunities for improvement:

Self-Study: The *Self-Study* was not written to a high standard in some areas. Attention to the *Policies and Procedures Manual* was not sufficiently careful. This has resulted in a significant number of requirements in this report that arise because guidelines were not followed or where evidence was not provided.

Branch Campus Status: UOWD is unequivocally a branch campus of UOW. Any lingering confusion is a result of the long history of the institution in the country and a changing regulatory context. The institution's status should be consistently documented in all publications.

Organizational Structure: The ERT has some concerns over the current organizational structure. It is confused by the dual terminology in use at the level of the academic schools and concerned that there is no cross-cutting role providing leadership of graduate studies and research.

Strategic Planning: Strategic planning at both the institutional level and covering specific areas such as research and community engagement needs improvement. Strategies are well designed so far as they go but lack critical components. In particular, there is an unhelpful confusion between operational and strategic performance indicators, with the latter mostly missing. UOWD provides clear evidence of operational planning at the institutional level, though this needs some improvement. In contrast, there is no evidence of operational planning at the levels of many lower-level strategies (the student recruitment strategy is an exception).

Faculty: The ERT has concerns over faculty sufficiency. To some extent, this has arisen because of recent success in student recruitment. Nevertheless, at present, there is evidence of overcrowding in classrooms and faculty with small but structural teaching overloads. Unfortunately, these problems are compounded by the current model of allocating teaching credits to faculty and instructors, which is not compliant with the *Standards*. The ERT recognizes that this is a challenge and will take some time to fully address.

Community Engagement: While the ERT notes considerable evidence of community engagement activities, it is concerned about the coherence of what is undertaken. This is an issue that is already shared within UOWD, and a more strategic approach is already under development.

Research Leadership and Organization: Similarly, in the area of research, while there is clearly evidence of recent success and a good level of support, activity is governed by operational performance indicators rather than strategic indicators. Hence, the ERT notes concerns that the institution is not acting coherently across all relevant areas, from faculty recruitment, through ongoing performance evaluation, to focused research planning and achievements. As mentioned above, the current research strategy is not operationalized. Unlike the area of community engagement, there does not appear to be work in progress to develop a more systematic approach. This is likely the consequence of a lack of a leadership in this area, while such leadership is already in place for community engagement.

The ERT offers its recommendations in a collaborative manner, with the aim of assisting UOWD in meeting the required standards and attaining renewal of institutional licensure.

