

## **BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT**

### **INTERIM INSPECTION (International HE)**

**INSTITUTION:** Varna University of Management (formally, International University College, Sofia)

**ADDRESS:** Tsarigradsko shose 149-B  
Sofia 1784  
Bulgaria

**HEAD OF INSTITUTION:** Professor Vesselin Blageov

**Accreditation status:** Accredited

**Date of inspection:** 3 February 2016

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION ON ACCREDITATION:** 14 March 2016

## PART A - INTRODUCTION

### 1. Background to the institution

The Sofia centre was founded in 1993 as International University College (IUC) Sofia. Subsequently, in 2007, IUC Sofia merged with IUC Dobrich. The expanded IUC became a 'Higher School of Management' reflecting its status as a tertiary institution with provision to award degrees in just one academic field. The institution was renamed Varna University of Management (VUM) in May 2015. VUM's headquarters are in Varna. All inspections to date have been undertaken solely in the Sofia centre.

### 2. Brief description of the current provision

VUM operates as a single, integrated, institution, on three sites: Dobrich, Sofia and Varna. The half-day interim inspection did not allow the inspector to inspect sites other than Sofia. VUM has an agreement with Cardiff Metropolitan University under which it offers four undergraduate, one MSc and one MBA programme. Students graduate with a Cardiff Metropolitan University and a VUM degree; the BA(Hons) Business and Management Studies and BA International Finance and Trade are identical programmes although graduates are awarded the former as a Cardiff Metropolitan University award and the latter as a VUM award.

The Dean of the Sofia centre also holds the post of Vice-Rector of VUM. There are 20 full-time and 28 part-time teaching staff contributing to the programmes across all three sites. At the time of the inspection there were 250 students enrolled on the Cardiff Metropolitan University programmes, 100 in Sofia, 81 in Dobrich and 69 in Varna. Of these, 173 are home students and 77 are international students.

### 3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken by one inspector in half a day. The inspection was conducted at the Sofia centre. The inspector viewed the premises, met the head of the Sofia centre (Vice-Rector of VUM), five other staff and 10 first-year undergraduates.

### 4. Inspection history

<b>Full inspection:</b>	8 to 11 May 2004
<b>Interim inspection:</b>	21 September 2005
<b>Full inspection:</b>	27 and 28 April 2009
<b>Interim inspection:</b>	17 and 18 May 2011
<b>Full inspection:</b>	3 and 4 October 2013

## **PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

**The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution**

### **1. Significant changes since the last inspection**

The institution has undergone a name change since the last inspection. The name was changed from IUC to Varna University of Management (VUM) in May 2015. The agreement with Portsmouth University was terminated in 2015 when the last cohort graduated. The institution now offers Cardiff Metropolitan University undergraduate and postgraduate awards. There has been very little staff turnover and no change to premises at the Sofia centre.

### **2. Response to action points and recommendation in last report**

*8.2 and 8.3 - The College must introduce an institution-wide annual monitoring procedure that informs and underpins managerial action and strategic planning. This should be implemented at the end of the current academic session. The annual monitoring exercise should include data from numerous sources and from a formal documented annual appraisal system for staff.*

It is clear that VUM monitors its operations closely and acts promptly to resolve issues as they arise. The Rector's Annual Report, produced in June at the end of each academic year, reports on activities and actions taken during the preceding academic year. It draws upon a wide range of data, covering the institution's operations. However, the Executive Summary in English kindly provided for the inspector suggests that the Report is largely descriptive, celebrating recent achievements rather than laying the foundation for the future in the form of action planning. The Vice-Rector informed the inspector that the full (Bulgarian version) report does constitute a self-evaluation report. It is suggested, therefore, that the report should be made available in English to enhance transparency and facilitate external audit. This would address the action point from the 2013 revalidation report.

*The College anticipates increased student numbers. The current small numbers of administrative and full-time academic staff suggest that, if this occurs, there is a risk to future operations should key members of staff leave or suffer serious illness. It is recommended that management should give serious consideration to succession planning and the resource implications of increasing the numbers of academic and administrative staff.*

Staff turnover is very low. Around half of the staff have been employed since the institution's establishment and the others have, in the main, been employed for several years. Furthermore, there is a sufficiently wide range of subject expertise to provide cover where necessary. Where it has been necessary, VUM has found no difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers. Management is aware, however, of the need to continue monitoring staffing levels in the light of any future significant increases in student numbers.

*The College application form should seek additional information from prospective students in respect of any specific learning needs or physical impediments.*

Students complete both the VUM Application Form and the Cardiff Metropolitan University International Student Application Form. Both forms require students to declare any special needs.

*The College should encourage students to respond to the unit feedback questionnaires.*

VUM has monitored and sought to address low response rates at the undergraduate level. These have improved. The small, intimate nature of VUM allows students to choose to voice any concerns directly with staff which may explain the limited interest in completing questionnaires.

*The introduction of a formal documented annual appraisal system should embrace both academic and administrative staff.*

VUM has a comprehensive, formally documented and recorded (in Bulgarian) academic staff appraisal system. There is considerable emphasis on enhancement. However, documentary recording of the process, such as face-to-face meetings in English is currently unavailable. Appraisal of non-academic staff is less structured and would benefit from a more formal approach.

*The practice of minuting Board of Studies meetings should also be applied to Faculty meetings.*

VUM does not have a faculty system. There is, however, considerable evidence of the minuting of various committee and annual programme review meetings.

*If student numbers rise it is recommended that the College seeks to formalise support for career guidance.*

The University has strengthened its career guidance provision. A dedicated career guidance and support person is located on the Dobrich site. Well-presented publicity materials, including a newsletter, bring VUM's current students and its graduates to the attention of employers. In addition, there are regular visits of employers to VUM to meet students and raise awareness of employment opportunities with them.

### **3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check**

#### **3.1 Management, Staffing and Administration**

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be		✓		
<b>Comments</b> Evidence from the Sofia centre suggests that the institution continues to be well-managed and administered. The institution is relatively small with good informal arrangements in place, the actions required in part C of this report are to bolster these existing 'informal arrangements' and transfer them to become formal arrangements. Staff are well-qualified and experienced for their roles. The Action Point from the previous inspection report must be met by providing the Rector's Annual Report in English. This will enable VUM to demonstrate its role in articulating its annual self-evaluation exercise and informing the institution's forward planning. An Academic Board has been constituted but has not yet met; its place in the university structure must be communicated. The recording of staff (academic and administrative) appraisal procedures should be made more explicit and transparent. All continuing references to IUC, such as publicity material, signage, email and material on the website, must be removed and replaced by reference to VUM. The inspector was informed by the Vice-Rector that these matters are in hand.				

#### **3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<b>Comments</b> Academic staff are very well qualified and experienced. Monitoring reports from Cardiff Metropolitan University are positive. Students who met the inspector were largely complimentary about their teachers as				

was evidenced from questionnaires.

### 3.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<b>Comments</b> The inspector spoke informally to some 10 first-year undergraduates who were very satisfied with the University's commitment to their welfare. The University's Dobrich centre has residential accommodation but it was not possible to inspect this during the interim inspection. Although the University does refund student fees as appropriate, it is important that it has a written policy on the matter.				

### 3.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<b>Comments</b> The Sofia provision is small, but provides a friendly and supportive learning environment for its students. The inspector did not visit the Dobrich or Varna site. It is therefore not possible to comment first-hand on the provision at these centres, although details of accommodation in Dobrich and Varna were provided.				

## PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

### Institution's strengths

The University, as evidenced by the inspection of the Sofia centre, is well-managed and administered. Academic staff are very well qualified and experienced. Staff exhibit an excellent command of English. The students met also exhibited an excellent command of English and were articulate, of high calibre and strongly motivated. The University is highly regarded and consistently achieves very high rankings in Bulgaria, eastern Europe and internationally. There is openness to external scrutiny and a strong commitment to improvement.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
The University must provide evidence, in English, of an annual self-evaluation review process which informs the production of self-evaluation reports and provides the basis for senior management strategic planning. (3.1)	M
The University must ensure that all reference to IUC in signage, documentation, email addresses and on the website is removed and replaced by VUM. (3.1)	M
The recording of academic and, especially, administrative staff appraisal procedures must be more explicit and transparent. (3.1)	L
The University must produce a new structure chart showing the place of the newly constituted Academic Board (3.1)	L
The University must draw up a written policy on the refund of student fees. (3.3)	M

## COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
<p>Further comments, if applicable</p> <p>While VUM does meet the required standards there is a need for more formal, documented procedures to enhance transparency.</p> <p>The University operates on three sites. To date only the Sofia site has been inspected. Consequently, there has been no first-hand reporting on premises and facilities on the Dobrich and Varna sites. The Dobrich site provides residential accommodation.</p> <p>While this might warrant a supplementary (premises) inspection, the Vice-Rector expressed a preference for bringing the reaccreditation inspection forwards to incorporate inspection of all three sites. This would minimise disruption to the University. It should be noted that Cardiff Metropolitan University has visited all three sites and reported positively on the facilities available in all of them.</p>	