



# Audit of overseas provision

**The University of Abertay Dundee  
Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi), Malaysia**

MARCH 2010



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## Introduction

### The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

1 The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in United Kingdom (UK) higher education rests with individual universities and colleges. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) checks how well they meet their responsibilities, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. QAA also publishes guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems to ensure students have high-quality experiences.

2 Many universities and colleges in the UK offer their higher education programmes to students wishing to study outside this country. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that almost 100,000 students were studying for UK higher education (HE) awards entirely outside the UK in the 2007-08 academic year, either at overseas campuses directly run by UK institutions or through collaborative arrangements that UK institutions have made with foreign partners. QAA reviews both collaborative arrangements and programmes delivered on overseas campuses through a process called Audit of overseas provision. We conduct Audit of overseas provision country by country. In the academic year 2009-10 we conducted an Audit of overseas provision in Malaysia. The purpose of the audit was to provide information on the way in which a group of UK universities and colleges were maintaining academic standards and the quality of education in their provision in Malaysia. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report.

### The Audit of overseas provision process

3 In April 2009, QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information on their provision in Malaysia. On the basis of the information returned, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with provision in that country. These institutions produced a briefing paper describing the way in which their provision (or a subset of their provision) in Malaysia operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which they assured quality and standards. In addition, each institution was asked to make reference to the extent to which the provision was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas activity. Institutions were also invited to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, particularly *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA.

4 Audit teams visited each of the 10 UK institutions to discuss their provision in Malaysia between November 2009 and February 2010. The same teams visited Malaysia in March 2010 to meet some of the staff responsible for managing and delivering the provision, and to meet students. During the visits to institutions in Malaysia, discussions were conducted with key members of staff and with students. The audit of the University of Abertay Dundee was coordinated for QAA by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor B Anderton and Mrs E Barnes, with Mrs S Patterson acting as audit secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and, where applicable, to their partners in Malaysia for the willing cooperation that they provided to the team.

### Higher education in Malaysia

5 According to UNESCO's *Global Education Digest*, there were about 750,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions in Malaysia in 2009. The institutions can be broadly divided into two types: public and private. Public institutions, which comprise 20 public universities, 27 polytechnics and 57 community colleges, are government-funded; private institutions, which include universities, university colleges and colleges, receive no public funding. The UNESCO Digest states that two thirds of students in Malaysia are enrolled in public institutions.

6 Executive responsibility for higher education in Malaysia resides with the Ministry of Higher Education, which was separated from the Ministry of Education and established as a full ministry under a Federal Government Minister in 2004. Among the various departments and agencies under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education is the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). The MQA is the single higher education quality assurance agency in the country, whose scope covers both public and private higher education providers. The MQA is responsible for accrediting higher education programmes and for maintaining a definitive list of accredited programmes - the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR) - which includes programmes provided in collaboration between Malaysian and overseas partners and programmes delivered at overseas campuses in Malaysia. Students studying unaccredited programmes are ineligible for student loans and institutions providing unaccredited programmes are not allowed to recruit overseas students to them.

7 In addition, the MQA is responsible for maintaining the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, an instrument that develops and classifies all Malaysian higher education qualifications from certificates to doctorates. The Act which created the MQA also provides for the conferment of a self accrediting status to 'mature' institutions that have well established quality assurance mechanisms. To achieve self accrediting status the institution must undergo an institutional audit. If it is successful, all qualifications it offers are automatically recorded on the MQR. At the time of the audit, the MQA was conducting the first round of institutional audits.

## **Section 1: The background to the collaborative link**

### **Nature of the link**

8 This report considers the partnership between the University of Abertay Dundee (the University, Abertay) and SEGi Colleges Malaysia (SEGi), which dates back to the late 1980s. The report examines the operation of the arrangement as at March 2010.

9 Abertay is one of the newest and smallest universities in Scotland. It can trace its origins to 1888, when the Dundee Institute of Technology was founded. It was granted taught and research degree awarding powers in 1992, and achieved university title in 1994. The University's mission states that it is 'committed to being an excellent university, equal to the best in Scotland and making its own unique contribution to society'.

10 SEGi, originally Systematic College, has been a holding company listed on the main Malaysian stock market since 1995 and delivers higher education at all levels, from diploma to postgraduate awards. SEGi is committed to providing Malaysian students with the opportunity to gain UK Awards, to accomplish which it has formed partnerships with a number of UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It is a private provider of education regulated by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the MQA.

11 The University has a comparatively limited number of overseas collaborative arrangements, of which SEGi is the most significant in terms of student numbers and the range of programmes. The University considers SEGi to be a preferred partner as the relationship is both long term and stable.

12 Between 1998 and 2005 the Senate at Abertay approved the delivery of the honours stage (stage 4) of the Abertay BA (Hons) Accounting with Finance, BA (Hons) Business Administration and the BA (Hons) Marketing and Business at SEGi Colleges. In 2005 SEGi gained approval from the Malaysian Ministry of Education to deliver all stages of the programmes. In 2006 Dundee Business School (DBS) was approved by Senate to deliver stages 2 and 3 of these programmes. The current Memorandum of Agreement (the Agreement) governing the operation of the partnership runs from 2007 until April 2012.

13 The programmes are delivered at the three SEGi College Centres, which are in Kuala Lumpur, Kota Damansara and Penang. This report is confined to the operation in Kuala Lumpur; all the SEGi Colleges operate as separate entities. In June 2009 there were 407 students enrolled on the programmes, a decline of 21 per cent on the previous year. There was a further decline in 2010 to 353 enrolments. The decline is partly attributable to the discontinuation of the parent course in Accounting with Finance at Abertay and also to an increasingly competitive recruitment market in Kuala Lumpur. Entry to the stage 2 courses in January 2009 was 19, compared with 90 in January 2008, and stage 4 saw a reduction from 455 students to 340. The centre in Kuala Lumpur recruited 62 students at stage 4 in 2009 and the centre at Kota Damansara 23 students. There was no recruitment to the courses in Penang in either 2009 or 2010.

### **The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision**

14 Abertay is clear, as is defined in the the Agreement for the partnership, that the University is responsible for the academic standards of the programmes and awards. The University describes its approach to overseas collaborative provision as 'cautious'.

15 The University has recently undertaken a restructuring at executive level. Posts of Director of Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, with broad oversight of all quality matters, and Director of Partnerships, with specific responsibilities for collaborative arrangements, have been established. The Director of Partnerships has responsibility for bringing greater consistency to the University's approach to creating and managing collaborations. There is an increasingly centralised approach to the management of collaborative provision, with an attendant move from a largely opportunistic to a more strategic approach to the management of collaborative provision. While it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements, the senior team at the University considers that it now has a better overview of activities and that central coordination is leading to improved consistency in approach across its collaborative provision.

16 There are a number of different collaborative models defined in the Handbook on Collaboration in Relation to Academic Awards (the Handbook), which sets out the procedures and processes for overseas collaborations. The Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee (formerly the Collaborative Provision Task Group), reporting to the University's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), maintains a comprehensive list of taught programmes offered through collaborative arrangements. A register of partnerships is appended to the Handbook.

17 The University's policy for collaboration is set out in the Handbook as a wish to:

- make its programmes available more widely to allow the development of innovative programmes through collaboration in staff expertise and/or facilities
- generate additional business and diversify sources of income
- facilitate greater cultural awareness and understanding through the interaction of staff and students from different backgrounds.

Recognising the potential for mutual learning, the University also aspires in its work with partners to make the most effective use of quality enhancement systems to improve the provision.

18 The University will grant approval for its programmes to be delivered in collaboration with partner institutions, and to programmes developed by a partner, only where it has been closely involved in the development and where the developments meet its strategic aims. Abertay will not approve collaborative arrangements where it does not have the subject expertise in its home provision. All programmes leading to awards of the University must be delivered and assessed in English.

## Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

### Selecting and approving the partner organisation

19 The Handbook defines the processes for approval of collaborative partners and of programmes, which include an indicative checklist of potential risks and a risk register template. The Planning and Resources Committee gives initial formal consideration to proposals for collaborative linkages. Partnerships may originate from a variety of sources, through senior or central staff or at school level, but in all cases support at school level is a requirement. The approval of partners focuses primarily on the business case for the partnership as opposed to the academic case.

20 The procedures for approval include guidance on:

- the identification of suitable partners and preliminary explorations
- the assessment by the University of academic quality and standards at the prospective partner organisation
- the development of the business model
- Senate approval
- preparation of a Memorandum of Agreement.

21 A checklist for due diligence consideration of the partner organisation is provided in the Handbook and includes:

- academic and financial standing
- clarity of the motivation of the partner for entering into the arrangement
- the partner's understanding of the University's policy towards collaborative activity and the limitations of the UK HE context
- details of other existing partnerships
- the local regulatory context
- the financial implications.

The process requires at least one visit to the prospective partner institution by senior University staff and by subject specialists in the areas of study to be developed. Information about the prospective partner is sought through third parties, such as the British Council, and any external reports on the organisation.

22 The Handbook defines the responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for programme and institutional-level approvals. The approval of the partner is conducted in parallel with programme approval. The SEGi partnership approval predated the Handbook but was subject to similar processes and, in fact, influenced the development and implementation of the Handbook. The partnership approval event in 1994 was SEGi's first experience of UK HE approval processes; in discussion with the audit team, senior staff at SEGi described it as a stringent and challenging process that had promoted confidence in the establishment of the partnership.

23 SEGi led the process of seeking approval from local regulatory bodies on the basis of documentation provided by the University. At the start of the arrangement, approval was required from the Ministry of Education. Subsequently, approval was sought and secured from the National Accreditation Board (LAN in its Malaysian acronym) and its successor, the MQA.

24 Hitherto, the University has not conducted periodic reviews of partner organisations. The senior management team at the University has recognised that its superintendence of collaborative provision would be strengthened by the introduction of a partnership review process, a view with which the audit team concurs. The intention to develop and implement a process of institutional-level review of collaborative partner organisations is in line with the move to a more centralised approach to the management of collaborative provision. The audit found that the specification of the process of approval for partner organisations was comprehensive and met the expectations of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The establishment of a systematic review of partner organisations will strengthen further the University's oversight of its collaborative provision.

### Programme approval

25 The approval process for programmes to be delivered at SEGi was based on the requirement that Senate have approved the programmes for delivery on campus. The approval document focused, therefore, on market and delivery conditions, programme and module delivery, admissions, delivery models, learner support, learning resource material, resources, and quality assurance and enhancement. The commentary stated that the approved programme specifications were the basis of collaborative provision proposals, but these were not included in the approval documentation provided. This requirement is not stated in the Handbook.

26 Programme approval may be granted with or without conditions. If approval is conditional, details of the response to the conditions must be provided to the approval panel for sign off by the Chair before the programmes can operate. The report is then presented to QAC, which in turn makes recommendations for approval to Senate.

27 Separate approval from Senate is required for each site of delivery. Schools must provide the relevant documentation and conduct site visits. In 2006 DBS submitted documentation for approval of a range of programmes across six sites. The sites were visited by the Head of the School of Computing and an external specialist to appraise them for delivery of programmes.

28 Requests for minor changes, and the opportunity to modify the programme to take account of local contexts, are raised primarily through informal channels during the visits of University staff to SEGi. There is also an opportunity to suggest changes through the annual review process.

29 There have been a number of programme amendments and reapprovals since the arrangement was established. In the academic year 2003-04 the University revised its academic regulations and modular scheme. Senate agreed that a transition period of two years be put in place for the scheme with SEGi, and all programmes and sites were reapproved in March 2006. In May 2009 a change to arrangements for entry to stage 4 was approved through a written submission to the Quality Assurance Committee.

30 The audit found a lack of clarity in relation to the recognition and accreditation status of the programmes. A written statement provided to the audit team about accreditation for the programmes for the academic year 2009-10 declared that the BA in Business Administration received Chartered Management Institute recognition for the purpose of registration; the accreditation applies to provision both on and off campus. The BA Accounting with Finance has exemption for five specified papers from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) for students completing level 3, and a further exemption for those completing level 4, which covers all students, regardless of the place of study. University staff confirmed that the programme had ACCA accreditation in the form of exemption in Malaysia for five ACCA papers, and that it had ACCA and Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) recognition.

31 Marketing materials specific to the programmes do not make reference to professional, statutory and regulatory body recognition or accreditation, but the prospectus does include a section about professional studies, including reference to ACCA and CIMA. Students whom the

audit team met were not aware of any accreditation or recognition being attached to the programmes. The University should verify the professional recognition status of the programmes, including their applicability to delivery at SEGi, and ensure that this information is provided in the relevant course handbooks and marketing materials.

32 Overall, the audit found that the arrangements for programme approval were sound and took due account of the relevant precepts in the *Code of practice*.

### **Written agreements with the partner organisation**

33 The operation of the partnership is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement (the Agreement) that defines the responsibilities of the parties. The Agreement includes a list of all the programmes and sites approved for delivery with SEGi. The annexes to the Agreement include:

- details of courses of study
- entry requirements
- academic standards and quality assurance
- financial arrangements
- the Procedures Manual.

The Procedures Manual provides operational details of course administration, identifying the responsibilities of both institutions and staff in the management and delivery of the programmes. The audit found that the form of the Agreement was in alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

## **Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes**

### **Day-to-day management**

34 The main contact for the partnership with SEGi Colleges is the Abertay Programme Coordinator, who is based in the Collaborative Provision Office, which has recently become part of the Partnership Directorate. Each SEGi Colleges campus has a College Coordinator with responsibility for the administration of courses. The DBS Director of Academic Programmes (DAP) chairs the school-level Collaborative Provision Committee, which oversees academic operational matters relating to delivery of programmes. The Agreement and Manual specify the responsibilities of module tutors at SEGi.

35 Communication between staff at the University and SEGi is coordinated by the Programme Coordinator and channelled to the relevant staff; direct contact between module tutors is also encouraged. Module tutors at SEGi reported that they were responsible for making the first contact with their counterparts at the University, but that, once established, the relationships worked well. The University aims that email correspondence to and from SEGi be copied to the Programme Coordinator; the practice is not yet fully established, so there can be delays in responses when staff are absent from the University.

36 The student records for the programmes are managed by the University through its standard on-campus system. The University has a two-stage system of Subject Boards and Programme Boards where student progression and achievement are considered and which are run entirely by the University. Student performance data from SEGi and on-campus students are presented together to the boards. This approach provides for direct confirmation of comparability of academic standards between sites of delivery.

37 SEGi students have a dedicated email address for contact with the University. In meetings with the audit team, students spoke positively about their ability to contact the University and of



the support offered by both local and University staff. They described staff as accessible and always willing to provide support and advice both formally and informally. Support is provided online by University staff, directly by SEGi staff and by University tutors when visiting SEGi.

38 The reapproval of the home programmes in 2006 and the University's move from a structure of 10 modules to 8 modules per stage provided an opportunity for Abertay to review programme delivery at SEGi. Between 1998 and 2006 delivery was based on workbooks produced by University tutors and used by SEGi students in self-study mode. Classes delivered by SEGi tutors were the focal point during revision. In 2003 the University commissioned an external advisor to undertake a review of its programmes with SEGi in the context of the changes to the University's modular scheme. Within the review, it was noted that there were drawbacks to delivery of the final year of the honours degree through the workbook-based approach, in that it was difficult to keep the material up to date and tutor contact was limited. The performance of SEGi students was also consistently lower than that of on-campus students. As a consequence the University introduced an arrangement, dubbed 'Articulate', whereby Abertay staff provide lectures online, which are supported by tutorial sessions with SEGi staff, to provide for more classroom interaction. At both institutions, students and staff whom the audit team met spoke positively about Articulate and the more engaging mode of delivery (see also paragraph 40).

39 All of the programmes are delivered and assessed in English. There is an assumption that students applying for the programme will have previously studied in English and will therefore not require additional support, as SEGi is an English-speaking environment. The majority of students entering the programme have studied the SEGi diploma, which is delivered in English. The University has not identified any issues with the students' language skills, but SEGi does offer English language tuition on its own account as there are some international students who may need some additional support in this area (see also paragraph 64).

40 Staff from the University visit all SEGi delivery sites during student induction and at mid-semester. Students receive separate induction from SEGi staff and from Abertay staff. The latter deliver sessions to provide the University context and to prepare students for the approach to learning and teaching. For stage 4, the support from the University includes orientation to honours-level study. University staff whom the audit team met reported that the induction sessions helped to establish and foster good relationships with the students.

41 Sessions offered by University staff during the mid-semester visits focus upon generic study skills issues, such as approaches to coursework, and are delivered during teaching time. Students also have the opportunity for individual meetings with staff. The University aims, through this approach, to provide students with active support for learning, as opposed to passive receipt of information. There are online discussions between staff and students towards the end of each semester to support revision; the discussions are archived for later use.

42 Stages 2 and 3 of the programmes are delivered by SEGi tutors using the syllabus and materials provided by the University module tutors. The SEGi tutors may adapt the material to provide local context, provided that they discuss proposed modifications with University staff. Contact time in Malaysia is higher than in the UK because of local requirements. Tutor-directed materials have been used to move towards staff at SEGi playing more of an advisory role and promoting independent learning as opposed to working to a didactic model. Students at SEGi whom the audit team met were very positive about their learning experience and were very aware of, and articulate in describing, the ways in which the programme had developed them as critical thinkers.

43 The 'Articulate' approach to Stage 4 delivery is supported by staff from both institutions. University staff provide an online lecture with supporting slides that students can access independently in their own time, and access is also provided at SEGi teaching centres. Tutorials are then conducted by SEGi staff, who encourage reflection on the learning from the lecture and provide related activities. Staff at SEGi do not normally replay the lecture in class, except in part,

but they all use the accompanying slides. The nature of the online lectures varies, with some broken up with time for reflection and activities, while others are delivered as a conventional monologue lecture. Students and staff reported finding it more difficult to engage with the latter approach. Articulate is generally well received by the staff and students, and the opportunity to revisit lectures and to use video clips in class provides an effective learning tool. The University has a technology-enhanced learning team examining more broadly how teaching and learning are supported and how students learn. The team is seeking to move away from voice-overs on PowerPoint slides to more interactive and innovative teaching methods which can be extended to the provision at SEGi.

44 Feedback arrangements for SEGi students differ from those that apply on campus. The students have a range of mechanisms for providing feedback, but the primary source of student feedback is that collected through the routine visits by University staff. The Programme Executive Board is a biannual, formally minuted meeting of student representatives with University staff. Student representatives are elected by their colleagues and are briefed about the role by University staff. Minutes of the meeting of the Board are considered by the Director of Academic Programmes at the University, and updates on actions and minutes of the meeting are provided by the SEGi course coordinator to students. The students whom the audit team met believed that their opinions mattered and were taken into account, and they were aware of actions taken in response to their feedback.

45 The University's approach to the collection of student feedback is based on the view that staff visits are more effective at gathering student views than questionnaires. There is evidence that the University has collected some feedback through questionnaires, but none of the students whom the audit team met were able to confirm having provided other than oral feedback to the University. SEGi collects student feedback systematically through questionnaires on its own account.

46 The School Annual Reports for SEGi do not make any reference to formal module evaluations for the academic years 2007-08 or 2005-06, but the outcomes of student programme feedback questionnaires were included in the reports for the academic years 2006-07 and 2004-05. Reference is made, in the report for the academic year 2007-08, to student feedback being monitored in March and November at the module level, and in December at graduation for the programme level. The only student feedback provided in the appendices to the 2007-08 report was from the Executive Board minutes from October 2007 and March 2008.

47 The development plan for the partnership for the academic year 2009-10 identifies learner feedback as an area for improvement. Information gained from Executive Board meetings is provided by student representatives and is therefore dependent on the assiduity of the representatives in gathering the views of other students, and therefore may not cover the individual student experience. Currently, information on feedback from students gained by SEGi and the University is exchanged through generic reporting in annual review and monitoring. The University is planning to review its approach to gathering feedback at SEGi, including the possibility of questionnaires through an online mechanism. The audit team endorses the University's intentions in this area as there is scope for a more structured and systematic approach to the gathering and use of student feedback to contribute to enhancement of the student learning experience.

### **Arrangements for monitoring and review**

48 The QAC is formally responsible for the arrangements for the monitoring and review of academic quality and standards, which are the same for on-campus and collaborative provision. In practice, quality assurance and the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards in collaborative provision are delegated to the Collaborative Provision Task Group. The DBS Collaborative Provision Committee is the link between school and institutional processes through its responsibility to consider and recommend approval of collaborative provision programme reports.

## Annual monitoring

49 Annual monitoring operates at a number of levels, with reports being produced to standard templates. The reporting schedule is designed so that annual review is completed before the start of the next academic session so that staff can focus on the new academic year, its intake and the development of the programmes. Division annual reports consider module-level delivery and performance, and programme annual reports consider the SEGi variant, including comparison with the cognate home provision. University Programme Coordinators compile comprehensive reports about the Abertay programmes at SEGi, drawing on other relevant reports. There is also a School Quality Enhancement Report that includes consideration of delivery at collaborative partners and provides a comparison of student performance across the school and partner institutions. Annual reports are considered at Senate, and in the earlier days of the relationship senior staff from SEGi attended Senate for the presentation of the report.

50 The School Annual Reports on SEGi include reflection on teaching and learning and the learning experience, drawing upon student recruitment, progression and achievement data, feedback reports from staff visits, Programme Executive minutes and any reports from the MQA. Detailed performance analysis at modular and programme level of SEGi students compared with on-campus students is included.

51 Monitoring of emerging issues and action taken is conducted within the annual monitoring process and a detailed account is provided at the start of the annual report. Annual reports seen by the audit team were primarily concerned with review and action planning; the identification and promulgation of good practice were less evident.

52 The School Quality Enhancement Report is produced by the Head of School, drawing upon school annual reports and the school's quality assurance report. The reports seen by the audit team made reference to SEGi as having comparable mechanisms for obtaining feedback on the learner experience, but again there was no specific reference to good practice emerging through collaborative provision or informing delivery off-campus. There was no reference to the report being shared with partner institutions.

53 SEGi staff receive copies of the completed annual reports, but are not otherwise involved with the process other than through the provision of feedback to the University during staff visits. Nonetheless, staff confirmed that they had opportunity to raise any issues or concerns and that the University was responsive to matters raised. In meetings with the audit team staff of the University were clear that the relationship with SEGi was viewed as a partnership of equals. Given the maturity of the partnership, the University may wish to review the participation of SEGi in annual monitoring and consider whether more active involvement of the partner might contribute to enhancement of the operation of the collaborative arrangement.

## Periodic review

54 The University's Quality Review is the formal mechanism by which approval is granted to continue to offer a programme. The process is detailed in the Quality Review Handbook and includes the preparation of a self-evaluation document; a review event; consideration of a review report by QAC, the Quality Enhancement Committee and Senate; and a revision of programme specifications and development plans. Review panels comprise internal and external members and a student representative. Collaborative provision is incorporated within the standard periodic review of subjects and programmes, but the subject and review handbook does not include explicit guidance on the involvement of staff and students from partner institutions. The last review that included the SEGi provision was conducted in the academic year 2007-08. The review panel judgements on the operation of the programmes were positive in all cases.

55 Senior staff from SEGi whom the audit team met were aware of periodic review and had provided information to contribute to the process, but delivery staff were unfamiliar with the process. As it reviews the participation of SEGi staff in annual monitoring, the University may also

wish to consider whether there might be benefit in seeking ways in which partner staff may be more actively involved in periodic review of provision.

### **Staffing and staff development**

56 Members of staff in partner institutions who are involved in the delivery of programmes leading to University awards are required to be associate lecturers of the University. The requirement is designed to ensure that the University has a comprehensive record of staff members and their academic qualifications. Associate Lecturer status is an honorary position that provides access to the University's computer systems, network facilities and networked services, while securing compliance with internal and external computing regulations and licence and copyright arrangements. There is a clearly defined process for the appointment of associate lecturers.

57 Details of staff teaching on the programmes should be provided annually by SEGi to the Human Resources Department and the Head of School. There was evidence to suggest that this process did not always operate as intended, as in response to a problem with access to the Virtual learning Environment (VLE) that was raised by SEGi tutors, it was assumed by the University that this was attributable to SEGi not informing the University of tutors becoming associate lecturers.

58 Staffing at SEGi to support the programmes is stable, with the majority of staff having been involved with the programme for a significant number of years. Academic staff from the University provide induction for any new staff during their routine visits. Support for module delivery is provided electronically, with ongoing dialogue between module leaders operating as a 'buddy' system.

59 Staff development needs are identified through the annual monitoring process and an action plan is incorporated in the DBS SEGi Development Plan. Visits by University staff are used routinely to provide staff development sessions for SEGi staff. The major focus of the support sessions is pedagogy and academic practice, as opposed to process and programme management. Visiting staff also provide information to SEGi staff on staff development that has taken place at the University. Staff at SEGi have recently been involved in development activity for project supervision and the use of the VLE. The Chair of the DBS Learning and Teaching Committee has also provided workshops to SEGi staff replicating those at the University on feedback on assessment.

60 Peer review of SEGi staff teaching is undertaken at the mid-semester visits by University staff. In meetings with the audit team the SEGi staff commented on the detailed and helpful feedback provided through this exercise. Although there is no formal reciprocal review process, SEGi staff observe University staff teaching on the VLE and through video-conferencing. None of the teaching staff whom the audit team met at SEGi had visited the University but all would welcome the opportunity to do so.

61 The University has developed a new Learning and Teaching Plan that includes the quantifiable time that students can expect to spend on enquiry-based activities. Accordingly, in the academic year 2010-11, DBS is planning to audit the use of enquiry-based learning in off-campus modules and to deliver a tutor workshop on enquiry-based learning at SEGi.

62 The audit found that the approach to staff support and development was a strength of the partnership. Staff at the University are aware of the need for sensitivity and are careful not to apply teaching and learning strategies to collaborative provision without consideration of the local context, conventions and expectations.

### **Student admissions**

63 The admissions requirements and procedures are set out in the Agreement. Marketing of the programmes and recruitment are managed centrally at SEGi with no input from the staff

delivering the programmes. Details of entry requirements are set out in the prospectus and on the University website. Students may enter the programmes at stage 2 or directly into stage 4.

64 Students are recruited from the feeder SEGi diploma, for which a number of the SEGi academic staff are common with the degree programmes. There are also applicants from other private colleges in Malaysia and from international students. There are currently no arrangements for accreditation of prior experiential learning, but there is provision for direct access to stages 3 and 4 on the basis of accreditation of prior learning against the standard academic prerequisites for the programmes.

65 SEGi centre coordinators check the evidence of qualification and then forward the application to the University. The Abertay Programme Coordinator considers applications and makes the official offers. All applications are recorded on the University's student records system.

66 When the standard entry requirements for entry to diploma programmes in Malaysia changed, the University found that an unexpected consequence was a credit shortfall for students progressing to the programmes at stage 4. In January 2008 the University responded by introducing a bridging programme with up to three modules at stage 3 for all SEGi diploma students. The programme operates with University module syllabi offered as SEGi subjects in which the assessment regime is that of the University but is managed by SEGi. The University's pragmatic and prudent introduction of the bridging requirement was seen to have a negative impact on recruitment as not all institutions modified their direct entry requirements from Malaysian diplomas to stage 4 and were therefore more attractive to potential students. Malaysian entry requirements for diplomas are about to change again so that all students will be required to complete stage 2 and therefore the requirement for the bridging programme will cease.

67 There is no reference to English language requirements in the Procedures Manual, the latest SEGi prospectus, or information leaflets about the programmes. The Agreement states that entry requirements are set out in the guide to entry on the University portal, but there is no detail about required English language qualifications. No details with respect to overseas student English language qualification requirements are available on the web. The University may wish to consider whether the provision to prospective students of accessible information about expectations for English language competence expectations, and the availability of English language support during the programmes, would strengthen its recruitment procedures. Apart from this latter point, the audit found that the approach to admissions was sound and took due account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

### **Assessment requirements**

68 The assessment strategies and instruments as set out in approval documents are identical at SEGi and at the University. The DBS SEGi Development Plan for the academic year 2009-10 refers to assessment strategies coming from a UK-specific higher education context and suggests that care should be taken when applying them in the Malaysian context. An audit of assessment strategies is being planned to establish their cross-cultural transferability.

69 DBS retains responsibility for the entire assessment process, including all first and second marking and moderation. Where assessment involves a student presentation a video recording is provided to the University. SEGi staff are not involved in summative assessment, but provide informal guidance, not direct support, to students in the preparation of their assessment submissions. Staff at the University provide support electronically and may advise on assessment drafts.

70 SEGi tutors do not have prior sight of examination papers, except where there is specialist content specific to the Malaysian context. SEGi tutors set the assessments for these modules for moderation by the external examiner. The University module tutor appraises the level of the assessment. External examiners based in Malaysia with subject-specific knowledge of the local systems are appointed to moderate assessments for these modules.

71 A moderator who has responsibility for safeguarding the DBS's standards produces a moderation report for those modules for which they are responsible. The comprehensive report to the module tutor comments on the mode of assessment in relation to the outcomes being assessed; the instructions provided and module grade criteria for marking; additional materials needed to complete the assessment; whether the assessment conforms with the teaching, learning and assessment statement set out in the module descriptor; whether the assessment question is reused; and the format and presentation of the assessment. The moderator also advises on whether the assessment should be sent to the external examiner for comment. Following the assessment a report is produced, compiling module tutors' comments, moderator comments and external examiner comments.

72 There are sound arrangements to safeguard the integrity of the assessment process, including the security of examination papers. The difference in time zones is accommodated through examinations being scheduled in the morning for students at the University and in the late afternoon for students at SEGi. SEGi students are kept in the examinations room until the examination at the University has commenced.

73 The Procedures Manual states that DBS will endeavour to provide formative feedback on all coursework. According to the commentary, 'feedback on coursework is normally provided through specific or generic cohort feedback comment provided by the tutor'. In meetings with the audit team the students at SEGi all reported that that they did not receive any feedback on assessed work. They are notified of their marks about two to three months after submission of the work. They found it was difficult to identify how to improve their performance, and that SEGi staff were unable to advise as they are not involved in the assessment process and could only offer advice on referencing.

74 The Articulate project documentation states that University module leaders will provide a collection of past coursework tasks and examination papers with answer keys. Staff at SEGi did not appear to have received this material. The same documentation also refers to a tutor-assessed task (TAT) system, which is a mechanism for the provision of formative feedback to students and the enhancement of shared understanding of task performance criteria. University staff should provide a TAT task for SEGi staff for the first two semesters of delivery. None of the staff or students whom the audit team met referred to the TAT. The University will wish to review its approach to the provision of feedback to students at SEGi, in particular the provision of feedback to students in a timely manner so that they may benefit from assessor comments when they undertake subsequent assessment tasks.

75 Subject and Programme Assessment Boards take place in January and February, and in August at the University. DBS has responsibility for running the Boards, recording the decisions, processing the documentation for Chair's actions and communicating decisions to SEGi College coordinators and students.

## **External examining**

76 The University appoints the same external examiners for the provision delivered on and off-campus. Subject external examiners work independently of programme external examiners. SEGi nominates the external examiners for the assessments that are specific to the Malaysian context and the formal appointments are made by the University Senate. The examiners are provided with the University external examiner handbooks and have a local induction at SEGi. They have no contact with the other external examiners and are not required to attend the assessment boards at the University. There is no requirement or provision for the UK-based external examiners to meet SEGi students or staff.

77 Copies of external examiner reports are provided to SEGi, but the staff are not involved in the responses to external examiners and do not have sight of any responses other than those referred to within the annual reports. The audit team considers that there might be benefit to the

partnership if staff at SEGi were able to have input into the composition of responses to external examiner reports. The local external examiners complete the standard external examiner reports for return to the University; they do have the opportunity to meet SEGi staff.

78 Overall, the audit found that the University made proper use of external examiners in its summative assessment processes for the collaborative provision with SEGi.

### **Certificates and transcripts**

79 SEGi students receive the standard University of Abertay Dundee award certificate that includes the classification (where appropriate) and award title. The accompanying transcript provides information about the modules studied, attainment, the location of delivery and the language of delivery and assessment. Students normally receive their awards at a graduation ceremony held in Kuala Lumpur but they are offered the opportunity to attend the ceremony in the UK. The approach to the certification of awards is in alignment with the guidance in the *Code of practice*.

## **Section 4: Information**

### **Student information (oversight by UK institution)**

80 During induction students are introduced to a range of documentation to support them in their studies and are provided with a CD-ROM containing information and guidance on programmes, policies and procedures. They are also introduced to the University portal containing a range of support materials. Students receive comprehensive programme handbooks and module guides. There are excellent support materials, including guidance on referencing, accessing electronic resources, and how to plan and present course work. The students were positive about the support they received for skills development, both in terms of the materials and online support available and the support skills sessions provided by University staff.

81 The students' experience of access to resources to support the programme was in the main very positive. Although there had been some technical hitches, in general the students were very complimentary about the VLE and its centrality to the delivery of the honours year. The electronic book database 'e-brary' is readily accessible in the SEGi library and students have a range of facilities offered on campus at SEGi to interact with electronic resources and course materials.

82 While the students are provided with information about formal processes for complaints and academic appeals, they reported that where they needed advice or wished to complain they would go directly to the programme coordinators at either SEGi or the University. They were given significant written guidance about avoiding plagiarism, which was reinforced by sessions from staff from both institutions. Staff and students at SEGi were familiar with the penalties for plagiarism. All plagiarism cases are dealt with by University staff during visits to SEGi. For academic appeals the panel meets at the University and students have the right to attend. A SEGi staff member is asked to liaise with the student and the panel. The University may wish to consider whether holding the Academic Appeal Boards at the University disadvantages students as it may be impracticable and costly for them to attend.

### **Publicity and marketing**

83 The Agreement sets out the University's responsibility for overseeing the veracity and marketing of promotional materials. The University supplies samples of promotional and advertising materials as models. The Manual states that all advertising must be approved by the Business Development Office at the University and that advertising materials such as programme leaflets will be supplied by the Student Recruitment Office. Staff at SEGi confirmed that they were expected to provide draft materials for approval by the University and that clearance had to be received for information provided on the website. Some of the programme leaflets seen by the

audit team were produced by SEGi and included reference to all of their provision with a range of UK partners. Hitherto, when University staff visited SEGi they looked at materials and websites within their own specialist fields, with approval of materials being sought from the Head of School. Under the more centralised processes for the management of collaborative provision, the Programmes Coordinator, based in the Academic Standards and Partnerships Directorate, and the Head of School will have formal responsibility for the consideration and approval of published information about the collaborative provision.

84 Students whom the audit team met at SEGi had heard about the programmes through a variety of sources, including friends and family, a student counsellor, a visit to the College and through recommendation. They confirmed that information in the prospectus and course leaflets was accurate and helpful. The majority of the students had selected the programmes because of the link with the University, which they considered to have a strong reputation.

85 The audit found that the University's procedures for securing the accuracy of published information about the collaborative arrangement were sound and would be strengthened by the central overview.

## Conclusion

86 The University's longstanding partnership with SEGi is one where, in the main, policies and procedures are well-established and understood by the senior management teams and staff of both institutions. The processes for the assurance of academic standards and quality are sound and draw on the guidance in relevant external reference points. In particular, the provision meets the expectations of the *Code of practice*, with the exception of work to be undertaken on the provision to students of timely and useful feedback on assessed work. The recent move to a more centralised approach should further secure systematic institutional superintendence of academic standards and quality in collaborative provision, and alignment of decisions with the strategic priorities of the institution. Given that the University views the arrangement as a partnership of equals, and the experience of the SEGi team with the programmes, the University may wish to consider whether there is scope for more active involvement in the quality management of the programme and for some delegation of authority to SEGi, by way of example in the assessment process.

87 University school staff at all levels maintain excellent working relationships with colleagues through visits, reinforced by electronic communication in between times. The Programmes Coordinator plays a crucial role in communication and the provision of timely responses. The post and responsibilities of Programmes Coordinator have recently moved from the Dundee Business School to the central Academic Standards and Partnerships Directorate as part of the move to a more centralised approach.

88 The audit team identified the following positive features in the partnership:

- The WebCT delivery and video-conferencing provide a positive learning experience for the students and facilitate staff at SEGi in their role in supporting student learning, particularly for stage 4 delivery. Furthermore, the virtual interaction with students and staff strengthens the students' sense of identity with the University of Abertay Dundee and ensures a learning experience more closely aligned to that of campus-based University students
- the development of students as independent learners and critical thinkers who were confident and felt well-equipped for the workplace
- the good relationships developed at senior management level and particularly early initiatives in the partnership, such as SEGi representation at Senate
- the quality and range of study skills materials and support provided to students
- the ongoing staff development activities at SEGi and the focus upon pedagogy.



89 The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by the University as it develops its partnership arrangements:

- the University should revise its approach to the provision of feedback on assessment so that students receive timely written feedback such that they have sufficient information and detail on their individual performance to support improved performance in future assessments
- the University should verify the professional recognition status of the programmes, including their applicability to delivery at SEGi, and ensure that this information is provided in the relevant course handbooks and marketing materials
- there is scope for a more structured and systematic approach to the gathering and use of student feedback to contribute to enhancement of the student learning experience
- consider whether the provision to prospective students of accessible information about expectations for English language competence and the availability of English language support during the programmes would strengthen its recruitment procedures.

90 The commentary guided the audit team to an understanding of the origins and current and planned future management of the partnership. The findings of the audit are that in nearly all areas the courses are operating in accordance with the procedures set out in the commentary and associated documentation. Given that the link is representative of the principles governing the operation of the institution's overseas collaborative arrangements, the audit would also support a more general conclusion of confidence in the University's stewardship of academic quality and standards in its overseas collaborative provision.

## **Appendix A**

### **The University of Abertay Dundee's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with SEGi Colleges Malaysia**

The University very much welcomes the positive and constructive report on its collaborative arrangements with SEGi Colleges Malaysia, in particular the identification of many areas of good practice. It is pleased that the excellent working relationships and the longstanding nature of the partnership have been recognised, and that the report finds that students at SEGi colleges studying on the University's programmes enjoy a challenging and rewarding educational experience.

The report makes a number of constructive comments concerning areas where communication between students and the University may be enhanced, and where publically available information could be more comprehensive. At the time of the audit most of these matters were under active review. The University is grateful for the encouragement to complete these reviews, and take appropriate action in an expeditious manner.

## Appendix B

### Student enrolments for 2009-10

|   | Stage 2 <sup>1</sup>          | Stage 3 <sup>2</sup>          | Stage 3x <sup>3</sup> | Stage 4 <sup>4</sup> |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>BA Hons Accounting with Finance</b>  | No recruitment until Sept '10 | No recruitment until Sept '10 | 56                    | 18                   |
| <b>BA Hons Business Administration</b>  | 13                            | 16                            |                       | 102                  |
| <b>BA Hons Marketing &amp; Business</b> | 16                            | 14                            |                       | 96                   |
|   |                               |                               |                       |                      |
| <b>Total</b>                            | 29                            | 30                            | 56                    | 216                  |
| <b>Overall total number of students</b> | <b>331</b>                    |                               |                       |                      |

<sup>1</sup> Student numbers based on recruitment in September 2009, for session 2009-10.

<sup>2</sup> Student numbers based on recruitment in September 2009, for session 2009-10.

<sup>3</sup> Stage 3x refers to students undertaking the 'bridging' programme prior to entry to stage 4. Students undertake a general programme of study.

<sup>4</sup> July 2010 recruitment ongoing. Stage 4 numbers based on current students per programme as at 1 June 2010.

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