



Audit of overseas provision

**University of Bolton and
Supply Chain Management Professional Centre, Malaysia**

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Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of Bolton and Supply Chain Management Professional Centre.

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 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 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 about 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 in 2004.

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. The audit of the University of Bolton was coordinated for QAA by Mr Will Naylor, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor John Baldock and Professor Mark Davies (auditors), with Mr Will Naylor acting as audit secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and, where applicable, to their partners in Malaysia for the willing cooperation 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 The link between the University of Bolton (Bolton) and Supply Chain Management Professional Centre (SCMPC) was established in January 2007. The link provides for the delivery by Bolton staff of the whole of the MSc Supply Chain Management (formerly MSc Logistics and Supply Chain Management) and the final year of the BSc Logistics and Supply Chain Management at SCMPC's premises in Kuala Lumpur. Both programmes are part-time and aimed primarily at mature professionals working full-time in related occupations. Both were originally developed by Bolton for provision at its own campus. The MSc continues to run in Bolton; the BSc is being replaced at Bolton by a BSc in Business Management (Supply Chain Management), which shares most of its modules with its forerunner.

9 Neither the MSc nor the BSc are eligible for accreditation by the MQA in their current form because the Malaysian Qualifications Framework has no provision for part-time 'top-up' programmes. However, both are accredited by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) and the MSc is additionally accredited by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT). Graduates whom the audit team met explained that the benefits of the programmes derived in large part from their professional accreditation. The lack of accreditation from the MQA is, therefore, unproblematic to students, and made clear to applicants before they enrol. In this context, the team noted that the certifications from CIPS (for the BSc only) and CILT for the home programmes at Bolton do not explicitly extend to the provision in Malaysia. For the avoidance of doubt, the audit team encourages Bolton to obtain written confirmation from CIPS and CILT that their accreditation covers the SCMPC programmes.

10 Bolton has a subsequent agreement with SCMPC for the delivery of two programmes differing slightly in modular content to those described above: the final year of study of the BSc in Business Information Systems and the whole of the MSc with the same title. However, these programmes have yet to recruit and will not be considered further in this report.

11 Both programmes have two intakes a year, in January or February and July. Student numbers on the MSc are typically between nine and 12 per intake; numbers on the BSc have steadily increased from 11 in January 2007 to 28 in January 2010. At the time of the audit there were a total of 16 students registered on the MSc and 44 on the BSc.

12 SCMPC commenced operations in 2001 as a professional training provider delivering training for the Malaysian Institute of Purchasing and Materials Management. It has links to Universiti Utara Malaysia and to Asia e University with which it delivers several programmes at various levels in finance, business management and entrepreneurship. Some students complete associate diploma-level qualifications at SCMPC in cooperation with Universiti Utara Malaysia before undertaking Bolton's BSc programme.

13 Bolton has a substantial portfolio of collaborative provision across each of its four academic schools, with partners in the UK and overseas including six institutions in Malaysia. It also offers the BSc with another partner in Malaysia and, in an alternate delivery mode, with a partner in Greece. The MSc is also delivered with a partner college in the United Arab Emirates. Although the present link constitutes a relatively small proportion of its collaborative work, Bolton regards it as having strategic significance in developing its expertise in providing collaborative programmes with professional accreditation. The academic School involved in the link is Business and Creative Technologies which was established in 2009. Prior to this the Business School was the responsible academic unit.

14 In its briefing paper Bolton confirmed that the delivery model is representative of that typically deployed for overseas partnerships.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

15 Bolton's approach to overseas collaboration is described in its 2007 Framework Document for the Development of Overseas Collaborations. The document sets out Bolton's desire to use collaborative activity, 'to the benefit of: direct recruitment of international students to the University; supporting the research agenda; supporting the professional agenda; raising the profile of the University generally'. It lists the core aims of overseas collaborative activity as generating income for and/or raising the prestige of the University/School. It also lists suggested activities, including many that are ancillary to teaching and programme management, as opportunities to realise the aims. The document contains a SWOT analysis of overseas collaborative activity and an operational plan, indicating priority, risk and the postholder with responsibility for a broad range of action points. The audit team concluded that the framework document unambiguously sets out Bolton's strategy, aspirations, approach and goals with respect to overseas collaborations and is a useful reference document for staff. Bolton called the document a 'Framework' to emphasise its interim status, pending other developments, including the establishment of a campus in the United Arab Emirates, restructuring, and the development of new strategies for internationalism and e-learning. At the time of the audit Bolton was conducting an internal consultation exercise on the development of a new International Collaborative Strategy, which will supersede the 2007 Framework Document, taking account of these other developments.

16 The establishment and operation of links is prescribed in a single document, revised in 2009, called Development, Approval, Operation and Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision, issued by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit and approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). This document states the overriding principles governing quality assurance procedures, describes those procedures and gives advice on operational matters. Details on the procedures and many of the internal forms and templates to be used are appended to the main document. The audit team regarded this document as clear and accessible.

17 Bolton's briefing paper made plain, 'the non-negotiable responsibility of the University for the oversight and control of the academic standards of its own awards', while responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities are shared between Bolton and its partners. This position is also clear from Bolton's policy and procedural documents and its written agreements with partners, and was understood by SCMPC staff whom the audit team met.

18 The deliberative bodies with responsibility for collaborative provision are Senate, which receives summary reports of validation events and periodic reviews; AQSC, which receives the full reports; AQSC's Collaborative Partnerships Sub-committee, charged with advising its parent committee on quality matters and operational effectiveness; and AQSC's Standing Approvals Panel, which considers proposals for modifications to programmes. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit maintains a register of collaborative provision, presented to each meeting of the Collaborative Partnerships Sub-committee and annually to Senate and AQSC.

19 Executive responsibility for collaborative provision resides with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor who approves academic development proposals (a precursor of validation) and chairs AQSC; the Director of International Partnerships who, with academic schools, develops prospective links to produce academic development proposals; deans of school, responsible for signing off the proposals; the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards who coordinates validation processes and chairs the Standing Approvals Panel of AQSC; link tutors, with operational responsibility for particular collaborations; and local programme directors who have overall administrative responsibility at the partner site.

20 Bolton's standard model for collaborative provision is to take established programmes and deliver them overseas using its own teaching staff (so-called 'flying faculty'). The role of the partner is typically restricted to providing teaching accommodation, some local learning resources, administrative support and perhaps some learning support from local tutors. Most collaborative programmes are aimed at mature working professionals. Study material may be contextualised to local legislation, culture and identity, and assessments may be work-based, providing continuity with the students' employment and promoting career development.

21 At the time of the audit, Bolton was developing a new website to publicise its collaborative provision. Although not complete, some information including partners, delivery sites and details of the programmes offered was already available. Bolton's briefing paper stated that the website was largely intended for prospective partners and students, but that resources and advice for current partners and students are planned to be available.

22 On the basis of discussions with staff and scrutiny of evidence, the audit team came to the view that, taken together, the executive and deliberative structures, and the frameworks, policies and procedures provided a sound basis for the effective management of the link with SCMPC. Furthermore, the team regarded Bolton as having a strong and purposeful strategy for its collaborative activities which drives operational management. Staff whom the team met demonstrated a good understanding of the University's approach.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

23 The Chief Executive of SCMPC is a graduate of one of the programmes which Bolton delivers in Malaysia, and the link developed from that connection.

24 The institutional approval process for SCMPC comprised two stages. The first stage was the production by the Business School of an Academic Development Proposal, which considered the likely market for the proposed programmes, the ability of the proposed partner to deliver them, use of the University's central learning resources, the relationship to existing Bolton programmes, projected student numbers and projected income. Approval of the Academic

Development Proposal triggered the second stage, known as Institutional Appraisal, which drew on a number of sources of evidence, including a visit to the proposed partner to consider SCMPC's track record, financial stability, management systems and resources and the risk factors to the University and the quality assurance processes to be applied.

25 The Academic Development Proposal was approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) in October 2005 on its second presentation (the first version was referred back to the Business School for more information on strategic fit). Institutional Appraisal was subsequently approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor in March 2006.

26 The audit team concluded that Bolton exercised appropriate due diligence in the development of the link with SCMPC. The team noted that since the link was established, Bolton had replaced the Academic Proposal Document with a new document called the 'Management of Collaborative Programmes'.

Programme approval

27 For the link with SCMPC, programme approval was confined to the nature of the delivery model, its appropriateness to SCMPC and the needs of students, rather than the more general issues of standards and quality, which had already been dealt with as part of the approval of the home programmes.

28 An approval panel comprising two Bolton staff from outside the Business School and a subject expert external to Bolton, met at SCMPC in May 2006. The panel considered the Academic Development Proposal, the Institutional Appraisal document, and an Academic Proposal Document alongside draft versions of the written agreement with the partner, programme handbooks and an operational manual describing how the link would operate. The panel also undertook a tour of facilities and held meetings with programme managers, teaching staff, students on other programmes at SCMPC, and a prospective employer. The panel then produced a report of its findings, which was received, but not formally approved, by both AQSC and Academic Board. The audit team enquired about why the report had not been approved, and heard that the term 'received' may have been an error in the committee record. Nevertheless, given that for deliberative bodies agenda items to be received normally warrant a lesser degree of scrutiny to those being put forward for approval, the team encourages Bolton to be more explicit in stating when, and by what committee, programmes are formally approved.

29 The audit team scrutinised the module descriptors and programme specifications for the two programmes and noted that, while the programme specifications contained much information of practical use to students, they did not explain how the programmes compared with external reference points such as relevant subject benchmark statements, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or include details of the accreditation by CIPS and CILT.

30 The approval report contained one condition regarding the availability of reading material for students, and a deadline for its fulfilment. On meeting the deadline, the chair of the review panel signed off the programmes to run.

31 Notwithstanding the ambiguity over where formal approval is given, the audit team regarded Bolton's processes and procedures for the approval of collaborative programmes as thorough and effective.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

32 The written agreement with SCMPC - formally known as a collaboration agreement - was signed on 28 January 2007 to cover a period of five calendar years from 1 January 2007. The audit team's visit to SCMPC revealed that teaching had begun during the period 1 to 28 January 2007 when there had not been a formal agreement in place. Although the team

acknowledges that the risk associated with running one teaching session without an overarching formal agreement was slight, it urges Bolton to ensure that all collaborative operations are covered by a valid agreement by the time the associated programmes begin.

33 The collaboration agreement is based on Bolton's standard template, available as an annex to the Development, Approval, Operation and Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision document, and sets out the obligations of both parties. The agreement makes plain the respective financial, programme delivery, advertising, intellectual property rights, competition rights, liability and indemnity obligations. An annex covers financial arrangements. SCMPC is responsible for the teaching facilities, tutorial staff employment, marketing, graduation, and local student support and administration. Bolton is responsible for programme delivery, assessment and quality assurance.

34 Bolton has a formal process for the renewal of collaboration agreements centred on a review conducted jointly by the relevant dean of school and the Director of International Partnerships who pass the revised document to Bolton's legal team before it is sent for consideration by the partner.

35 The audit team confirmed that the written agreement with SCMPC encompasses all the areas identified in QAA's *Code of practice, Section 2, Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, and concluded that it provided a sound foundation for the partnership.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

36 Bolton prefers to delegate responsibility for the day-to-day management to the relevant academic school, supported by other parts of the University, an approach which it believes is consistent with the status of collaboration as a core activity. To support this approach, it encourages schools to keep audit files specific to its links which contain information such as approval documents, student data, diary events and financial data. The audit file is available for all University staff to access. The audit team noted the potential value of the audit file, although in discussion with staff with operational responsibilities for the link, noted that the Supply Chain Management Professional Centre (SCMPC) file was used more at an institutional level to monitor international links. The team, while acknowledging that the audit file was a relatively recent innovation, considered that it could be more widely used, reflecting its stated purpose.

37 Bolton's briefing paper stated that the regulation, development and enhancement of the programmes is coordinated by a steering group, which meets at least annually, and comprises the University Programmes Director, the Link Tutor, the CEO of SCMPC and the SCMPC Programme Director. However, Bolton staff whom the audit team met indicated that the steering group is an informal structure that meets several times each year, often by video-conference, and that its attendees are usually confined to the Link Tutor and the SCMPC Programme Director. From its scrutiny of the notes of a steering group meeting, the team noted that the group mainly worked reactively, responding to issues raised by students, staff and the course committee. The team concluded that the steering group was indeed valuable in resolving operational problems, but that it could be more effective in providing direction or guidance to the link.

38 Responsibility for operational management, including scheduling, course handbook production, liaising with the external examiners, ensuring the timely return of marks and feedback to students, and resolving queries generated by students and staff, lies with Bolton's Link Tutor. The SCMPC Programme Director acts as a first point of contact for students and is responsible for local arrangements at SCMPC including marketing, dealing with enquiries from

prospective applicants, the admissions process, and arranging teaching facilities. The Programme Director also relays management information about, for example, requests for extensions to assessment deadlines, mitigating circumstances, suspensions and withdrawals, and communicates results to students, although increasingly, students can access this information online. The audit team heard much evidence from staff and graduates about the effectiveness of the relationship between the Link Tutor and the SCMPC Programme Director and its value in providing a definitive channel of communication between the partners. The team concluded the day-to-day management of the link by the Link Tutor and programme director constituted a positive feature of the partnership.

39 Procedures covering all operational matters are consolidated in a single operational manual for the link. The manual is clear, comprehensive and extremely detailed, covering: key contacts and their availability; communications between Bolton and SCMPC; programme and module management, structure and content; entry requirements and admissions processing; programme timetables; enrolment and induction processes; assessment and moderation procedures; management information procedures; local staff appointment and training; roles for both University and local teaching staff; physical resources available for learning; complaints and appeals; annual monitoring procedures; and student representation. Staff whom the audit team met indicated that the Link Tutor and SCMPC Programme Director are jointly responsible for maintaining the currency of the manual and any revisions may be conveyed by the Link Tutor orally rather than by changes to the manual itself. Bolton staff acknowledged the limitations of this approach. The audit team concluded that, while it found no evidence of inaccurate information in the manual, the lack of a formal review procedure could gradually erode its value as Bolton's procedures evolved.

40 Bolton students contribute to quality assurance in part by their inclusion as members of course committees, whose formal remit is to provide a forum for the discussion of all matters which affect the operation of a course by the teachers, students, support staff and other interested parties associated with the delivery of a particular course. The audit team read the minutes of the course committee for the home programmes at Bolton, and confirmed that it discharged this remit effectively.

41 According to the operational manual the SCMPC course committee is chaired by the Bolton programme leader and attended by the SCMPC Programme Director and one student from each study cohort. The operational manual stresses the importance of students reporting issues to the committee but does not indicate the more general role of the committee in programme management. The audit team's scrutiny of the minutes of the SCMPC course committee revealed that it is constituted in line with the regulatory requirements, though may have additional members from both Bolton and SCMPC, and that business almost exclusively concerns both students and SCMPC staff giving feedback on their experiences. The team considered that Bolton was missing an opportunity in not using the SCMPC course committee in the same way as the home course committee to discuss the operation of the programmes more generally and to involve students in those discussions.

42 A recurring issue raised by students at SCMPC course committee meetings is communication between students and Bolton staff. Bolton expects staff to reply within 48 hours to students' emails, but the committee minutes and graduates whom the audit team met indicated that the process can take much longer. To encourage a response, students are asked to copy the SCMPC Programme Director into correspondence. Evidence from the annual monitoring action plans indicated that Bolton was in the process of resolving this issue at the time of the audit.

43 Students may also give their views on the programmes through module questionnaires. Bolton staff explained that the results of the questionnaires were discussed at the SCMPC course committee, whose minutes are presented to the home course committee. However, the audit team's scrutiny of the minutes of both course committees revealed that this procedure had not

been put into practice (though questionnaire results had contributed to plans produced from the annual monitoring process). SCMPC staff indicated that questionnaires about both programmes and the local tutors were sent to Bolton, with copies retained and analysed locally at SCMPC. The graduates whom the team met were not aware of what happened to the questionnaires they completed and did not know of any actions taken in response. The team concluded that feedback from students could be dealt with more transparently, facilitating their greater involvement in programme management.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

44 Bolton's annual monitoring of programmes draws on a range of evidence, including achievement data, student questionnaires, module reports, external examiners' reports, course committee minutes, examination board minutes and steering committee notes, and culminates in the production of a Programme Quality Enhancement Plan (PQEP). Bolton expects any issues pertaining specifically to collaborative provision to be raised in PQEPs, along with the identity of the partner concerned, although it is still trying to find the most effective way of realising this expectation. Over the last three academic years it has tried a separate PQEP for a group of cognate programmes at each level at each collaborative link; a conflated PQEP for a group of cognate programmes, which may encompass different levels, irrespective of delivery site and including the home programmes; and a similarly conflated PQEP that gives specific comment to collaborative provision where necessary.

45 In its briefing paper, Bolton indicated that potential items for the PQEPs are identified by the Link Tutor and the SCMPC Programme Director at an annual planning meeting, and these items are then discussed and approved by the SCMPC course committee and the Steering Group. The operational manual offered a slightly different procedure, whereby a draft PQEP is circulated to the course team and to the Steering Group for comment. A revised PQEP is then presented to the course committee for further comment before it is finalised. However, the audit team's scrutiny of the notes of the Steering Group and the SCMPC course committee indicated that while items are fed from these meetings into the PQEPs, and despite a standing course committee agenda item of 'University of Bolton Programme Report/Planned Changes', draft items or reports are not presented to either group. Draft items are, however, presented to the home course committees.

46 The briefing paper further indicated that the course committee and the annual planning meeting consider the external examiner's report, recruitment progression and achievement statistics, course committee minutes, and module-level feedback from students. The audit team found that all the items listed above were considered by the home course committee, but that of those items only previous course committee minutes were considered by the course committee at SCMPC. Moreover, SCMPC staff whom the team met were not aware of any annual monitoring arrangements. The audit team concluded, therefore, that Bolton should secure the implementation of its procedures for producing PQEPs and encourage staff and students at SCMPC to contribute to their production. The team also suggests that Bolton involve its academic partners in the annual monitoring process, with the aim of encouraging them to reflect on their performance.

47 Bolton has a standard, quinquennial procedure for the periodic review of collaborative provision, described in an annex to its Quality Assurance Procedures for Collaborative Provision, wherein the relevant school produces a reflective self evaluation document in collaboration with the partner. The review takes place independently of the periodic review of the home programme, but does not duplicate it, and so is confined to issues pertaining specifically to provision at a particular delivery site (or country, where there are a number of partners in one country delivering the same programme). A review panel with external representation is established and visits the partner to meet with students and staff. Reports are considered by AQSC, with summary reporting to Senate

48 The present provision has yet to be subject to periodic review. Review is scheduled for 2010-11.

Staffing and staff development

49 Individual modules on the SCMPC programmes are typically delivered by Bolton lecturers during a one and a half day workshop, followed two or three weeks later by a second one and a half day workshop led by a local tutor. The second workshop reinforces, contextualises and extends the material delivered in the first workshop, though it is sometimes used to introduce new material. The audit team's discussions with SCMPC teaching staff and graduates revealed some ambiguity about the full extent of the local tutors' role and it became clear that at least some of the tutors were providing more than the tutorial support described in Bolton's briefing paper. In this context, the team concluded that the claims made in some of the publicity material that the programmes were fully conducted by Bolton staff could be misleading. The team encourages Bolton to ensure that the public statements it makes about delivery reflect the operational arrangements.

50 Each module is led by a member of Bolton staff who is given a tutor manual for guidance. The manual contains a variety of both practical and pedagogic requirements and tips to facilitate effective delivery, including details on staff accommodation, key contacts, the teaching model adopted, use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and other learning resources, and the procedures for assessment. The audit team regarded the tutor manual as clear and helpful. The Link Tutor inducts new teaching staff with the aid of the manual.

51 Local tutors are employed by SCMPC and are assigned to the programme by the Link Tutor and the SCMPC Programme Director. The local tutors are typically senior professionals in related occupations or lecturers in related programmes at other Malaysian institutions (or sometimes both). Immediately prior to the audit Bolton adopted a new procedure for the approval of local tutors. Under the old procedure, candidates were interviewed by SCMPC and their curriculum vitae sent to the Bolton programme leader for approval against a local tutor checklist. Its replacement retains the scrutiny of curriculum vitae but dispenses with the requirement for an interview. The audit team reviewed these revised procedures and concluded that they were robust and fit for purpose.

52 There is no written role description for local tutors and they are inducted to Bolton's programmes and procedures by the Link Tutor when he visits Kuala Lumpur. Induction to specific modules is provided by Bolton lecturers immediately before the first workshop. University staff identified some inconsistency in the performance of local tutors which was addressed at the Steering Group meeting. In response the operational manual has been updated to clarify the role of local tutors and a staff development workshop was delivered to local tutors by the Link Tutor. Local tutors are not members of the course committee and confirmed to the audit team that they do not meet as a group. The only way they can provide feedback on their experiences of programme delivery is informally to the Link Tutor. The audit team encourages Bolton to formalise its arrangements for inducting, developing, reviewing, and soliciting feedback from the SCMPC local tutors.

Student admissions

53 The programme director at SCMPC is authorised to make offers to applicants who meet the standard minimum entry requirements set out in the document Admissions Requirements at SCMPC. Applicants who do not meet the standard entry requirements, but who fall into one of the categories for exceptional entry, are normally asked to supply a full curriculum vitae in addition to the standard application form and are then interviewed by the programme director in Malaysia. The audit team heard from SCMPC staff that about 40 per cent of applicants fall into the exceptional entry category.

54 The notes from the interviews of applicants presenting with exceptional qualifications were until recently sent to the Bolton programme leader who made the decision on admission, though by the time of the audit this responsibility had passed to the School Exemptions panel.

55 Bolton accepts seven standard entry qualifications for the BSc programme. It has mapped each of these qualifications to the first two years of the recently-discontinued home BSc, to ensure that equivalent learning outcomes can be demonstrated.

56 For the accreditation of prior, and prior experiential, learning (APL and APEL), Bolton's standard procedures apply. All such applications are reviewed by the Link Tutor, who takes decisions comparing, in the case of APL, the module specification for which credit is sought with the student's transcript and other evidence of prior study. Bolton has recently begun using qualification mapping documents in the APL and APEL process, and where it sets a precedent for the accreditation of particular prior learning, SCMPC may take responsibility for admitting other applicants with the same credentials.

57 Bolton's briefing paper gave conflicting information about who is responsible for formally signing off admissions offers: in one section the Link Tutor was held responsible; in another a member of the Bolton course team. However, the audit team was satisfied that formal admission to programmes was firmly in Bolton's control.

58 Overall, the audit team concluded that the admissions requirements for the SCMPC programmes are appropriate and clear, that the respective responsibilities of both partners are unambiguous and well understood and that Bolton maintains effective oversight of the admissions process.

Assessment requirements

59 Assessment procedures follow the framework in Bolton's Assessment Process Handbook. For most modules there are two assessments, one item of coursework, followed by another item of coursework or an examination. In its briefing paper Bolton indicated that the first item of coursework is scheduled to allow students to receive feedback before the second assessment. The audit team noted some variations in this approach, but that these occurred for sound pedagogic reasons, such as to accommodate an extended case study, and confirmed that assessment schedules, including deadlines and examination dates were clearly communicated to students via their programme handbook or in writing at the start of the module. The team further noted that a digest of assessment rules and regulations, including advice relating to plagiarism and cheating, are included in the programme handbook.

60 All assessments are devised and marked by Bolton staff. The only exception is a series of presentations given by MSc students, which local tutors score according to a scheme devised by Bolton staff and following a briefing by the Link Tutor.

61 The briefing paper stated that all assessments are internally and externally moderated prior to release to students and that the module leader is always involved in this process. However, the audit team's scrutiny of external examiners reports revealed that external scrutiny did not always occur.

62 Assessment tasks list learning outcomes to be tested and include assessment criteria. The assessment tasks are often identical to those issued to students on the home programmes, though some variation is allowed in some modules to reflect Malaysian laws and contexts. Where there is variation, the same staff set both assessment tasks to ensure they are of an equivalent standard.

63 All written coursework is submitted through the VLE and is checked for plagiarism using special software. Students also receive feedback through the VLE. Staff whom the audit team met confirmed that these procedures were identical to those for the home programmes. However, the notes of the Steering Group meeting indicated that feedback for some modules was

perfunctory or late. This reflected the experiences of the graduates whom the team met, who cited examples of useful feedback provided rapidly, along with instances of inadequate and late feedback. The team encourages Bolton to ensure that all feedback is both effective and timely.

64 Examination boards consider both collaborative and home students together, though Bolton disaggregates achievement by student location after the boards have met to allow comparisons. Examinations take place at two SCMPC premises in Malaysia, both of which were included in the Institutional Appraisal. Examination scripts are sent to the UK for marking and moderation according to Bolton's assessment procedures. Bolton staff confirmed that while examination papers are usually identical for home and collaborative provision, the examinations are not held at exactly the same time. Given the potential for rapid electronic communication among students in different parts of the world, the audit team encourages Bolton to consider holding identical examinations at all delivery sites simultaneously.

External examining

65 Bolton's policies and procedures for external examining are set out in The Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners and the Consideration of their Reports, which is supplemented for collaborative provision by procedures described in the Development, Approval, Operation and Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision.

66 Bolton's preference is for a single external examiner to examine all programmes with the same title(s), wherever they are delivered. This is the case with the SCMPC programmes.

67 External examiner reports are received by the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards who highlights issues for the programme leader's attention. Reports are shared with partners and both Bolton and the partner take responsibility for addressing the issues raised.

68 The audit team read all external examiner reports encompassing the provision at SCMPC, the first dated May 2007. This raised a number of concerns: a lack of comments specifically on collaborative provision (despite the assertion in the briefing paper that the report form asks external examiners to clarify where any matters raised apply particularly or specifically to collaborative partners); a tendency for the reports to repeat the same, often perfunctory, comments every year; and, in the most recent example, a failure to disaggregate comments by programme level in a report dealing with three MSc programmes, two BSc programmes and one Higher National Diploma. In addition, the team noted that an external examiner had not yet visited SCMPC, despite Bolton's general expectation that external examiners visit collaborative partners at least once during their period of appointment, and a specific recommendation in the 2006 approval report that an external examiner should visit SCMPC within two years. Finally, the team noted that the external examiner reports had not been shared with the SCMPC students, in contrast to arrangements for the home programmes, where the reports are shared with students via course committees.

69 Against this background, the audit team concluded that Bolton should ensure that its requirements of external examining are fully realised for the provision at SCMPC. In particular, the team encourages the University to: revise its external examiner report form to prompt specific comments on partners' activity; encourage external examiners to provide full comments against individual programmes, consistent with their responsibilities for the standards and quality of Bolton's awards; organise a visit by the external examiner to SCMPC as soon as possible; and share external examiner reports with the SCMPC students.

Certificates and transcripts

70 Award Certificates are identical to those issued to graduates of the home programmes and, therefore, do not indicate the place of study or identify the partner. However, these are clearly identified on the accompanying transcript, to which the certificate draws attention. In addition to listing modules studied and marks, the transcripts also refer, where applicable,

to prior qualifications that give credit towards the award. Taken together, the certificates and transcripts are, therefore, consistent with the guidance in QAA's *Code of practice, Section 2*.

Section 4: Information

Student information (oversight by UK institution)

71 Information provision to students is prescribed in the Development, Approval, Operation and Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision. Bolton provides information on its relationship with SCMPC, how quality assurance procedures operate, and on students' entitlement to access its facilities. SCMPC supplies information specific to the partner, Bolton's academic regulations, and the programme handbook and accompanying operational information.

72 Students are given an induction study guide as part of a one-day induction workshop. The graduates whom the audit team met said they found Bolton's VLE useful and that the electronic library resources were more than adequate.

73 The student handbook provides a broad range of information and guidance, including key contacts and availability, academic policies and procedures, use of the VLE, pastoral support and guidance, academic support, the nature of the programme including its ethos, delivery and assessment, entry requirements, the nature of induction, and student representation. The handbook also contains the programme specifications and instructions for submitting complaints, which refer to Bolton's website rather than the local procedures, but does not mention academic appeals. The audit team encourages Bolton to ensure that information on complaints and appeals is communicated effectively to students.

74 The audit team attempted to access the module specifications on Bolton's website, but had some difficulty owing to broken links and cataloguing errors. The team encourages Bolton to ensure that the information it provides about modules is accurate and accessible to students.

Publicity and marketing

75 Procedures for publicity and marketing are contained in the document Development, Approval, Operation and Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision. The Director of International Partnerships takes the lead in signing off publicity material, though the Link Tutor may also authorise material.

76 The Link Tutor and the SCMPC Programme Director have developed presentations for prospective students, which include introductions to Bolton and SCMPC, the nature of the programmes and how they function, and the professional accreditation. The audit team confirmed that these presentations were accurate, notwithstanding the issue of teaching delivery noted in paragraph 42.

77 The collaboration agreement indicates that SCMPC must seek approval for any advertising of the programmes. In addition, the partners have agreed text that SCMPC can use to advertise its own sub-degree programmes alongside those of the University.

78 The audit team saw several examples of newspaper advertisements published up until May 2009 stating that Bolton was a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. However, Bolton's membership of that organisation lapsed some years ago. Bolton indicated that such advertising had now ceased. It will wish to ensure that such claims are not repeated.

Conclusion

79 In considering the partnership, the audit team identified the following positive features:

- Bolton's strong and purposeful strategy for collaborative activities that drives operational management (paragraph 22)
- the day-to-day management of the programme by the Link Tutor and programme director (paragraph 38)
- the due diligence exercised by Bolton in selecting SCMPC (paragraph 26)
- the thorough and effective programme approvals process leading up to formal approval (paragraphs 27, 28)
- the formal collaboration agreement (paragraph 33)
- Bolton's oversight of the admissions process and the clear admissions requirements (paragraph 58).

80 The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by Bolton as the partnership develops:

- obtain written confirmation from CIPS and CILT that their accreditation extends to the provision at SCMPC (paragraph 9)
- be explicit about when and by what body programmes are formally approved (paragraph 28)
- ensure that all collaborative operations are covered by a valid agreement by the time the associated programmes begin (paragraph 32)
- facilitate the greater involvement of students in programme management (paragraph 43)
- secure the implementation of its procedures for producing PQEPs and encourage staff and students at SCMPC to contribute to their production (paragraph 46)
- ensure that public statements about delivery reflect the operational arrangements (paragraph 49)
- formalise arrangements for inducting, developing, reviewing, and soliciting feedback from local tutors (paragraph 52)
- ensure that students receive effective and timely feedback (paragraph 63)
- consider holding identical examinations at all delivery sites simultaneously (paragraph 64)
- ensure that its requirements of external examiners are fully realised (paragraph 69).

81 The audit team considered that Bolton demonstrated a comprehensive awareness of QAA's *Code of practice* and has established processes that are designed to achieve adherence to it. Where the team found aspects of Bolton's practice that could be improved in the context of the *Code*, these are identified in the report.

82 The briefing paper provided the audit team with a full and clear understanding of the origins and current management of the link. As an example of its policies and procedures for collaborative provision, and notwithstanding the points for consideration listed above, the team's findings support a conclusion of confidence in Bolton's management of academic standards and systems for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students studying under its collaborative arrangements overseas.

Appendix A

University of Bolton's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with Supply Chain Management Professional Centre, Malaysia

The University welcomes the Malaysia audit report, which provides a largely positive account of the University's approach to the strategic and operational management of its provision.

The report identifies features of good practice which reflect favourably on the contributions, commitment and professionalism of University and partner organisation staff. A number of the recommendations made in the audit report were already in hand at the time of the audit and/or have been addressed subsequently. Other matters are being embraced within the pre-existing enhancement plan for the University's collaborative provision.

Changes instigated since the audit include:

A meeting has been held with student representatives to inform of our planned improvements to response times to student email enquiries in a more timely manner and of arrangements for the supervision of dissertations during the summer period.

A process for quicker feedback on student issues raised at course committee meetings has been put into the Operational Manual for more general implementation.

Local tutors have been invited to the next course committee meeting in July in response to the recommendation for them to become more closely involved. Agenda items have been added to cover proactive improvements to the programme and to update the committee members on changes at the University which might affect the programme.

A meeting with the SCMPC programme director has been scheduled during the October 2010 teaching trip to create the draft PQEP.

Enquiries have been made with CILT to provide formal notification that the accreditation for the MSc covers the provision with SCMPC. Clarification has also been sought from CIPS that BSc accreditation applies to the provision with SCMPC.

A UK course team meeting has been scheduled to discuss further enhancement and formalising the role of the local tutor and their involvement in the enhancement of the programme.

Appendix B

Student enrolments for 2009-10

BSc (Hons) Logistics and Supply Chain Management	67
MSc Supply Chain Management	28

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