



Audit of overseas provision

**University of Reading
and Taylor's University College, Malaysia**

MARCH 2010

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ISBN 978 1 84979 135 9
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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of Reading and Taylor's University College, Malaysia.

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.

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 Reading was coordinated for QAA by Mr A Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor D Airey and Professor S Frost (auditors), with Mr A Bradshaw 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 The link between the University of Reading (the University) and Taylor's University College (the University College, the College) was approved by the University's Senate in 2003. It takes the form of an LLB programme offered by the School of Law. Teaching on the programme began in September 2004, and the first students graduated in 2007. The arrangement was reviewed in 2008 and renewed in 2009. Graduates receive the LLB degree of the University; there is no College award attached to the programme.

9 The University College had a similar arrangement with another UK university which finished recruiting in 2003. The reason given for making the change to partnership with the University of Reading was the desire of the University College to offer the programme as two years in Malaysia followed by one year in the UK. The University College felt that this would be more attractive to the market than the one year at the College plus two years in the UK, this being the arrangement with the former university partner. The programme with the University of Reading is in three parts (years of study). The first two parts are offered at the University College. For Part 3, students transfer to Reading. Students may also transfer to Reading for Part 2, that is, they may elect to spend both year two and year three at the University. Most students elect to spend only Part (year) 3 at the University.

10 The programme has grown from an intake of 49 students in 2004 to 75 in 2009 (39 joining in October 2009 and 36 in January 2010). In 2009, there were 44 students from the University College studying Part 3 at Reading, and, of the 47 eligible students, four transferred to the Reading campus for Part 2.

11 The University College is a private institution founded in 1969, offering mainly professional and vocational programmes at pre-university level on five campuses to 3,300 students, and higher education to about 8,100 students. Its degree programmes are offered in partnership with 11 universities in Malaysia, Australia, the UK and other countries. The University College's higher education programmes have moved to new purpose-built premises in Kuala Lumpur, and at the time of the audit team's visit to the College, law was already recently established on this new campus.

12 The programme with the University is the University College's only partnership in law. At the time of the audit, in a recently announced reorganisation, the College's activities were separating into two: Taylor's University College will offer tertiary and postgraduate work while Taylor's College will offer pre-university programmes. This is part of a move toward Taylor's University College gaining University status. The audit team was told during its visit that application for this was due to be lodged in April 2010.

13 The University is aware of the changes likely in the status of the University College, and of the Malaysian moratorium on new programmes in law. It recognises that, in line with the policy of the Malaysian Ministry of Education concerning foreign programmes, the partnership is likely to change. There are regular opportunities for strategic discussions between the University and the University College.

14 The University describes its collaborative arrangements as representing a small portfolio which reflects its strategic interests. In some ways, the link with the University College is unusual for the University. It was the University's first international collaboration; it is its only link in Malaysia and the only international collaborative arrangement at undergraduate level. Currently, the University lists 34 collaborative arrangements, together accounting for nearly 5,000 students. A high proportion of these are on programmes validated at a UK specialist college. Of the 18 international links, accounting for about 1,400 students, 12 are described as partner-supported distance-learning; these links have 1,100 students, mainly taking MBA programmes by distance-learning, with just four validated or franchised programmes and two joint degree programmes.

15 Having learned from the experience with the University College, the University intends around five further links of this type, each with an expected life of about 10 years. The University will focus on a few countries, including China. It sees the benefits as internationalising the University to the extent of raising the proportion of international students from the current 11 per cent to 15 per cent, and for Reading-based students to gain from international contacts.

The UK institutions' approach to overseas collaborative provision

16 The University stated that programmes delivered through collaborative provision are approved, taught, assessed, managed and reviewed using procedures and arrangements that are the equivalent to those for programmes offered at the home campus. To support its collaborative work, it has developed three policy documents that form a part of the University's Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teaching and Learning, Section 11: working with other institutions. This was revised in 2008. One document sets out the policy and procedures for the design, approval and quality management of collaborative provision. It is supported by a guide to international collaborative provision and a guide to the procedures for the review of programmes and the renewal of partnerships. These documents draw on *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. The international guide also draws on the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education.

17 The documents set out a comprehensive and clear set of procedures and policies. These include reference to the University's necessary, permanent retention of responsibility for the standard of the award and the quality of the programme. They also include clear statements of the principles, definitions and examples of types of collaboration, an outline of the initial and full approval process, and arrangements for risk assessment, academic scrutiny, activity approval and partner approval. Within these processes, attention is required to the academic infrastructure, business and financial arrangements, and due diligence in relation to the partner.

18 The University has a clear definition of collaborative provision as 'Any programme directly leading to an award of the University which is delivered in part or in whole through an arrangement with a partner organisation'. Within this definition it identifies different collaborative

arrangements. These include joint awards, dual awards, validation, franchise, off-campus delivery, partner-supported distance-learning, and articulation. Most international collaboration is partner-supported distance-learning, but the University also has two joint awards, one validation arrangement, one off-campus delivery, and two combinations of franchise and off-campus delivery. Currently, it has no formal articulation arrangements in which recognition of the student's achievement at a partner is given on admission to the University.

19 The University recognises that collaborative provision brings increased risks and challenges. The issues are set out in the University's Specific guidance for international collaborative provision. This gives the key elements required in a final agreement, and helpful templates are provided for topics such as risk assessment and partner profiles. The University has also developed a risk assessment document for completion at initial approval stage. It demands a thorough business case to be included as a part of the approval process and, for partner approval, a due diligence investigation is conducted as well as a visit to the prospective partner institution. The latter is conducted against a clear set of themes to be explored. The Specific guidance for international collaborative provision also contains a helpful indicator of the key areas to consider including, for example, pedagogical and learner culture, national recognition and approval, assessment and examination arrangements, financial issues, and the impact on the originating school or department. The documents provide a thorough basis for setting up and monitoring collaborative provision.

20 Responsibility for developing, operating and maintaining a collaborative link rests with the academic school. The University attaches importance to the role of 'champions' at subject level to oversee the programme and the relationship. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of a Programme Director supported by the School Director of Learning and Teaching and Head of School. At faculty level, support is by the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning and Sub-Dean. At university level, the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning has oversight of all collaborative provision. A University steering group takes an overview of all international activities and proposals for collaborations, including partnerships, and a Pro Vice-Chancellor for international activities has been recently appointed to provide support for the University's ambitions for international activities. Implementation is taken forward by the schools. Approved programmes are either brought within the remit of an existing board of studies, as is the case in this link, or a new board of studies is created.

21 In summary, the audit team considered that the procedures and approach adopted by the University to overseas collaboration, as reflected in the documentation and the procedures followed in relation to its work with the University College, as effective and securely based. The guiding documentation is thorough and comprehensive.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

22 Any proposed developments need the support of both the school and the faculty. The Quality Support Office and International Office provide advice as the development proceeds. In 2007, the University established the post of International Quality Support Manager in the Quality Support Office to assist in developing and operating international collaborations. The approval process consists of two parts: initial approval, to establish the overall merits of the collaboration, and full approval which examines all aspects of the collaboration. Initial approval requires three documents: the proposal, a risk assessment and partner profile. Formal approval at this stage is provided by the Committee on Strategy for Student Recruitment and Academic Provision and agreed by the Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning).

23 The process for full approval is led by the Programme Director, appointed by the School, and includes academic scrutiny, activity approval and partner approval. Academic scrutiny follows the same procedures as for all programmes developed by the University and needs the approval of the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning before submission to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. Activity approval is by the Committee on Strategy for Student Recruitment and Academic Provision. This, together with partner approval is also submitted for agreement to the University Board for Teaching and Learning before final approval by the University Senate. The due diligence arrangements, as a part of partner approval, are set out in detail and are considered by the University's Finance and Corporate Services section, the International Office, the Insurance Office and the Quality Support Office. Approved programmes are included in the Register of Collaborative Provision which provides comprehensive information, including student numbers. The Register is publicly available on the University website.

24 As a part of the academic scrutiny, schools are required to ensure that programme design and delivery, in conjunction with a partner, fulfils the requirements of professional statutory or professional bodies. Also, the due diligence requisites make specific reference to the *Code of practice, Section 2*, in connection with the need to investigate the legal standing of the proposed partner and its ability to operate within its national legislative and cultural requirements.

25 The agreements with the University College make it a responsibility of the University to ensure liaison with professional bodies for the accreditation of programmes, where required, and provide reasonable assistance to the University College in liaising with professional bodies for the accreditation of the programme. The Reading LLB is a Qualifying Law Degree. Following a review by the Joint Academic Standards Board (JASB) the University's collaboration with the University College in the LLB was formally recognised as meeting the quality assurance requirements for the UK Law Council, UK Council of the Bar and the Malaysian Legal Qualifying Board. This status as a Qualifying Law Degree was reaffirmed by the JASB following the periodic review of programmes in Law in 2008-09. Within Malaysia, the programme also has recognition by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

26 The initial approval by the University of the University College as a partner was carried out in 2003. This experience informed the development of the University's approach to overseas collaborative provision and its present arrangements. The 2004 Memorandum of Agreement has been developed and additional scrutiny was undertaken as part of the periodic review process in 2009. This included a full operation and strategic review report, a financial report and a visit to the University College, as well as the periodic review report itself.

27 The University's procedures for selecting and approving partners, as reflected by this partnership, are effective. The arrangements are thoroughly and clearly documented, and attention is given to risk and due diligence considerations within the University's deliberative structures.

Programme approval

28 For this partnership, the first stage in the programme approval process was a formal visit by the University to the University College to establish the feasibility of progressing to a formal agreement. The visit was undertaken by the Head of the School of Law and the Assistant Registrar, and established the nature of the University College's facilities, the way in which the existing course was delivered, and an understanding of the legal and academic standing of the College. Details of academic and financial arrangements were obtained, and a review of key documentation including the curricula vitae of teaching staff was completed. University approval was then given by Senate prior to the signing of the formal agreement. As the proposed new programme at the University College was a variant of the programme already offered at Reading University, it was approved through a procedure defined as 'simple approval'. This procedure enables an existing programme to be scrutinised with a view to the approval of a new delivery mode, and focuses on the themes pertaining to the proposed variation in delivery.

29 The University uses external points of reference which are easily accessible through the staff website, and there are explanations of the use of the Academic Infrastructure in the curriculum. The University requires its programmes to be developed and delivered within policies that are informed by the *Code of practice, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements, published by QAA. University references to the FHEQ, for example, give detailed explanations about the way in which the University interprets the academic level of the course and the management of credit from prior learning. This advice is then applied in module descriptions and the programme specification. A detailed second programme specification is produced for students at the University College; this enhances the home-campus programme specification by adding information of relevance to students in Malaysia.

30 The programme that is delivered at the University College has been developed over the period of collaboration, and now provides the same curriculum as that which is provided for Reading-campus students. All course materials are developed and approved by the University. Academic timetables have been harmonised so that there is a broad match of the assessment timetable. This supports a smooth transition for students when they transfer to the University. A Programme Director at the University oversees the partnership with the University College to ensure that the programme continues to be delivered as required by the University.

31 The language of tuition is English, and the language requirement for admission to the course is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) 6.5, or A-Levels, or equivalent, from UK, United States of America or Australian education. The University College has a specialist centre to support students in maintaining and developing their language skills for academic writing, and provides English language support for all students. The University provides advice to admissions tutors on the interpretation of language tests and support for students whose first language is not English. The University's Guide on International Collaborative Links clarifies that the language of tuition and assessment is English. While additional language support is available for students, Malaysian students entering the programme have completed their pre-university programmes in English, and are confident in the use of English in their studies. Students who met the audit team confirmed their confidence in studying in English.

32 The audit team came to the view that the University has effective procedures for the approval of its collaborative programmes. These procedures scrutinise the standards of the proposed programme, and the quality of the student experience, within the normal expectations and requirements for University awards. Additionally, the approval processes take into account the local experience and needs of students in the transition to the University in ways that offer sound support to students and good oversight of the programme.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

33 All agreements are signed by the Vice-Chancellor or the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning. The key elements of the agreement are identified as: the fundamental contractual terms; the academic terms; and the financial terms. In addition, schools are asked to consider how quality assurance arrangements are to be handled, including the operation of boards of studies and examination boards, annual reporting, regular monitoring(, including visits), school staff, periodic review and revalidation. The University's Quality Office works with the school and the partner institution to develop an operational handbook in order to detail operational and quality assurance procedures; these details form a part of the formal agreement.

34 The agreement with the University College and the associated Operational Handbook in draft form, called here the Provider's Handbook, are thorough. The agreement and the schedule annex clearly set out the obligations of the two parties, the financial arrangements and the arrangements for quality assurance, termination and dispute resolution as well as issues relating to intellectual property, data protection and freedom of information. The Provider's Handbook sets out the operational arrangements, drawing on those of the School of Law at Reading;

included are student representation and student complaints as well as management and quality assurance arrangements. The appendices include the programme specification.

35 From the policies and from the documents supporting the partnership agreement with the University College, the audit team concluded that the written agreements are well-developed and provide a sound basis for the partnership which is fully in accord with the *Code of practice, Section 2*.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

36 The day-to-day management of the law programme at the University College mirrors that of the home-campus provision at Reading. The module leader, based at the University, is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the units of learning, and works closely with module staff in the College. The School's Director of Teaching and Learning is responsible for the oversight of the design, delivery and monitoring of modules. The University regards the leadership on the home campus and in the partner institution as crucial for the success of the programme. The audit team saw evidence of this in the well-coordinated and regular accounts of communication between the University College and the University. University leadership is sensitive to the local context. Students who met the team confirmed contact with the Programme Director and other staff, and regarded it as supporting their experience of a smooth transition to the University's campus.

37 Programme content is provided by the University. Academic staff at the University College have considerable freedom in how they deliver the content. This provides many possibilities for introducing Malaysian examples and experience, for example in activities such as workshops and field visits relating to Malaysian law and legal culture. The audit team also learned that the University had been responsive to requirements from the MQA in, for example, the requirement to include Sharia Law in the content of the module General Principles of Law.

38 The recent acquisition by the College of University College status, and the reorganisation of the management structure, are noted in the University's strategic and operational report 2008-09 as having benefits for the academic culture and management and leadership of the programme. The departmental managerial structure in the University College reflects a similar devolution of responsibility to that found at the University. The Board of Studies at the University College is a sub-board of the University's Board of Studies for law subjects. There is an exchange of minutes between the Boards. The audit team was given an example of cooperation: a difficulty in the timing of the distribution of module handbooks, reported at the College sub-board, was subsequently acted upon by the Board at the University.

39 The Programme Director at the University liaises regularly with key staff at the University College both through telecommunications and visits. Additionally, there is a pattern of visiting to ensure that senior staff meet regularly both at Reading and in Malaysia.

40 Students are enrolled at both the University College and the University on admission to their course. The University's enrolment process is the same as that for home-campus students. Application and enrolment forms are completed electronically using a web portal. The University holds the definitive student record, and the arrangements for the management of the student record are included in the partnership agreement. The students who met the audit team confirmed that their registration with the University had been straightforward, and that this had enabled immediate access to online resources. The students also reported the success of a buddy system that helped their induction in their first year at the College.

41 An administrator is assigned to the management of the link with the University College, and a reciprocal arrangement exists in Malaysia. Amendments to the student record are notified by the College, and suspensions and extensions are considered and granted by the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning.

42 Each student is allocated a personal tutor. In Malaysia, personal tutors are assigned from the University College staff. Regular meetings with personal tutors are expected, normally twice each term. When the students transfer to the University's campus a new personal tutor is assigned. Students confirmed that they had a personal tutor both in Malaysia and at Reading. They found this a useful academic support, and commented that their personal tutor support included advice on professional practice and careers.

43 The University College has a wide range of support services for students, and provides pastoral and social care as well as academic support. There are cultural and social events which operate through the halls of residence. Law students have access to a range of specialist professional debates. These include compulsory participation in moots and mock legal role-play to enhance the application of their studies. The students met by the audit team confirmed that these are supported with enthusiasm, and are greatly valued. Students who met the audit team also confirmed that the University College has a wide range of resources and facilities. They believed, however, that the law collections in the University Library were better suited to their needs, and they welcomed the broader range of specialist facilities at the University which cater for the more advanced elements of their course.

44 The students in Malaysia have student representative arrangements that are intended to mirror those at the University's home campus. There are staff-student committee meetings which report on their proceedings through minutes. These are submitted to the Board of Studies, and seen by the Programme Director at Reading and Head of School at the University College. Students told the audit team that they were satisfied with the effectiveness of these arrangements for making their views heard. They were able to point to changes in the timing of the distribution of module handbooks, and changes in assessment arrangements that had followed their comments. University staff visit at least three times each year, and during these visits meet each cohort of students.

45 Using the University's virtual learning environment, students at the University College are invited to give annual anonymous feedback on modules. This includes an opportunity to comment on any themes that are specific to the College. The teaching team comments on follow-up actions and any comments in the Annual Programme Report to record what agreed actions have been completed. Each year the Board of Studies reviews actions from the previous report. Students who met the audit team confirmed that they used module questionnaires and the student feedback system. A student representative and other students gave examples of how students' feedback produced useful programme changes.

46 Students were very approving of their experience, and commented positively on most aspects of the course. They reported that fellow students make few criticisms other than that of the demanding workload. One recurring theme mentioned by students was the change in study culture on moving to the Reading campus where they had reduced staff contact. While students enjoyed the increased autonomy and a more 'university student' experience in Reading, they indicated a clear view of the need for increased contact and commented on the challenges of the transition to the more independent style of education in the UK.

47 The audit team came to the view that the day-to-day management of the programme is highly effective. Students were very positive about the programme that enabled them to commence in Malaysia and transfer to Reading with well-supported preparation. The management arrangements pivot on the work of the Programme Director and the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning, roles which provide effective leadership. There is considerable investment and energy by the University in ensuring that students are well-supported and that their learning environment continues to be enhanced.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

48 The University has a structure of officers responsible for overseeing the collaboration. Approval and review reports are considered at different levels of the University. The University retains overall responsibility for ensuring that recommendations and conditions are acted upon. Quality controls are devolved to the University College and the responsibility for these controls is laid out in the agreement with the College. Approval reports are considered at the Law Board of Studies, the Faculty of Social Sciences Board for Teaching and Learning, and at the University Board for Teaching and Learning.

49 Programme amendment and reapproval are undertaken through the University Committees that also deal with purely home-campus courses. The University has produced a series of policy documents that give clear and detailed guidance, in particular, Support for and Approval of Programme Initiatives and Revisions to Programmes.

50 Annual monitoring is undertaken in accordance with procedures laid out in the University's Teaching and Learning Policy: Template and Guidelines for Annual Programme Reports. The Programme Director for the University College prepares the report, using the standard template. Staff at the College contribute to this report which is considered by the Boards of Studies in Malaysia and at Reading.

51 The most recent report from the University College is thorough and analytical about the programme, and celebrates achievement and highlights challenges, for example, the progress of the Kawan 'buddy' scheme (explained below). Also, the variation in performance of students in various cohorts, compared with the UK cohorts, is analysed and required actions recorded. The annual report includes information on external examiners' comments (see below), teaching and learning, resources and student feedback.

52 The annual report is considered as part of the Faculty Annual Quality Report, which is submitted to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. The audit team saw evidence of thorough and detailed reporting that indicated effective scrutiny and oversight at all levels. Student feedback is considered carefully, and external examiners' comments are given considerable weight in planning.

53 Annual monitoring is effective and efficient. The views and contributions of students play an important part in the reflective processes, and the experience of students at the University College is compared carefully with that of their counterparts based throughout Reading. Students confirmed that they participated in liaison committees, and, this year, one of the University College students had progressed to be a representative on the Faculty Student-Staff Committee.

54 The University has established thorough and clear arrangements for periodic review. These include the normal periodic review required of all University courses, and, in addition, a specific review of collaborative programmes. The University College conducts an internal audit of its provision, and uses the Academic Infrastructure to undertake its own review of law courses. This audit contributes to the periodic review of courses delivered through the partnership.

55 The last periodic review of law was undertaken in 2008-09. The process was rigorous with a detailed report of a very high standard. There were two external members of the review panel from universities similar to the University of Reading. The panel met students from the University College and also met the Programme Director for the partnership.

56 As part of the periodic review, some members of the panel visited the University College and met staff and students. Their report commented on the experience of the College's students, and highlighted strengths and one or two areas for continued development by the partnership team. The report included areas of notable good practice, including reference to the strong sense of community and student support at the University College. The panel noted at Reading the formation of the Malaysian Law Society that offers support to College students during their

transition to the UK. Additionally, the report notes recommendations for the continued management of the partnership, including exploration of ways in which the experience of international students might be enhanced. The report is sensitive to the differences between Malaysia and the UK, and reflects the positive experience reported by students, and the commitment, of staff at the University College to provide an excellent learning experience.

57 The arrangements for monitoring and review are nested within the mainstream processes of the Faculty and University. There is evidence of critical scrutiny and a commitment to follow up planned actions. The audit team came to the view that the review arrangements are thorough and well-managed.

Staffing and staff development

58 The University College appoints the staff who teach and administer the parts of the programme delivered in Malaysia. For its part, the University maintains an overview of the staff appointed to teach at the College, and sees the CVs of teaching staff prior to appointment. Senior staff at the University are consulted, and, where there are any concerns, these are pursued carefully. College staff profiles are maintained and are held with the definitive documents at Reading. The Memorandum of Agreement specifies the staffing levels required at the University College, and there are mechanisms at the University for raising points where staff shortages may occur.

59 College staff are responsible for delivering the course according to the programme and module specifications supplied by the University. All course materials are provided by the School of Law at Reading. All assignments and examination papers in Part 1 of the course are marked by staff at the University College.

60 Communication and cooperation are reported as a strength of the collaboration in the 2009 periodic review report. It was clear to the audit team that staff in the two institutions know each other well and have mutual respect for their respective professional expertise.

61 The University provides an extensive programme of development and support which is available to staff members of partner institutions. There is a detailed and useful website for University and College staff that is provided by the University Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning. Additionally, there is more specific staff development undertaken through team teaching and staff development events provided by the University in Malaysia. This development is intended to ensure that staff in Malaysia understand the University systems and processes and are able to participate in the reporting and monitoring processes. There is also a College staff development programme provided locally that supports teaching and administrative staff in Malaysia.

62 The growing number of staff exchanges has enhanced research and development opportunities for the University College's staff. The success of the students in 2007, when they were runners-up in the international Hong Kong 'Mooting competition' for Law students in Asia was supported by staff who have developed skills in preparation for competitive mooting and ensured that it forms a key part of the student experience. Staff use case studies, field visits and industry-based initiatives from legal practice to ensure that the course is contemporary and continues to reflect the Malaysian context. This feature is supported strongly by the University College, and is underpinned by continuing professional development for staff in their field of practice.

63 The University and the University College have invested considerably in support for staff teaching on the programme. There is evidence of a range of staff development and opportunities for joint working. The College's staff have access to a comprehensive range of on-line teaching resources and locally based opportunities. These resources are widely used by College staff and provide an important source of reference as well as staff development.

Student admissions

64 The minimum entry requirements for students studying at the University College are lower than for Reading-based study. However, most students admitted have significantly higher grades than the minimum entry requirements. In addition, there is a language requirement for Malaysian students who must provide evidence of English Language ability at a minimum of IELTS 6.5 equivalent. There is information and support for students to ensure that they understand the nature of the course and the requirement for the completion of Part 3 at Reading. The students met by the audit team in Malaysia confirmed the usefulness of this information.

65 The University College manages the first stages of recruitment, and scrutinises applications using the protocols and standards set out in the Memorandum of Agreement. The Memorandum allows for less usual qualifications, so allowing flexibility of access, but the academic standard required on entry is maintained. Admission decisions are made by the University College. Admission information and the academic profile of each candidate are sent to the University. Borderline candidates are referred to the Programme Director at the University, and the decision on their application is managed through the Faculty Admissions Office.

66 The University has a policy on admissions, and all students who enter must meet the requirements of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework. Academic credit applications are also managed through the University, and follow the University standard procedure on the use of the accreditation of prior and experiential learning.

67 The student admissions system is effective and overseen by the University. The audit team came to the view that the arrangements for admissions were sound, and students were provided with a good service that ensured they were clear about admissions and were able to register swiftly with the University and with the University College.

Assessment requirements

68 The regulatory framework for the assessment of students in Malaysia is the same as for students following the LLB degree programme at the home campus. The assessment arrangements are supported by useful guides available on the University's website including the Code of Practice on the Assessment of Taught Programmes. Details about assessment arrangements are set out in the student handbook, which cross refers to the module catalogue where the arrangements for each module are provided. Students have access to previous examination papers through the University's website. The programme specifications for the University College's students provide details about arrangements for the assessment of knowledge and understanding, intellectual skills, practical skills and transferable skills. These are the same as for Reading-based students and include end-of-year formal examinations as well as in-course assessment. The balance between examinations and assessments varies. Most weight is placed on final examinations although, at the time of the audit, there was a move toward a greater emphasis on continuous assessment. The teaching team at the University College explained to the audit team that it had had discussions about whether it would be desirable for the University to go further in this.

69 The Provider's Handbook sets out the responsibilities of the University and the University College for the assessment of students in line with the Agreement. The materials used for teaching in Parts 1 and 2 are provided by the School of Law at the University, but for examinations and assignments the staff at the University College and the University work together to set questions, with the module convenor, based at Reading, being responsible for compiling the paper. The timing of examinations is arranged so that students in Reading and in Malaysia sit their examinations at precisely the same time. An Examinations Unit at the University College administers the examinations and ensures that College procedures mirror those at the University.

70 The audit team learned that the students are aware of the assessment arrangements and

what is expected of them to do well. College staff are provided with guidance on preparing students for examinations, and students reported making good use of the examination papers that are available on the University website, which they found easily accessible and useful.

71 In line with University policy, examinations and other assessed work are marked anonymously. After being double-marked in the first year of the Agreement, the examinations for first year students are now assessed by staff at the University College and moderated by the University. All Part 2 examinations are marked and moderated by University staff. Anonymised scripts are supplied, and College scripts are combined with those of students based at Reading to ensure equality of treatment across the year. The audit team learned that at Part 1 marking took place promptly at the University College before the scripts were scanned for supply to the University for moderation. For Part 2, scripts are not scanned but are sent to the University as they are marked by University staff only. The students expressed content with the arrangements for receiving general feedback on their work; this is provided on the website. They also indicated that they found any individual feedback particularly helpful.

72 The assessment arrangements for this partnership are well-developed. They are identical to those for the students based on the Reading campus. They are effective, clearly documented and are well-understood by the students who have a clear idea of what they need to do to perform well. Helpful generic feedback is provided and, where it is offered, individual feedback is useful and appreciated.

External examining

73 The external examiners for the programme at the University College are the same as for those for the programme offered at the University. They are recommended by the Board of Studies for nomination by the Head of the School of Law. The Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning then approves nominations before submission for confirmation to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. Full details about the role and reporting of external examiners are set out in the University Guide to Policy and Procedures for Teaching and Learning. This identifies the School's Director for Teaching and Learning as responsible for ensuring consideration of the reports at the Board of Studies and by the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. The external examiners see samples of work assessed by staff at the University College and moderated by staff at the University as well as work marked entirely in Reading. External examiner reports are provided to the module convenors at the University, and the staff at the College confirmed that they see the reports. The University's briefing paper refers to positive comments from the external examiners about the integration of examination scripts from the College with those of the University so that it is not possible for markers to distinguish between the origins of candidates, although subsequently the confirmed results can be scrutinised by location.

74 The minutes and reports of the examination boards seen by the audit team showed that the performance of the students in Malaysia and those who transfer from Malaysia compares well with that of students who are solely based on the Reading campus. In 2008 a student who had transferred from the University College had the highest level of performance in the final examinations.

75 The audit team considered that the external examiner arrangements for this partnership operate thoroughly and effectively.

Certificates and transcripts

76 The students who complete their degree programme successfully are provided with a certificate identical in form irrespective of whether they study for the whole time at Reading or whether they take part of their programme at the University College in Malaysia. The accompanying Diploma Supplement indicates the location of their studies. It also explains that the University College is in Malaysia, is a private higher education institution, and that it is a partner of the University of Reading. The Diploma Supplement shows the modules taken, and the

marks, grades and credits awarded. The University is responsible for providing the certificates to the students who, as students of the University, are eligible to attend the degree ceremonies which take place in Reading. There are no arrangements for an additional University ceremony in Malaysia. Students who terminate their course early for illness or other circumstances, including those who do not progress to Reading, may be eligible for a lower exit award of the University. College staff were not aware that any of their students had withdrawn early, and were unfamiliar with these other exit awards. The audit team believed that it would be helpful for the University to ensure that staff at the University College were familiarised with these arrangements.

77 Certificates and Diploma Supplements (transcript) are clear, useful and appropriately formulated. It would be helpful for the University to ensure that the staff at the University College are aware of the exit awards that are available for students who terminate their programme early.

Section 4: Information

Student information (oversight by UK institution)

78 Information is provided to prospective students through the University College website and through printed material. Enrolment staff at the College are briefed by the Programme Director. After enrolment, and during their studies, the students are provided with a range of information. Notably, information for students is provided in a very comprehensive Law School Guide and the LLB Programme Handbook. This last document is designed for students studying at Reading as well as for students at the University College, and it is supplemented by a College handbook. The University guides provide details about the School of Law at Reading and its staffing, organisation and facilities; about the degree programme and its operation and structure, including a link to the programme specification and including matters such as feedback, plagiarism and student feedback; about assessment arrangements including academic appeals; and about student support. The students met by the audit team indicated broad satisfaction with the information provided in the handbooks and with the timeliness of their receipt. They were aware of where to find information, for example, about complaints and academic appeals. They also explained that, following their suggestion that it would be more helpful to receive the information contained in the module handbooks rather earlier, arrangements had been made for this.

79 The audit team found the information provided by the University to give a comprehensive, clear, accurate and reliable account of the student experience that provides a good guide for students in making decisions about their studies.

Publicity and marketing

80 As part of the Agreement for the partnership, the University College promotes the programme to prospective students and sponsors. It does so through its website and through other publicity material including a prospectus. The College has sole responsibility for marketing the programme in Malaysia. Also, according to the Agreement, all materials must conform to University of Reading guidelines and policies. All marketing and promotional materials produced by the University College, including materials published on the internet, are subject to approval by the University. The Programme Director is responsible for checking the accuracy and compliance of publicity material with University policies, and that materials are examined during visits to Malaysia. The Programme Director gives feedback to the Head of the Law School at the University College. The International Quality Support Manager also makes periodic checks of the College's web pages. The audit team noted that the website for the College provided a good level of information about the LLB programme, and that this reflected accurately the University's own publicity. The team also noted that the website gives access to the prospectus and offers a useful question and answer section for prospective students. The students met by the team confirmed that their experience fully matched, and in some areas exceeded, the expectations set by the publicity.

81 The University's arrangements for checking publicity and marketing materials are

thorough and effective.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

82 In order to complete Part 3 of the programme, students must transfer to the University's campus. Part 2 students have an option of studying in Reading in their second year, so giving two years of study in the UK. The Provider's Handbook suggests that some 15 per cent choose to do this. In 2009, the number was four out of 47 eligible students. According to the University's briefing paper, transfer briefing sessions are held in Malaysia in January by University staff. These are then followed in March by further sessions for Part 1 and Part 2 students. Information about the transfer is also provided through formal and informal meetings with graduates who have returned from Reading. The audit team learned that the students considered themselves to be members of the University from the moment that they started their programme. The students particularly referred to the fact that, on enrolment as students of the University, they had immediate access to the passwords for the Reading website, of which they made full and effective use both for their academic work and for learning about the University. They also indicated that their teachers regularly remind them of the need to prepare for their experience at the University, and to become independent and critical learners. The students explained how they used social networking sites to keep in contact with students who had progressed to Reading. The University College's student law magazine carries regular pieces from and about students and staff at the University.

83 The University's School of Law has a well-developed support system to help the University College's students integrate when they arrive in Reading. This includes close working with the University's Accommodation Office. The School of Law complements the general international student induction events with special events, both academic and social, for the students from Malaysia. One notable arrangement which has been developed for these students is a 'buddy' system, known as the 'Kawan' (Malay for 'friend') network. This was started by the University, with 'friends' being paid. It is now operated by volunteers, with credit given under the University's volunteer scheme. University students are trained as volunteers, and are paired with College students. They then act as guides during the first few weeks after student arrival in Reading, and are available to provide support during the year. The Kawan scheme is highly effective in supporting the transition. The College's students commented on how they used their Kawan and the value in having a fellow student who understood their needs and their culture. The University has continued to develop the Kawan system and ensures that it is culturally sensitive, and gives support without overly managing students transferring into years two or three. The students at Reading met by the audit team confirmed that they were well-briefed and supported in their transfer to Reading. This affirmation was supported by the academic staff who indicated that the students were well-prepared when they arrived. However, even with this preparation, both in Malaysia and at Reading, some students still indicated that the change, particularly in learning style, represented a challenge. The staff at the University College were also aware of the extent to which the College students tended to remain together, both in class and in accommodation, while they were in Reading.

84 The audit team considered that the extent and effectiveness of these formal and informal arrangements for preparing the students for progression to the University, and for supporting them after their arrival, were a feature of good practice.

Conclusion

85 In this partnership, the University follows the precepts and advice of the *Code of practice*, especially *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA.

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

- clear and effective leadership for the programme (paragraphs 36 to 47)
- the close links between University and College staff (paragraphs 36, 60 to 63)
- the effective use of the virtual learning environment both in supporting student learning and in ensuring a close engagement by the students with the University from the start of the course (paragraphs 40, 45, 70, 82)
- the well-developed and documented annual and periodic review arrangements (paragraphs 48 to 57)
- the extent to which the academic staff in Malaysia are able to provide the local context for the students (paragraph 62)
- the careful ways in which the students are encouraged to prepare for their experience in Reading and the effective support for them after they arrive at the University (paragraphs 82 to 84).

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

- ensure that staff at the University College are familiarised with arrangements for lower exit awards of the University (paragraphs 76, 77).

88 The evidence indicates that the University of Reading's view of the link as set out in its briefing paper provides an accurate account of the way in which the link has been developed, is managed and is operating.

89 The collaboration between the School of Law at the University of Reading and Taylor's University College is a well-supported and well-developed arrangement that provides the students with a good learning experience. It also provides effective arrangements for ensuring that the students are well-prepared for their progression to the University campus and are well-supported after arrival in Reading.

90 As an example of its policies and procedures for collaborative provision, the team's findings support a conclusion of confidence in the University'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

Update on the partnership since the audit

The University of Reading welcomes the report on its collaborative link with Taylor's University College and, in particular the conclusion of 'confidence in the University'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'.

As the University's first and longest running international teaching collaboration, we are pleased at the recognition of our focus on maintaining academic standards and ensuring a high quality student experience both whilst our students are studying with our partner and on their transfer to Reading.

The University also takes seriously the constructive feedback received in external review reports and is currently acting on the point raised for consideration.

Appendix B

Current student numbers

Note: Student numbers reflect those entering the programme. They are fully registered University of Reading students from the start of the degree.

| Academic year | No of students |
|---------------|----------------|
| 2004-05 | 59 |
| 2005-06 | 68 |
| 2006-07 | 59 |
| 2007-08 | 61 |
| 2008-09 | 56 |
| 2009-10 | 74 |

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