Coventry University audit of overseas provision

1 This report considers a collaborative arrangement between Coventry University (Coventry), through the Faculty of Engineering and Computing (FEC) and the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), through the Community College of City University (CCCU).

Introduction

2 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a United Kingdom (UK) organisation which seeks to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded. It provides public information about quality and standards in higher education to meet the needs of students, employers and funders of higher education. It does this mainly through a peer review process of audits and reviews. These are conducted by teams of auditors and reviewers comprising academic staff from higher or further education institutions, but with some members drawn, where appropriate, from industry and the professions. The most recent institutional audit of Coventry was conducted by QAA in November 2005.

3 One of QAA’s activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative links between UK higher education institutions and their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2007, QAA conducted audits of selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Hong Kong. The purpose of these audits was to provide information on the way in which the UK institutions were maintaining academic standards and the quality of education in their partnerships. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report on the collaborative arrangements for the management of standards and quality of UK higher education provision in Hong Kong.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

4 In March 2006, QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information on their collaborative partnerships in HK. On the basis of the information returned on the nature and scale of the links, QAA selected for audit visits six UK institutions with links in Hong Kong. Each of the selected institutions produced a commentary describing the way in which the link operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which it assured quality and standards. In addition, each institution was asked, as part of its commentary, to make reference to the extent to which the link was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas collaborative activity. Institutions were also invited in their commentaries 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), in particular Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning), published in 2004 by QAA.

5 In spring 2007, audit visits were made to each of the selected UK institutions to discuss its arrangements in the light of its commentary. In May 2007, an audit team visited the partner institutions in Hong Kong to gain further insight into the experience of students and staff, and to supplement the view formed by the team from the institutions’ commentaries and from the UK visits. During the visits to institutions in Hong Kong, discussions were conducted with key members of staff and with students. The full audit team conducting audits of institutions with collaborative links in Hong Kong comprised Dr D Furneaux, Professor M Hunt, Professor K Hurst, Mrs S Middleton, Dr S Taylor (auditors), and Mr G Clark (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr I Ainsworth, Head of Degree Awarding Powers and University Title, Reviews Group. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Hong Kong for the willing cooperation they provided to the team.
The context of collaborative provision with partners in Hong Kong

6 Higher education in Hong Kong is provided by public and private institutions and is organised according to four levels of award: associate degrees and higher diplomas; bachelor’s degrees; master’s degrees; and doctorates. The University Grants Committee is responsible for funding eight universities which have their own degree awarding powers and offer programmes at all levels. It is also responsible for funding a teacher education provider whose degrees are validated by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) (now the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation and Vocational Qualifications). In 2006, university status was granted to the first private university in Hong Kong.

7 There are also approximately 20 private providers offering associate degrees and higher diplomas. Private providers must have their programmes accredited by an external body, such as the HKCAA. Graduates of higher diplomas and associate degrees may be eligible to enter bachelor’s degree courses at an advanced stage, depending on the number of credits they have accumulated.

8 Higher education provision by overseas institutions in Hong Kong (hereafter referred to as ‘non-local provision’) has experienced considerable growth over the last 15 years to meet local demand for degree-level top-up courses and other types of non-local provision. The Education Bureau (the Education and Manpower Bureau at the time of the audit) is responsible for education, more generally, in Hong Kong and maintains a register of 'Non-local Higher and Professional Education Programmes', listing all programmes provided in whole, or in part, by non-local providers within Hong Kong.

9 The framework for the quality assurance of non-local provision in Hong Kong was established by the 1997 Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (hereafter referred to as the Ordinance). The 1997 Ordinance requires all courses leading to the award of a non-local higher education qualification by a non-local institution to be registered with the Registrar of Non-local Higher and Professional Education Courses. The HKCAA advises the Registrar on the eligibility of non-local courses which have applied for registration. Registration is an assurance that the providing institution is a recognised body in its home jurisdiction; that the programme is of the same standard as the equivalent programme offered in the provider’s home country, and is recognised as such by the relevant accreditation authorities and academic community. The registration requirement does not apply to courses conducted in collaboration with local higher education institutions; wholly distance learning courses (those without the institutions or their agents being physically present in Hong Kong); and courses conducted solely by local registered schools or higher education institutions. Courses which fulfil one or more of these criteria may apply to be exempted from registration. Exempted courses are not subject to assessment by the HKCAA.

The background to the collaborative link

General background to the link

10 CityU was established in 1984 as the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, offering awards validated by the UK Council for National Academic Awards. It was formally constituted as a university and granted authority to award its own degrees in 1994. CityU currently offers 42 sub-degree and 66 undergraduate programmes across a wide range of disciplines and the vast majority of its 25,513 full and part-time students come from Hong Kong. It has over 1,000 full-time academic staff with a further 610 full-time research staff engaged in teaching, research, consultancy and other scholarly activity.

11 The collaboration between Coventry and CityU began in 2000 when Coventry’s former School of Mathematical and Information...
Sciences agreed to credit rate four streams of the Associate Degree in Computer Studies delivered by the Division of Computer Studies at CityU's College of Higher Vocational Studies, the precursor to the CCCU. This collaboration led to discussions about the possibility of delivering a franchised top-up degree programme at the newly constituted CCCU, giving holders of four named Associate Degrees - the Associate of Science in Computer Studies; Information Technology; and Web Technology; and the Associate of Business Administration in Electronic Commerce and Web Technology - progression to the Coventry award of a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business Information Technology (BIT). The top-up programme started in September 2004 with an initial cohort of 196 students. All formal teaching and assessment on the programme is conducted in English. 12 The Commentary indicated that the link with CityU is representative of Coventry's policies and procedures. It noted that the operational link established between the FEC and CCCU had built upon models of good practice developed through other collaborative arrangements established by Coventry. The partnership with CityU is valued highly by Coventry.

The UK institution’s approach to overseas collaborative provision

13 Coventry's International Development Committee (IDC), which reports to the Vice-Chancellor's Group, receives all proposals for international collaboration to: ensure that they are in line with Coventry's International Strategy; ensure that they are commercially sound; and evaluate the level of risk involved, should Coventry decide to progress a partnership. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has delegated responsibility from Academic Board to review the standards and quality of academic work, including international collaboration. However, in practice, responsibility for international collaboration has been delegated to the Standing Advisory Group on Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning (SAGCP), formerly the Standing Advisory Group on Overseas Collaborative Provision, which is required to present an annual report to Academic Board on these matters. There are close links between SAGCP and the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) at Coventry, with the latter providing administrative support, maintenance of the central record of collaborative arrangements, and two members of SAGCP. 14 The Strategic Academic Planning Group (SAP) is responsible for the quality of Coventry’s courses and modules, providing a cross-institutional academic planning focus for Coventry’s credit-related course/programme provision. SAP reports to QAC and Academic Board. It also advises the Academic Executive which comprises the Vice-Chancellor, pro vice-chancellors (PVCs) and faculty deans, with department directors invited to attend for specific items. The link between QAC and SAP is strengthened through a common chair in the form of the PVC (Learning and Student Experience). The University employs a separate, but parallel, strategic and quality approval process for its collaborative courses via the IDC and course approval and review panels (CARPS)/partnership approval and review panels (PARPs) respectively, as it considers that this introduces additional rigour to the process. Operational responsibility for partnerships is delegated to faculties, which have their own faculty or school strategic academic planning committees. 15 The Commentary indicated that Coventry’s approach to collaborative provision derives from the Corporate Plan, which informs the development of business plans and international strategy at faculty level. The management of the collaboration with CCCU lies with the FEC. Initially, the International Steering Committee within the School of Mathematical and Information Sciences was responsible for the management of this link but, in June 2004, the FEC developed a new, detailed Faculty Collaborative Provision Framework (FCPF) for managing its collaborative provision. The Collaboration Framework Document produced for CityU
indicates that the partnership with CityU is an autonomous franchise and outlines the roles and responsibilities of both partners in the management and quality assurance of each partner. The audit team found this document to be a valuable tool in the management of link.

16 The Faculty Quality, Learning and Teaching Committee (QLTC), through its Sub-Group on Collaborative Provision, is responsible for monitoring the operation of the programme, for receiving annual reports from CCCU, and for reporting matters relating to the programme and its operation to QAC. The audit team noted, however, that collaborative matters were not treated as a standing item on meeting agendas and there was little evidence of discussions on collaboration taking place within these forums.

17 Operational management resides with the Link Tutor, appointed by the Dean on an indefinite basis. The Link Tutor normally reports to the Collaboration Manager but, in this instance, the Manager of International Activities, Collaboration Manager and the Link Tutor for the Collaboration is the same person. The Link Tutor liaises with the Programme Leader at CityU by email and telephone, and the Link Tutor undertakes a minimum of two visits to CityU each year to meet staff and students, to discuss issues arising and to provide support for the delivery of the programme. The Link Tutor normally attends all examination boards but other faculty staff also visit CityU to deliver lectures, attend examination boards, and to meet staff and students.

18 The Link Tutor is responsible for providing an annual report on the partnership to the Faculty QLTC. This report includes factual information, such as the number of visits by staff, details of the curricula and changes to the provision (for example, the withdrawal of particular routes), and a critical evaluation. QAC receives annual reports on collaborative activity from each faculty or school but delegates the analysis of the reports to SAGCP which identifies areas for improvement for dissemination across the institution by means of a SAGCP annual report.

19 CCCU staff who met the audit team confirmed that the collaboration worked well and that CCCU had detailed knowledge of the procedures, processes and responsibilities of the parties involved. CCCU staff had been involved in the preparation of the Commentary and stated that it represented an accurate representation of the collaboration. The team noted that the CCCU team had a close working relationship with the Link Tutor, who visited on a regular basis, and also with their equivalent colleagues at Coventry, who also visited at least twice a year. The team noted that subject staff felt able to contact their colleagues at Coventry at any time via email or, for urgent consultation, by telephone. Visits by senior staff from Coventry also occurred at least twice a year when discussions would take place with the CCCU Principal and senior colleagues in Hong Kong. Administrative staff also had direct access to named individuals within the International Office and Registry in Coventry and to Coventry's Secretary and Registrar.

20 It appeared to the audit team that frequent and detailed discussions leading to the approval of the collaboration had resulted in firm foundations being laid and the team found that the relationships established between Coventry and CityU at the outset of the collaboration had been maintained. The team considered that the frequency and range of Coventry staff visiting CCCU has served to promote strong intercultural understanding between the partners involved. It viewed the close collaboration established between the partners, at all levels, as an important factor in the success and continuing good health of the partnership.

Public information, publicity and promotional activity

21 Each record in the centrally held register of collaborative arrangements contains the name of the partner institution, the home
faculty or school responsible for maintaining the link, the nature of the arrangement, the title of the provision offered, and a comment section. The Registry area on Coventry’s website displays a range of documentation and procedures on collaborative partnerships and a brief account of the responsibilities of those involved in collaborative ventures. This section also provides information on Section 2 of the Code of practice. No direct reference is made to particular collaborative links on the website except where they are considered noteworthy, as in the case of visits by CCCU students and lecturers to Coventry.

22 Coventry provides detailed guidance on the use of its title and logo by its partner institutions and the same document also provides guidance on advertising. Senior staff at Coventry told the audit team that its partners’ publicity material is closely monitored and CCCU senior staff confirmed that they are required to submit all printed and web-based materials relating to programme publicity to the Coventry Link Tutor before publication.

**Formal arrangements for establishing the link**

**Selecting and approving the partner institution**

23 At faculty level, the Faculty's International Development Group (IDG), led by the Faculty’s Manager of International Activities, considers all proposals for new international partnerships or programmes. If the proposal is considered to merit further consideration, an IDG member is charged with preparing a proposal document, a context paper and outline project costing. The proposal document takes the form of a Coventry template, which requires approval and signing off by the faculty (or school), the IDC, and the Vice-Chancellor’s Group before validation. The International Office may, if appropriate, consult appropriate bodies, such as the British Council, to establish the good standing of the proposed partner, its legal status and its ability, under law, to enter into a written contract with Coventry. Approval at this point is also dependent upon the proposal meeting Coventry’s strategic and commercial imperatives. Additionally, the Academic Executive and the SAGCP are informed so that all faculties and schools are aware of the proposal and any potential development opportunities.

24 When approval leads to students progressing to Coventry or enrolling on programmes leading to a Coventry award, as is the case for the top-up degree provision, a two-stage process is required. The first stage involves an institutional approval event and the audit team noted that Coventry has clearly defined the purpose and scope, terms of reference and constitution of overseas and UK collaborative provision institutional approval panels. Approval panels meet in the UK to review the available documentation before visiting the proposed partner institution, where they meet a range of staff to discuss resourcing; academic and resource planning; quality assurance, monitoring and enhancement; and student support and facilities, including library resources for which there is a detailed checklist. Panel recommendations, whilst ratified by QAC, are considered by SAGCP, given SAGCP’s role in identifying good practice to enable improvement to Coventry’s policy and procedures. The audit team noted that Coventry’s approval is given only for the site visited by an approval panel. Additional sites, including campuses, require further approval visits.

25 It is common practice for Coventry to conduct institutional and programme approvals in the course of a single visit, in the interests of cost effectiveness. The Commentary indicated that a partnership approval panel met in Coventry in January 2004 as part of a two-phase approval event incorporating institutional approval, recognition of CityU’s Associate Degree programmes, and the approval of the top-up degree. The second phase of the approval event at CityU followed in February 2004. At that stage, the partnership approval panel was satisfied that there was sufficient compatibility in the missions, academic management, administrative and quality
assurance systems of Coventry and CityU to engender confidence in the proposed collaboration. The arrangements were approved to commence from September 2004 with an interim review scheduled to take place after the first two cohorts had completed (see paragraphs 32 and 34 below).

26 The QEU is responsible for all approval and review events with a view to ensuring institution-wide consistency and consistency between Coventry and its partners. The Commentary indicated that panel secretaries are allocated, wherever possible, to particular countries and partners, to develop awareness of the local educational systems and authorities and to enhance institutional level communication.

27 Partner institutions are entitled to three months' notice of an impending visit although this may be waived. Before a visit takes place, QEU provides copies of guidance notes, Section 2 of the Code of practice and, when available, the panel membership. The Panel Secretary, who is a member of QEU, liaises with the proposed partner and the relevant Coventry-based faculty or school about the visit arrangements. Coventry staff who will be involved in any approved partnership provide additional support. Where a panel includes members who are unfamiliar with a particular country, QEU will also arrange for the International Office to provide briefings on culture and customs. Approval panels are responsible to QAC and do not have delegated responsibility. However, they may give confidential feedback on the likely outcome of their deliberations. The audit team noted the care taken by Coventry in the initial selection and approval of collaborative partners.

**Programme approval**

28 Coventry's faculties and schools generate programme-specific proposals and, in the case of the FEC, the Dean and Manager of International Affairs nominate a project manager to draw up the necessary documentation. This includes an overview of the proposed collaboration; a programme specification; module syllabuses; academic regulations for the programme; and a resources document. The project manager is normally an IDG member. The Faculty Strategic Academic Planning Committee provides a reading group to examine the documentation and interrogate the proposal before approving or rejecting the proposal on the Faculty's behalf.

29 A PARP is established for proposals leading to provision at a collaborating institution which is already approved to operate at Coventry, and for any subsequent reviews. Where a new or revised course is to be offered at a collaborating institution, a CARP (see paragraph 14) is constituted. The two panels have very similar terms of reference and constitutions. QEU provides detailed guidance and a checklist for panels to ensure that due account is taken of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, subject benchmark statements, and the Code of practice. PARPs (see paragraph 14) are required to ensure that the student experience at the partner institution is equivalent to that of the Coventry students and that arrangements are in place to facilitate the monitoring of the quality assurance and staff liaison. PARPs also receive a partnership document. The audit team noted that no CARP or PARP would proceed if a visiting panel found that it was unable to recommend institutional approval.

30 The audit team noted that Coventry's policies and procedures require PARP panels to be chaired by an independent member, drawn from another faculty or school with experience of partnerships. They are also expected to include a minimum of one member per faculty or school involved in the partnership; one member from a faculty or school not involved in the proposed partnership; one current member of QAC; and one external member with relevant academic or professional expertise in the subject area. QAC delegates authority to make decisions on approval of course-level collaboration to the CARP or PARP, as appropriate.

31 SAGCP considers all CARP and PARP reports to ensure consistency and to identify any trends requiring further consideration. Once the Panel Chair confirms to QAC that
all approval conditions have been met, the approval process culminates in the Agreement being signed by the Principal (or equivalent) of the partner institution and a senior member of the Coventry staff, normally a PVC.

32 As stated in paragraph 25 above, institutional and course approval were combined for the link with CityU and included approval of the credit rating undertaken and recognition of designated CityU Associate Degree programmes as appropriate entry routes to Coventry’s BA (Hons) in BIT, and approval of the BA top-up programme. The approval panel recommended conditional approval and, following a detailed response from the School of Mathematical and Information Sciences, the top-up programme was approved to commence in September 2004 with an interim review scheduled to take place in 2006-07.

33 The initial recruitment to the top-up programme was expected to be between 40 and 50 students but 196 students enrolled on the programme. This was made possible by further discussion between Coventry and CityU and the appointment of additional lecturers to supplement the existing staff base and support the teaching in Hong Kong. The Commentary indicated that an additional full-time lecturer was appointed to the teaching team to enhance the support for the 2005-06 student cohort of 223 students. Professional body accreditation does not extend to the franchised provision offered at CCCU.

34 The PARP established to conduct the initial approval of CityU to offer the top-up degree in 2004 comprised the QAC Chair (and PVC) and an (external) education consultant, with the Link Tutor from Coventry and a QEU member in attendance. The audit team noted that this was at variance with Coventry’s policy on PARPs (see paragraph 30 above). The team further noted that an interim review visit to CCCU in January 2007 was undertaken by the QAC Chair (and PVC); Registrar and Secretary; and a member of staff who had recently left Coventry.

35 In view of the above, the audit team formed the view that there would be merit in Coventry reviewing its arrangements for the establishment of approval and review panels to ensure that independence and objectivity considerations are fully taken into account. Such a review might also usefully encompass the minimum period of time that should elapse before former members of staff might be considered as external members of both approval and review teams.

36 The Commentary stated that, in the interests of facilitating an appropriate match between the review process and the nature of the collaborative provision, there is no set format for the interim review which is intended to ensure effective working and understanding between Coventry and its partners. The audit team would encourage Coventry to consider at least some measure of standardisation in the terms of reference for interim reviews so that good practice and issues arising from new partnerships, more generally, can be easily extracted from the interim review process.

37 Course and partnership re-approval is normally for six years and is conducted by the CARPs and PARPs. Documentation for a CARP will include a critical review of the course, including the validity and currency of the course; a review of the evaluation of feedback; a summary of proposed changes; and innovation and good practice. Guidance is provided on Coventry’s expectations in relation to evidence and data gathering. Courses requiring changes outside the normal approval process involve a different procedure requiring the agreement of the Board of Study, the faculty/school board and the external examiner before being signed off by the Dean and forwarded to QAC for approval.

Written agreements with the partner institution

38 The Agreement between Coventry and CityU has been in existence since February 2004. The Agreement and its associated schedules include details about the collaboration framework, including reference to English being the language of instruction
and assessment; the responsibilities of CityU and Coventry; intellectual property; publicity and marketing, including guidance on promotional materials; financial arrangements; duration of the Agreement; termination; information for students; and the programme specification.

39 The audit team noted a reference in the Agreement to Coventry and CityU bearing joint responsibility for ensuring that enrolled students are able to complete their programme of study, in the event of the Agreement being terminated. Noting a reference to the use of City's student complaints, discipline and appeals procedures, the team queried whether CCCU students had a right of appeal to Coventry. Senior staff at Coventry confirmed that, as the awarding body, Coventry was aware of its responsibilities to students still enrolled at the time of any termination of the Agreement. References to joint responsibilities to the students were intended to make clear that the partner institution would continue to provide facilities until such time as other arrangements could be made. Senior staff at Coventry also confirmed that it would receive, and respond to, appeals from students at CityU on the same basis as for its home students, namely on the basis of procedural irregularities rather than challenges to academic decisions.

40 Although the formal agreement is with CityU, at an operational level, the relationship is almost exclusively with CCCU. The audit team discerned little apparent interaction between Coventry and CityU itself, with responsibility for the link, and detailed knowledge relating to the relationship, clearly residing with the FEC and the Link Tutor, in particular. The team learnt that CCCU is a semi-autonomous body with a separate legal identity and it therefore queried the implications of this arrangement for the Agreement between Coventry and CityU.

41 Whilst CCCU is semi-autonomous legally and financially, responsibility for academic governance resides with CityU which must approve each international collaboration. CCCU has its own Board of Management, chaired by a lay member of Council and with the Deputy President of CityU as Deputy Chair and an Academic Board which has Senate appointees as well as representatives from other parts of CityU. CCCU's Academic Board is responsible for the quality assurance of Associate Degrees through the College Validation and Monitoring Committee (CVMC), from whom it receives regular reports, including an annual report, which reviews and reports on annual reports received from all CCCU programmes, including those offered in collaboration with overseas partners. There is cross-membership between CityU's QAC and CVMC, in the interests of consistency.

42 Noting that the final cohort of publicly financed Associate Degree students will complete their studies, and CCCU will become entirely self-funding in 2008, the audit team formed the view that Coventry will wish to assure itself that the responsibilities and provision of services outlined in the Agreement between Coventry and CityU will continue to be secured at an appropriate level.

Quality management of the link
Management of the link
43 The link between Coventry and CityU is described as an autonomous franchise, involving a validated programme which is not governed by Coventry's internal regulations or internal quality assurance procedures, although Coventry must satisfy itself that the systems, processes and procedures of the partner institution are appropriate for assuring the quality of the award. Unlike other validated programmes, however, the curriculum and programme regulations are those of Coventry. The details of the management of the link are described in the Faculty Collaboration Framework Document for the CityU link and the summary of responsibilities are linked directly to the Code of practice, where appropriate.

44 The Link Tutor at Coventry is the main conduit for the academic management of the link, reporting to the Collaboration Manager and Dean within the FEC. The Link Tutor prepares annual reports on the collaboration
for presentation to the Collaborative Provision Sub-Group of the Faculty QLTC. The Collaboration Manager is responsible for developing the business relationship with CityU. The CCCU counterpart for the link is the Programme Leader who reports to the Head of Division of Computer Studies. FEC lecturing staff also undertake visits to CCCU to deliver lectures and workshops, participate in meetings with staff and students, attend examination boards, and provide staff development, if required.

45 CCCU staff confirmed that, whilst their closest association is with the Link Tutor in Coventry, there are also close working relationships between subject tutors at CCCU and Coventry. At a senior level and, at the time of graduation, in particular, Coventry’s Pro Vice-Chancellor meets the Principal of CCCU to discuss future developments. In addition, Coventry’s Registrar and Secretary has also visited CCCU. As noted in paragraph 19 above, administrative staff at CCCU have links with designated staff at Coventry. The team noted that the frequency of visits undertaken, supplemented by staff communication by means of email and telephone contact, contributed to the strength of the relationship between the parties involved.

46 CCCU manages student admissions with the Link Tutor providing oversight and assuming responsibility for approving any requests for non-standard applications. CCCU maintains student records for the duration of the programme and these records are transferred to Coventry at completion. CCCU and Coventry have been working to provide access to Hong Kong staff to the student management system (UNIVERSE ) at Coventry and CCCU staff confirmed that this was now working satisfactorily. The audit team noted that the students see themselves as both Coventry and CCCU students.

**Arrangements for monitoring and review**

47 FEC provides a template for annual statements to be produced by link tutors on the operation of collaborative provision for submission to the Faculty QLTC (see paragraph 18 above). These statements summarise collaborative partner visits and reports from subject advisers and external examiners on the collaboration; consider issues relating to the management of the collaboration; and report on actions taken on the issues raised in the previous statement. Copies of the statements seen by the audit team demonstrated FEC’s evaluative and critical review of the partnership.

48 The collaborative partner is also required to produce an annual report on the programme and the Programme Leader is responsible for production of the report in consultation with the Programme Team. The report is then forwarded to CCCU’s CVMC (see paragraph 41 above) and to the FEC via the Link Tutor. The Faculty received the original report for the first year of the programme after the due deadline because of organisational changes at CCCU. Consideration of the initial report demonstrated a lack of critical analysis but a re-drafted report, using the mandatory template for annual reports developed by the FEC, resulted in a more critical and reflective document, similar in style and content to the Annual Statement on the Operation of the Collaboration produced by the Link Tutor for the Faculty QLTC, but offering a programme rather than a partnership perspective.

49 The Link Tutor is responsible for forwarding the report to the Faculty QLTC Sub-Group on Collaborative Provision where it is considered, alongside the Link Tutor’s Annual Statement. The minutes of the Faculty QLTC and the Annual Statements are forwarded to SAGCP for consideration on behalf of QAC. Through its annual report, SAGCP is responsible for disseminating good practice and monitoring actions on an institution-wide basis.

50 The audit team learnt that the Programme Leader and Programme Team at CCCU are involved in the development of the annual report before its submission to Coventry and that it is also discussed by CVMC. The team noted that the Programme Leader received feedback and an action list from Coventry and
that this was communicated to the wider Programme Team, and an action plan was drawn up for discussion with the Link Tutor. The outcomes of the plan were communicated to Coventry and CCCU in the subsequent annual report.

51 Periodic review of courses is identical to the course approval process with the addition of a critical review document which reflects the current status of the courses. It is normally conducted on a six-year cycle. Additionally, for new partnerships, such as the top-up degree at CCCU, there is an interim review after two years of delivery to confirm that the operation of the collaborative provision meets the requirements of the initial approval. The audit team found the interim review of the CCCU link to be thorough. Meetings were held with senior staff, teaching staff and students from CCCU and also with the external examiners involved in the programme. Issues were clearly analysed and recommendations made, where appropriate. Although the Commentary stated, and the team was told, that the format for interim reviews is informal and at the discretion of the panel, the team would encourage Coventry to consider making the meetings with staff, students and external examiners required elements of the interim review process.

**Staffing and staff development**

52 The Faculty Collaborative Partnership Framework (FCPF) (see paragraph 15 above) indicates that the Link Tutor collates staff curricula vitae (CVs) which are reviewed by the Faculty Dean, heads of department and the Link Tutor at Coventry before a preliminary assignment of CCCU staff to modules, for consultation with the partner institution. Discussions with the Link Tutor and faculty managers confirmed that these procedures worked well and that no member of staff from CCCU is permitted to teach on the top-up degree unless approved by Coventry.

53 The FCPF also indicates that Coventry will provide staff development, as laid down in the individual partnership framework. For CCCU this includes meetings with CCCU staff following assessment boards to review the operation of the programme, to inform staff of developments at Coventry, to discuss desirable modification and changes to the programmes, and to provide briefings on the programme and its management. The audit team noted that, at CCCU's request, more faculty staff members are involved in teaching on modules at CCCU, providing further staff development opportunities in terms of delivery and teaching styles. The team noted that the staff development provided by Coventry was valued highly by CCCU and contributed to the establishment of a positive teaching team spirit on the part of Coventry and CCCU staff members involved.

54 Responsibility for staff and staff development currently resides with CityU and the audit team was told that CCCU could negotiate access to CityU staff development programmes and was also using its own resources to deliver staff development. The team noted that responsibility for staff development would transfer to CCCU from 2008 and was mindful of the potential implications of this transfer of responsibilities for CCCU staff. Although Coventry staff members regularly visit Hong Kong, there has been a limited number of visits to Coventry by CCCU staff and the team noted, from Coventry's interim review of the collaboration, that CCCU staff would welcome further exchanges. Several staff had visited Coventry and had found it a rewarding experience. The team was aware of a desire by CCCU staff, at all levels, to continue and extend this practice.

**Student admissions**

55 Entry requirements are set out in the programme specification for the top-up programme and are thus available to all prospective students. The Link Tutor is responsible for formally approving student admissions but, where entry requirements are formally set out in the programme specification and the partner institution Programme Leader has worked in collaboration with the Link Tutor, this takes the form of an audit of the
admissions. Applicant students offering non-standard entry qualifications must be passed to the Link Tutor for consideration and approval.

56 The programme specification states that the student must have at least the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English. Staff at CCCU confirmed that they had a list of Associate Degrees which Coventry agreed were acceptable entry qualifications to the top-up programme and that students, having completed their Associate Degrees through the medium of English, had an appropriate standard of English. The Link Tutor audits the admissions process but would assume responsibility for the approval of applicants holding non-standard or qualifications which are not on the list of approved entry qualifications. There had been no instances of experiential learning based applications.

Assurance of academic standards

Assessment of students

57 CCCU lecturers prepare all examination papers and coursework which are moderated internally before being reviewed by the Programme Leader. Coventry staff then review the papers and coursework to ensure comparability with those of Coventry before a review of the papers by the appropriate external examiner. Any changes are made to the assessment and checked by the Programme Leader at CCCU.

58 The programme specification refers to the assessment regulations on the Coventry website since the processes, regulations and procedures are identical. The CCCU Programme Team is responsible for marking and moderation. Moderation takes the form of an assessment panel, chaired by the Head of Division at CCCU, and including the Programme Leader; module coordinators; and external examiners, if available. Before the Examination Board, the external examiner and a team of subject advisers review coursework, examination scripts and honours projects to ensure that the quality and standards of the work is comparable to those in Coventry. Subject advisers also analyse the performance of different teaching groups and investigate anomalies.

59 The external examiner, subject advisers and Programme Team discuss any issues before the Examination Board, which follows the Coventry model of student performance in modules being considered by the Subject Assessment Board, and students’ progression and achievement being considered by the Programme Assessment Board. The Programme Leader at CCCU is responsible for the organisation of meetings of the Examination Board. CCCU staff confirmed that these procedures were followed but stated that they received oral, rather than written, feedback from the moderation process. The audit team believes that the process would be enhanced by the provision of written feedback, or clarification to the Programme Team of where such written feedback might be obtained.

60 Students receive a transcript of their results and feedback on their assignments. The audit team noted that external examiners and Coventry’s own interim review have raised the matter of timeliness of feedback to students. It would appear that this is partly due to the moderation process and possibly due to the students not accessing the appropriate website location. The team was told by students at CCCU that feedback on assessments varied with the size of the coursework but was now between two weeks and one month. Students do not receive feedback on their projects but this reflects normal FEC practice. The team noted that assessment arrangements are almost identical for Coventry and CCCU, with additional moderation by subject advisers.

External examining

61 The Agreement between Coventry and CityU refers to Coventry’s responsibilities for appointing and funding two visits each year of an external examiner for the course. CCCU is responsible for nominating external appointments for appointment by Coventry. External examiners receive a handbook and are
offered workshops covering Coventry’s procedures. They also receive FEC briefings specific to particular collaborations, including local requirements; the regulatory framework; and other relevant documentation.

62 The FEC has established a team of external examiners for its collaborative provision and a member of the team is present at CCCU meetings of the Examination Board when awards are made. It is normal practice to employ external examiners with current or recent experience of the equivalent programme or programmes in Coventry to ensure comparability of standards. Following the Examination Board at CCCU, the external examiner’s report is circulated to the entire external examiner team.

63 External examiner reports are received by the FEC and by Coventry’s Registrar and Secretary. The Faculty QLTC reviews the reports and provides a report to the Faculty Board. The Registrar and Secretary reads all external examiner reports and provides a summary report to QAC. For the past two years the report has explicitly discussed the overseas collaboration. CCCU also receives copies of external examiner reports and, with effect from the current academic session, these are to be considered by the CVMC at CCCU.

64 The audit team noted that the arrangements for external examining between Coventry and CityU are identical. In its view, external examiner visits to CCCU, which include meetings with students and staff, contribute to a better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, strengths and issues that arise within the collaboration.

Certificates and transcripts

65 Coventry issues all transcripts and certificates. The Commentary stated that the approach to certification must be defined as part of the approval and is stipulated in the Agreement. The audit team noted, from its consideration of the Agreement and PARP documentation, that the only reference to certification is in the responsibilities section of the Agreement and this merely states that responsibility for the issue of transcripts and certificates lies with Coventry. Certificates issued to students refer to a transcript. The team noted that transcripts list all subjects studied and marks awarded; and the place of study is clearly indicated. Coventry staff deliver certificates and transcripts to CCCU in person or they are sent by courier.

Quality of information and support for students

66 The Agreement between Coventry and CityU includes a schedule of information to be brought to the attention of students. This clarifies a student’s position in relation to appeals, complaints and comments. The Agreement makes it clear that a student’s initial and main point of contact is with CityU. The audit team was told that, normally, CCCU discharges these duties on behalf of CityU but students could, and do, appeal directly to CityU.

67 Students at CCCU receive a complete range of documentation, including prospectus material, and programme and module handbooks. Students who met the audit team confirmed the accuracy of the information they received. The team noted that reference is made to the link with Coventry and the top-up degree on CCCU’s website. Communication between Coventry and the students is limited to the induction process, visiting staff who lecture on some of the modules, and information on Coventry's own website.

68 Staff and students at CCCU spoke very highly of the level of direct interaction with Coventry staff. The visits were well regarded in that they provided insight into UK business practices and promoted intercultural exchanges which are prized highly by those involved. The audit team also learnt of a scheme of financial support at CCCU to enable the best performing students to visit Coventry. The scheme, and the opportunity it provided to visit Coventry, was appreciated by students. However, the students observed that the timing of the visit, in the summer vacation, meant that they were unable to meet their Coventry-based student counterparts during the visit.
The audit team noted that the visits undertaken by CCCU staff and students are valued highly in that they provide an opportunity for the staff and students involved to enhance their understanding of UK higher education and business practice, enabling them to contextualise the programme of study accordingly.

**Student support arrangements**

Student support is provided predominantly through CCCU. As the students are enrolled as Coventry students, the Link Tutor and CCCU Programme Manager work on initiatives such as staff and student exchanges to ensure that students studying at CCCU share a learning experience with their counterparts in the UK. Although the students’ access to Coventry resources and personal support is limited, they do have access to some of the same teaching materials as Coventry students and some module delivery is undertaken by Coventry staff. The learning resources are those of CCCU and CityU, with personal support being provided by CCCU staff. Student support arrangements were reviewed as part of Coventry’s interim review process and were found to be appropriate at that time.

Students confirmed that their support is predominantly provided by CCCU staff but that this is supplemented by Coventry staff visits of two to three weeks’ duration once a semester. During these visits staff provided lectures, tutorials and informal discussions, often over lunch, which were well received. The audit team was told that Coventry staff also participated in induction and graduation events. Students confirmed their satisfaction with the learning resources available to them and had no concerns about their right to use these facilities. The team would suggest that Coventry monitor the situation to ensure that students on its top-up degree provision continue to have access to the necessary learning resources, notwithstanding CCCU’s semi-autonomous status.

**Student input into quality management**

CCCU students complete teaching feedback questionnaires which feed into staff performance appraisals. They are also able to voice their opinions at Staff Student Consultative Committee, Programme Committee and Board of Study meetings. The audit team was told that students have formal meetings with external examiners. The team noted, from Coventry’s interim review report, that students believe that their views are valued. The staff at Coventry stated that they had informal discussions with students and that these discussions also feed into the enhancement of the programme and its delivery. Students at CCCU confirmed the responsiveness of CCCU and Coventry staff to student feedback on the quality of their learning experience, citing an example of a request for additional computing facilities, which was addressed within two weeks.

**Conclusions**

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

- the detailed Faculty Collaboration Partnership Framework, which is tailored for individual collaborations, and ensures that all partners are aware of their responsibilities (paragraph 15)
- the frequency and range of Coventry staff visiting throughout the course of the programme, which serves to promote strong intercultural understanding between the partners involved (paragraph 20)
- external examiner visits to CCCU which include meetings with students and staff and contribute to a better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, strengths and issues that arise within the collaboration (paragraph 64)
- the visit opportunities to Coventry provided for students and staff from CCCU (paragraphs 68-69).
The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by Coventry:

- reviewing its arrangements for the establishment of approval and review panels to ensure that independence and objectivity considerations are fully taken into account. The review might also usefully encompass the minimum period of time that should elapse before former members of staff might be considered as external members of both approval and review teams (paragraphs 34-35)

- introducing some measure of standardisation in the terms of reference for interim reviews, with a view to facilitating analysis of new partnerships across the range of its collaborative provision (paragraph 36)

- assuring itself that the responsibilities and provision of services, outlined in the Agreement between Coventry and CityU, will continue to be secured at an appropriate level, notwithstanding the semi-autonomous standing of CCCU (paragraphs 42 and 71).

The audit team confirms Coventry's view of the link, as set out in the Commentary. Overall, the team believes that Coventry has in place processes and procedures which enable it to manage its portfolio of collaborative provision effectively and assure the quality of the delivery of its collaborative programmes. The close links established between staff and students serve to develop and foster an enhanced intercultural understanding, engendering confidence in the quality of the provision in the process. The findings of the audit would support a conclusion of confidence in Coventry's stewardship of academic standards and in its oversight of the quality of the students' experience on its overseas collaborative provision.
Appendix A

Update on the partnership since the audit provided by Coventry University

1 Review of Monitoring and Reporting on Collaborative Provision within the Faculty of Engineering and Computing

The Faculty has established a Faculty Collaborative Provision Committee (FCPC) to replace the role of the Faculty Quality Teaching and Learning Committee, Sub-committee on Collaborative Provision. The constitution of the FCPC strengthens the representation of Faculty Boards of Study in matters of collaborative provision and provides a single forum for the responsibility of all collaborative work both at home and overseas and with respect to programmes offered wholly off-site and through articulations with external organisations.

The FCPC has delegated responsibility from Faculty Board to examine and approve all programme documentation relating to collaborative work prior to University approval events and to receive both the Annual Quality Monitoring Reports from collaborating institutions and the Statements on Collaborative Provision from its individual Link Tutors on an annual basis. This single point of reference allows issues, problems and examples of good practice to be exchanged between Collaboration Managers, Link Tutors, and Board of Study representatives, and to inform all members of the Faculty of the progress of collaborative work.

FCPC will report annually on the collaborative work of the Faculty to the University Standing Advisory Group on Collaborative, Flexible and Distance Learning. It is felt that with the considerable expansion of the Faculty’s collaborative provision, much benefit could be derived from a more rigorous analysis of the experience and performance of all the Faculty’s collaborations and that this could form a more succinct submission to SAGCP, allowing both the Faculty and the University to focus on areas where remedial action is required and where good practice should be promulgated widely.

2 Comparison of award outcomes across provision for same course at home and overseas

Each Annual Quality Monitoring Report comments on the performance of students and must describe the actions taken to respond to any problems that are identified within the context of a specific collaborative delivery.

The Faculty has been reluctant to make comparisons between the delivery of the same programme in different overseas locations or with the home delivery because of the unique context of each collaboration, eg the backgrounds of students, their previous learning styles, their motivation for undertaking the programme, and the variety of styles of teaching delivery designed to meet the needs of these different backgrounds. Provided there is evidence that students are experiencing a teaching and learning environment that is properly resourced and which follows UK practice, and that the standards being set for their assessments and awards are consistent with the University and other UK universities, the Faculty has been satisfied that the collaboration is being managed properly. It is thought that comparisons made on the basis of simple statistical indicators could be very misleading if used to diagnose problems.

However, as the Faculty is now moving towards keeping all records for students in collaborating institutions on UNIVERSE, the opportunity exists to generate easily a number of performance indicators and to perform a comparative analysis. It now plans to do this as an exploratory exercise.

3 Faculty Briefing for External Examiners

The Faculty currently briefs new appointees as an addendum to the workshop provided by the Academic Registry for all new University External Examiners. Since the work involved and the responsibilities of External Examiners at home and overseas are the same, it is appropriate that the training received is also the same.
The Faculty provides each External Examiner with a copy of the Collaboration Management Document for the programmes to which their work will apply. This includes an explanation of the context to their duties at a collaborating institution.

However, it is felt that a more systematic briefing of the University's approach to collaborative work, the closely related roles of the External Examiner and the Subject Advisors drawn from inside the University, and the wider expectations for the support and assistance of the collaborating institution, are needed.

The Faculty and the Quality Enhancement Unit are therefore developing an Addendum to the External Examiners' handbook to explain the role and detail the specific responsibilities of work off-site.

4 Overseas External Examiners' Policy

External Examiners are appointed to the collaborative programmes on the basis that they have current or recent experience of comparable provision at Coventry. Where this is not possible, care is taken to construct a team of examiners of which one has that wider experience. Reporting takes place after each examinations board, each report only dealing with part of a programme and not necessarily with the making of awards.

The Faculty wishes to extend its understanding of issues relating to standards of awards and the student experience by providing a mechanism for making comparisons between the issues reported by External Examiners for different collaborations. It also wishes to establish a clear statement of the total annual position of each collaboration from the External Examiner's viewpoint.

To achieve these aims, all External Examiners will be encouraged to take part in a Board at two or more institutions within one year so that comparisons can be made. In addition, one External Examiner will be designated the Chief External Examiner for each collaboration and will be expected to combine their own report with the issues experienced by others who have attended Boards at the same collaborating institution. This annual report will then be attached to the Annual Quality Monitoring Report.

5 Reducing the Carbon Footprint of Collaborative Work

Following the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Faculty has embarked on an analysis of the environmental impact of its collaborative work, particularly of its travel arrangements. While it is acknowledged that collaborative provision may be reducing the amount of intercontinental travel by students, there are nevertheless several steps that can be taken to reduce the frequency of visits to collaborating institutions, to substitute visits of longer duration focussed on monitoring the student experience and engaging in staff briefing and development, and extending the use of web conferencing facilities where appropriate.

The Faculty aims to assess the costs and benefits of different travel policies in terms of their environmental impact and the consequences of the objectives of its collaborative provision.

6 Enhancement of Opportunities for Staff to Visit Coventry University

Staff from collaborating institutions are being encouraged to visit the Faculty for periods of at least one week's duration in which they can learn about our management procedures and observe the style of teaching and learning that are practiced in the UK. We have already operated a successful programme involving discussion of library systems, student record systems, English language support, academic resource planning, quality assurance processes and student support. These visits also facilitate direct contact between academic staff on particular modules and their counterparts in collaborating institutions.
7 Availability of PGCert in Learning and Teaching for Staff at Collaborating Institutions

The Faculty has noted both the need for some staff in collaborating institutions to undergo systematic training in teaching in a UK HE environment and a similar enthusiasm by those institutions to support such a development. There is, however, often a reluctance to commit resources to individual staff development activities which the Faculty has always provided for its collaborating institutions because these cannot then be used as staff qualifications when making submissions to Ministries of Education and other accrediting bodies.

The Faculty, in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, has therefore developed a framework for the delivery of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. This involves a study week at the University for staff from collaborating institutions followed by periods of mentoring that will be combined with peer review and other visits by Faculty staff. The qualification earned justifies more resources being provided by the collaborating institution and this, in turn, will foster opportunities for staff from overseas to spend time at the University with colleagues in the Faculty.

8 Enhancement of the Collaboration with City University Hong Kong

The Faculty is building on its current relationship with the Community College to develop new areas of collaboration. A four-year part-time programme leading to BA Business Systems has been developed jointly with the Community College and was subject to an approval event held in May 2007. In parallel, the programme was approved for operation at the University. A pilot top-up programme commenced at CCCU in September 2007.

The Faculty was also asked to provide a top-up programme for the Associate Degree in Airport Operations and Aviation Logistics. This was designed as part of a new three-year programme leading to BSc Aviation Management at the University and was approved in May 2007. The first intake at CCCU began their studies in September 2007. The Faculty provides two scholarships for students on this prestigious programme which is the only one of its kind in Hong Kong.

The wider collaboration with City University includes a top-up programme leading to BSc Business Management (Engineering) and to MBA (Logistics) which was approved in October 2006 to operate with the School of Continuing and Professional Education (SCOPE). The Bachelors programme commenced with a September 2007 intake.

9 The Interim Review process was standardised in September 2007, and Interim Review Panels (IRPs) now have terms of reference and guidance to follow for panel membership. Interim Review is an informal process to provide the University with a 'health check' concerning the collaboration and to ensure that both the University and the partner institution are working well together. An Interim Review will normally be set to take place two years after the first intake of students at the new partner organisation or on courses and/or programmes approved as an extension to an existing partner's already approved profile of courses and/or programmes. In addition to looking at the effectiveness of the working relationship between the two institutions, the Interim Review will look at the quality of the students' experience, academic standards, quality assurance and quality enhancement. An IRP will consist of a minimum of two members, one of whom must be a representative from the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), and one of whom must have experience of collaborative provision. These two requirements may be covered by one person. IRP members must normally be drawn from a Faculty not involved in the collaboration being reviewed, and, if deemed appropriate, one of the members may be external to the University. A report from the Interim Review should be produced for the Chair of QAC. As a minimum the report should make reference to:
a effectiveness of the working relationship between the two institutions
b quality of the students’ experience, covering both learning experience and student support
c academic standards, quality assurance and quality enhancement.

The roles of Institutional Approval, Partnership Approval and Review, and Course Approval and Review Panels have been clarified, and Terms of Reference updated accordingly. This can be summarised as follows:

a **Institutional Approval Panels (IAP)**

This provides guidelines for the approval process and requirements for a new collaboration with a potential partner organisation. Institutional Approval (with or without conditions) must be achieved before consideration at course and/or programme level can be considered. If an Institutional Approval Panel does not give approval, then the University cannot proceed to consider approval at course or programme level.

b **Partnership Approval and Review Panels (PARP)**

A PARP is required to consider giving initial approval to an approved institution in order to run a course (or courses) which are already in approval at Coventry University. The PARP also reviews the course at the partner institutions towards the end of the approval period (usually six years or earlier if required). The PARP may also renew approval for a further six years.

c **Course Approval and Review Panels (CARP)**

A CARP is required to consider giving approval to an approved institution to run a course (or courses) which are not in approval at Coventry University. The CARP also reviews the course towards the end of the approval period (usually six years or earlier if required). The CARP may also renew approval for a further six years.
## Appendix B

### Summary of current student numbers

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<th>Course</th>
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<td>224</td>
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<td>165</td>
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<td>BA Business Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSc Aviation Management</td>
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<td>97</td>
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