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**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

Overseas Partnership Audit Report

Lancaster University and the
Universidad Pontificias Comillas

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW DIRECTORATE

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Contents

Introduction	1
The process of audit of overseas partnership links	1
The context of collaborative provision with Spanish partners	1
The background to the partnership	1
Formal arrangements	2
Responsibility for quality and standards	3
The approval process for this partnership link	3
Quality of learning opportunities and student support	4
Liaison with the partner and administration of the link	4
Monitoring and review	4
Curriculum	5
Learning resources	6
Student information and support	6
Staffing and staff development	7
Summary	7
Assurance of the standards of awards	7
Entry requirements	7
The assessment of students	8
Language of tuition and assessment	8
Summary	9
Conclusions	9
Appendix A	10
Commentary on the audit report supplied by Lancaster University	10
Appendix B	12
Lancaster University - Student numbers	12

Introduction

1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a UK organisation which aims to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. It provides public information about quality and standards in higher education to meet the needs of students, employers and the funders of higher education. One of QAA's activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative links between UK higher education institutions and some of their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2000, QAA audited selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Spain. The purpose of the audits was to provide information on the way in which the UK institutions were maintaining academic standards and quality of education in their partnerships with institutions in Spain.

The process of audit of overseas partnership links

2 In planning these audits of overseas collaborative provision, QAA invited all UK institutions to provide a list of their collaborative links with Spanish partners. On the basis of the information provided on the range and scale of the links, business and management studies were selected as the subject focus for the audit. Each of the UK institutions whose collaborative link had been selected for the audit provided QAA with a *Commentary* describing the way the partnership operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which the UK institution assured quality and standards in the link. 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 or specific to this link, subject or country. QAA identified six UK institutions which had established arrangements where most or all of the educational provision was delivered through a Spanish partner, and these institutions were visited by small teams of auditors to discuss the arrangements with appropriate staff and to look at relevant documentation.

3 Audit teams visited the Spanish partner institutions to gain further insight into the experience of students and staff, and to supplement the view formed by the team from the institution's *Commentary* and from the UK visit. During each of the visits in Spain, further documentation about the link was made available to the team, and discussions were conducted with key members of staff, lecturers and students. In addition, members of the team, who included subject specialists in business and management, were able to

see facilities and resources available to the students, and examples of students' work. QAA is grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Spain for the willing cooperation provided to the teams.

4 Institutions were invited, in their *Commentaries*, to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the Higher Education Quality Council's (HEQC) *Code of Practice for Overseas Collaborative Provision in Higher Education, 2nd edition* (1996) (HEQC's *Code*). HEQC's *Code* contains advice and recommendations about the assurance of quality and standards in overseas partnerships. In the context of these audits, it was used as a reference point by the audit teams, and its contents are reflected in the observations in this report. Some institutions also made reference, in their *Commentaries*, to the ways in which they were working towards implementation of QAA's *Code of practice on the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision* (1999) (QAA's *Code*), which takes full effect in August 2000. In the context of these audits, there was no expectation that institutions would necessarily be able to demonstrate that they met the expectations of the latter *Code*.

The context of collaborative provision with Spanish partners

5 Substantial responsibility for the administration of education in Spain is devolved to the 17 autonomous communities that now constitute Spain. Under Spanish legislation passed in 1991, private institutions offering the awards of foreign universities may apply for official government recognition, and the status of 'centre of a foreign university in Spain'. Recognition of institutions is the responsibility of the governments of the autonomous communities. Through a separate process known as 'homologation', students holding qualifications of foreign institutions may apply to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of the central Spanish government for official recognition of their awards (and thus permission to work in the public sector). Current interpretation of Spanish law means that it is very unlikely that an award obtained through study at a non-recognised institution will be homologated.

The background to the partnership

6 This report considers the partnership between Lancaster University (the University) and the Universidad Pontificia Comillas (the Universidad). The partnership operates within the context of a consortium of business schools through which students are able to study and undertake work experience in two different countries. The consortium

involves a total of 15 institutions, of which six - including the University's Management School and the Universidad's business school (ICADE) - have multiple relationships within the consortium, and form the International Partnership of Business Schools (IPBS). The current agreement between the University and the Universidad permits students to spend two years at the University, studying in English, and then to transfer to ICADE for a further two years' study, in Spanish. Students progressing to ICADE join students from other consortium partners. At the time of the audit visit, three students had progressed from the University to ICADE, and were in their third year of study, although one of the three had transferred to a one-year exchange programme; there were 11 students in each of the first and second years. There is scope within the agreement for students to commence their studies at ICADE and progress to the University, but the partners have decided not to exercise this option for the time being. Students completing the programme successfully are eligible for the University's award of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in European Management and the Universidad's award of Graduado Superior en Ciencias Empresariales Internacionales. Details of student numbers, provided by the University, are attached as Appendix B to this report.

7 The *Commentary* provided for the purposes of the audit described the partnership in the context of the University's commitment to European student exchanges, and drew attention to its work as a founder member of the European Credit Transfer System in business administration. The resulting knowledge and relationships 'were the foundation on which a strategic new development was formed', when the University's Management School was invited to enter into an agreement with three existing members of the IPBS consortium in 1997, and became an official member of IPBS in 1999. The University's formal agreement with the Universidad refers to the partnership as a student exchange, but in practice, as staff at the University confirmed to the audit team, the arrangement is one of validation: the University recognises the two years at ICADE as equivalent to the final years of its own degree programmes, and makes an award on that basis. The *Commentary* did not address the extent to which the University considered that its link with the Universidad typified its approach to managing overseas partnerships.

8 The Universidad Pontificia Comillas, founded in 1850, is a private, state-recognised Jesuit university in Madrid, with degree awarding powers derived from the Vatican. It is a substantial institution of around 14,000 students, of whom 2,500 are in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration.

9 The audit team members who conducted the UK visit to Lancaster University were Mrs N J Channon; Dr D H Furneaux; and Professor M P Shaw. The members of the team who visited the Universidad Pontificia Comillas were Professor M Bond; Mr G Clark (audit secretary); Ms S J Clark; Professor J Coyne; and Professor M P Shaw. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms S J Clark, Assistant Director, Institutional Review Directorate.

Formal arrangements

10 The *Commentary* referred briefly to a formal agreement (the *Agreement*) governing the partnership, signed by the University and the Universidad in 1997, and due for renewal in 2000. It also made reference to the IPBS *Charter*, which is due to be amended in the near future to include reference to the University. The stated purpose of the *Agreement* is 'to facilitate and develop an integrative student exchange programme': it formulates the roles and responsibilities of each partner contiguously in a framework that respects their autonomy over the elements of the programme that they deliver, with the implication that neither partner can be directly responsible for elements delivered elsewhere. The *Agreement* does not cover systematically the areas listed in HEQC's *Code*: there is no mention of specific quality assurance procedures, of rules concerning publicity and promotional materials, or of the arrangements to be made for students on the programme in the event of premature termination of the partnership. The *Agreement* suggests a partnership based on mutual recognition rather than validation, mirroring the broader context of the IPBS consortium in which the partnership resides.

11 The audit team heard that the approach implied by the *Agreement* was borne out in practice. Staff at the University confirmed, for example, that there was no formal procedure for approving publicity for the programme and thus no formal means by which the University assured itself of the accuracy of ICADE materials referring to its award. The team was informed that the University was in the process of reviewing the scope and comprehensiveness of its partnership agreements, but perceived some uncertainty amongst University staff about whether any changes would be made when the current *Agreement* with the Universidad expired. The University will wish to reflect further on whether the *Agreement* is sufficient to provide a secure framework for what is, in effect, its validation of the final two years of a degree programme, and to ensure that future agreements with the Universidad are consistent with the expectations of national codes of practice.

12 The *Commentary* did not refer to the University's policy on certification and the audit team's discussion

with senior staff indicated that a consistent certification policy for collaborative ventures had still to be formulated. The team heard some expressions of support, however, for a certificate that carried the name of the partner institution, and for a certification policy consistent with QAA's *Code*. The *Agreement* states that the partners 'will agree and produce a common transcript of results for the two degree programmes'. Given that the first cohort of students eligible for the University's award will complete the programme in 2001, the University will wish to give attention to clarifying the information to be provided on the certificate and the arrangements for the production of the joint transcripts, taking account of the guidelines, in both HEQC's *Code* and QAA's *Code*, relating to location of study and language of instruction. The students who met the team in Spain confirmed that they had still to be informed about the nature of certification that they would receive on graduation. Further comment on transcripts is provided below (see below, paragraph 24).

Responsibility for quality and standards

13 Within the University, ultimate responsibility for institutional quality and standards rests with Senate, advised by the relevant faculty and central committees. Of these, the Committee on Overseas Collaborative Provision (COCP), a sub-committee of the Committee for Associated Institutions, was set up in 1999 to establish and maintain systems for the monitoring and review of overseas arrangements and to make recommendations on the approval of new arrangements. At programme level, responsibility for the partnership rests with the Management School. The *Agreement* is explicit, however, that the 'courses and related activities' provided through the University's partnership with the Universidad are 'the primary and ultimate responsibility of the host institution', a position confirmed in the IPBS *Charter*, which states that members agree to 'respect the standards of quality of the country in which programmes are offered'. As a result, the partnership provides a particular challenge to the University's authority over the quality and standard of its award. Although the audit team found little awareness of this challenge in the *Commentary* or the supplementary documentation provided for the audit, it noted that a recent report to COCP by a working party on the University's North American exchanges had identified the necessity for the University to assure itself of the comparable quality and standards of its exchange partners, and recommended ways in which this might be achieved. The team was also informed that COCP had intended to conduct an internal audit of the ICADE link, but that this had been deferred owing to preparations for QAA's audit. As it proceeds with its internal audit, the University may wish to reflect on the relevance to the partnership of the report of the North American

exchanges working party. It may also wish to consider how COCP's potential might be exploited further, to provide a stronger focus for maintaining an institutional overview of quality and standards in all overseas provision.

The approval process for this partnership link

14 The *Commentary* offered few details about the approval process for the partnership. Prior to 1997, the University offered a BBA in European Management programme, in which students spent three years at Lancaster and one year abroad. The invitation to join the consortium, and to amend the existing programme accordingly, was the result of an IPBS search for a new UK partner. The *Commentary* reported that the University decided to join 'having been convinced of the highest quality of the constituent members' - a judgement that was 'based upon knowledge that existing members' academic standing, mission and objectives were satisfactory and consistent with one another', supplemented by the University's prior experience of the members through SOCRATES exchanges. Staff at the University informed the audit team that the process of approval commenced with familiarisation visits with the German member of the consortium, followed by University recognition of the programme of the German partner as compatible with a modified first two years at the University. The decision to extend the arrangement to ICADE was made without further visits by the University, on the grounds that the programme had already been harmonised within IPBS. The *Commentary* reported that the new arrangements for the programme had been approved by the BBA Steering Committee, the Management School's Teaching Committee and, finally, by the 'University's group which considers proposals arising in the latter part of the academic year' - the Long Vacation Approvals Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, which carries powers delegated by Senate.

15 The evidence available suggested to the audit team that the University's approval process for the partnership had been both light and informal. The programme had been exposed initially to minimal scrutiny outside the Management School; the proposal to deliver the final two years of the University's award in a foreign institution and in a foreign language had been treated as a programme amendment; and the team saw no evidence that the University had assessed, formally, the suitability of the partners, beyond its consideration of the German partner. The University acknowledged to the team that the process had not been documented, although there had been discussion and debate. The team noted, however, that the University had since introduced new processes for programme approval that required a more rigorous

and comprehensive University overview of proposals, to include examination of the viability of the proposal by the International Steering Group, initial scrutiny by COCP, and much fuller consideration by the relevant faculty and central committees. The team was informed by senior staff that the University had sharpened the approval process over time, and that COCP now played an important role in making risk assessments of new ventures. The team also heard that institutional scrutiny of proposed partners was planned, so as to ascertain the comparability of internal arrangements and the student experience, although there appeared to be less certainty as to whether this process would always require a visit to the partner institution. The University may wish to give consideration to whether future adherence to QAA's *Code* can be achieved without such visits. The University is to be commended, however, for the development of more robust approval mechanisms for overseas collaborations. It will wish to ensure their consistent application in the future.

16 The *Commentary* did not address the status of the programme in respect of official recognition by the Spanish authorities. The audit team was informed in its discussions with both partners that neither the Lancaster nor the ICADE award had received government recognition, but that the currency of the ICADE award in the business sector was such that students had no difficulties in obtaining employment in Spain. The students who met the team in Spain shared this understanding of the status of the awards. The team noted that it was possible for students to obtain the Lancaster award without obtaining the ICADE award.

Quality of learning opportunities and student support

17 The *Commentary* stated that 'the programmes offered by the consortium provide students with high-quality study opportunities and work experience in two different countries' and reported that students on the earlier BBA exchange programme had given 'very positive feedback as to the quality of the courses offered and of the institutional arrangements'. It also alluded to the research expertise of staff at ICADE and their experience of foreign students. No formal process for supporting these expressions of confidence, by checking on the appropriateness of learning opportunities and student support facilities offered through the partnership, could be identified by the audit team. The University later informed the team that student feedback (see below, paragraph 21), over time, would provide the primary monitoring mechanism.

Liaison with the partner and administration of the link

18 The *Commentary* explained that, consistent with its normal practice, the Management School has appointed a programme director and deputy programme director to the BBA programme, including the BBA European Management, with appropriate time allowances for their duties in respect of programme management. These two members of staff constitute the principal points of liaison with ICADE and are 'in frequent contact' with the Head of Studies in Spain. Further opportunities for liaison are provided by regular IPBS meetings and programme directors' meetings, the former dealing with strategic matters, and the latter with day-to-day business including, according to the University's programme director, individual courses and opportunities for greater convergence between partners. There is also an annual 'International Business Weekend' for the students of all partner institutions, and a joint examination board meeting in July (see below, paragraph 33). The audit team was informed by staff in Spain that administrative contact between the University and ICADE was currently limited but unproblematic, because the University had adapted to ICADE's requirements in respect of the exchange of information about student selection, the academic calendar, student accommodation and travel.

19 The audit team noted that regular liaison visits and correspondence between programme directors at the University and ICADE had taken place. The students who met the team in Spain confirmed that the University's programme directors had met them at ICADE to discuss any potential problems, and had provided effective support. The team noted that, in effect, the University was relying on the programme directors to check upon the quality of learning opportunities and student support during their visits to Spain, but that no formal record was kept of the visits. The team concurred with the view expressed by senior University staff who met the team: that a protocol for reporting was needed, so as to enable the University to assure itself of the quality of the student experience.

Monitoring and review

20 The *Commentary* described monitoring and review arrangements for the programme in the context of the University's general arrangements for review. In respect of the BBA, an annual review report is prepared by the programme director, and considered by the BBA Steering Committee and the Management School's Teaching Committee. A summarised report is then submitted, via the School's Board of Studies, to the University's Committee for Undergraduate Studies and Senate. The documentation available to the audit team suggested that the reporting style in this process

was minimalist: the annual report to the School's Teaching Committee for 1998-99, for example, was a brief document covering four programmes, without detailed comment on the new BBA in European Management. The *Commentary* reported that, while the programme as a whole would not be subject to a review until 2001-02, when the first cohort of students had graduated, informal review of the programme was 'a continuous process' and had given rise, for example, to proposals for curriculum changes (see below, paragraph 22). It also stated that the School had recognised that 'the relative complexity of the programme' required 'an additional means' of 'monitoring relationships with...the consortium, students' performance and their experience of studying abroad', and was proposing the establishment of a sub-committee of the BBA Steering Committee to undertake this work. In the view of the team, the University's current arrangements for monitoring the programme leading to its award, as delivered in Spain, were largely informal and dependent on the programme directors identifying and dealing with difficulties as and when they arose. The University will wish to introduce a more systematic and robust approach to continuous monitoring, and to consider whether the current style of annual reports enables it to maintain an adequate overview of the programme.

21 In relation to student feedback, the *Commentary* reported that a staff-student committee for the 'overall degree programme' met once a term at the University, with 'similar arrangements' at ICADE. The audit team saw only one set of minutes for these committees, relating to a meeting with first-year students at the University in November 1999. The team's discussions with students indicated that the meeting had been held for a specific reason: to consider and vote on the proposed changes to the programme. Staff informed the team that there was no formal route for the minutes of such meetings, but any serious matters would go forward to the Steering Committee and, if necessary, the Teaching Committee. Written feedback from students is gathered through questionnaires administered after each block of teaching, and informs annual review. At ICADE, provision is made for the representation of students on faculty committees, but it did not appear that a staff-student committee specific to the programme existed. At both the University and ICADE, it seemed to the team that the main channel of student feedback was informal, direct communication links with the programme directors. The students who met the team at ICADE, currently three in number, considered this channel to be effective. As numbers on the programme grow, however, the University may wish to consider working with its partner to develop more formal systems of student feedback.

Curriculum

22 The *Commentary* stated that the aim of the programme was 'to give a wide education in all aspects of management, with a constant interplay between theory and practice'. The *Agreement* makes it clear that the courses provided in the two parts of the programmes are 'the primary and ultimate responsibility of the host institution'; formal opportunities for partners to influence the curriculum delivered elsewhere are limited. The audit team was informed that the University had made its initial, and most detailed, comparison of curriculum with the German consortium partner. The team noted that the University's strong disciplinary and quantitative approach was compatible with the even stronger quantitative orientation of the business education offered at ICADE. Students had commented, however, that while they had experienced few difficulties in making the transition between the partners in relation to some subjects, in others, such as accountancy and Spanish language for business, the 'join' had been less sound. The team heard that these difficulties had been identified 'as part of the informal review process' and that, as a result, changes had been proposed to the University's programme to provide better preparation for students in several areas, and to adjust the balance between business and language studies. These changes suggested to the team that the University was willing to take action in the interests of securing curriculum compatibility and it was also clear that the required modifications had been subject to a rigorous approval process at the University. However, the need to make modifications also suggested that the University's initial compatibility assessment had not been wholly effective, a matter that it will wish to take into account as it seeks to tighten its procedures.

23 The programme includes three compulsory placements - two in the first two years of the programme at the University, during the summer vacations, and the third during the second semester of the third year, at ICADE. The students who met the audit team at the University indicated that they were less than satisfied with the help provided by the University to enable them to find placements in the UK: in one case, a student had undertaken his 'UK' placement in Spain, with the help of ICADE, because he had been unable to arrange something suitable in the UK. This matter was also raised with the team by staff at ICADE, who viewed the placements as core to the programme and essential to meeting employers' needs for graduates with international business experience, and had felt some frustration with the University's failure to secure placements for all students. The team noted the attention paid at ICADE to arranging high quality placements, and the formal systems in place for preparing and assessing students.

The University may wish to give further consideration to this matter, to ensure that it is able to meet the expectations of both its partner and its students.

24 The programme attracts a higher credit tariff than normal due to an increased study load. The audit team noted that the Management School's proposals to modify the first two years of the programme, in the light of the matters raised above, had still to be approved by the University, on the grounds that they would entail the allocation of even more credit, and had implications for parity of treatment of students. On its visit to Spain, the team heard that there was no formal system for mapping one course against another to determine the equivalence of credit for subjects studied in partner institutions: for the purposes of its final award, and in order to fit a student's credit profile into the ICADE norm, the Head of Studies at ICADE simply divided the credit obtained by the student against the list of possible subjects, regardless of whether the student concerned had in fact studied - and passed - all of the subjects on the list. The University informed the team subsequently that this arrangement had no implications for the accuracy of the joint transcript, which would be divided into two parts and therefore separate out the information about the courses taken and marks achieved at the University and ICADE respectively.

Learning resources

25 On the basis of its confidence in the quality of its proposed partner, the University made no initial assessment of the appropriateness of the learning resources provided in Spain; its monitoring, subsequently, has been based upon the visits of the programme directors. As a result, no formal University evaluation of learning resources was available to the audit team, and the team's tour of facilities at ICADE did not include a visit to the library. The students who had studied previously at the University indicated that they had found the resources very different to those available to them in the UK: they reported that computer and internet access was comparatively restricted, that the library had no browsing facilities, with books ordered taking up to two days to be delivered from stock, and that they had experienced some difficulties in obtaining materials necessary for them to undertake project work. In so far as the team was able to judge, ICADE's facilities and its classroom environment appeared to be consistent with its status as a well-respected institution with high achieving students. The University may wish to consider ways in which it might improve students' preparation for the learning environment provided by its partner.

Student information and support

26 The *Commentary* stated that 'for all matters concerning particular courses, complaints and other queries are primarily addressed to and dealt with by the programme director(s) at the university providing the courses'. The *Agreement* makes it clear that students are 'subject to the regulations of the institution in which they study'. The students who met the audit team in the UK knew where to find the University's examination regulations and appeals and complaints procedures, and had also been given a programme document containing departmental procedures and policies on such matters as plagiarism. University staff who met the team were less clear, however, about student entitlements under the Universidad's regulations: the team heard an expression of confidence that ICADE had appeals procedures, but staff acknowledged that they did not know how they worked. Given that students studying at ICADE would receive the University's award, the team viewed as a matter of considerable concern the University's apparent failure to compare or understand its partner's appeals procedures. The students who met the team in Spain, one of whom had failed several examination papers, were unsure of their rights of appeal, or of the standard of performance that would be required to gain the University's award, in the event that they failed to obtain ICADE's award. The University will wish to ensure as a matter of priority that all students studying for its award are fully apprised of these matters. It may also wish to reflect on whether the operation of different regulatory frameworks at the University and ICADE could in itself give rise to student appeals and whether, in the event of a formal appeal against a decision made in respect of the University's award, the position that such an appeal would be subject to ICADE's procedures would in fact be tenable.

27 Students at both the University and ICADE reported to the audit team that they were well-supported in their studies. The team heard that support in the UK was provided through course tutors, welfare tutors and through the general accessibility of staff. At ICADE, it was evident that these roles were provided very effectively by the Head of Studies, a British national familiar with the environment of UK higher education, and that students also remained in contact with the programme directors at the University. Students in Spain reported that they received feedback on their project work, although the predominant method of assessment was examinations, and it was not the norm to be provided with continuous feedback. This matter notwithstanding, the team concluded that effective systems of student support were in place.

28 The *Commentary* made reference to the 'considerable difference in styles of teaching, studying and assessment between Lancaster and ICADE, necessitating a very considerable adjustment on the part of the students'. The Head of Studies described ICADE's teaching style as more directive and didactic, and the students who met the audit team at the University stated that they were aware that there would be a difference when they transferred to Spain. The students who met the team in Spain described the transition as a major culture shock, referring to the high number of contact hours and what they considered to be a relatively passive learning environment. The *Commentary* stated that ICADE provided a formal induction programme and that the first semester in Spain was lightly loaded in terms of credit for the University's award, to allow students time to adapt. The team noted, however, that in terms of ICADE's award, the first semester was almost identical to other semesters in terms of credit-rating. Staff at ICADE considered that, although the transition was hard, it could be viewed as part of the training on the programme and that successful students were adaptable: a view supported by the enthusiasm, resilience, and general cheerfulness of the students who met the team. The team believed, nonetheless, that the University would wish to continue to work with its partner in exploring ways in which the transition might be eased for future cohorts of students, and the quality of the 'join' secured.

Staffing and staff development

29 In keeping with the *Agreement*, the University has no role in the appointment of staff to the programme at ICADE, although the Head of Studies explained to the audit team that he had made changes to his teaching team on the basis of informal feedback from partners. The *Commentary* did not identify the need for joint staff development activities for teaching staff, although staff at both the University and ICADE referred to workshops held during an annual three day IPBS meeting as an opportunity to share good practice within the consortium. The team concluded that, in spite of the degree of responsibility that the University had delegated to its partner, it had not put in place formal mechanisms for satisfying itself of the continuing acceptability of teaching staff delivering the programme leading to its award, or for encouraging wider contact between staff teaching the programme in the UK and overseas. The University later informed the team that, while staffing in Spain was of course a matter for ICADE, it intended to monitor this staffing via student feedback, course curricula and visits, and by shared experience over a period.

Summary

30 From documentation available to it in the UK, and from its discussions with staff and students at the University, the audit team considered that the University had yet to put in place appropriate formal systems for assuring the quality of learning opportunities provided through the programme as delivered in Spain, and for ensuring that it had access to information to enable it properly to monitor the provision leading to its award. This view was confirmed by its visit to Spain, where it was clear that the University's trust in its partner was well-founded, but that mechanisms for consultation and monitoring were almost wholly informal, and that a stronger quality assurance framework might have enabled the University to anticipate some emerging problems.

Assurance of the standards of awards

31 The *Commentary* provided no clear statement of the University's approach to assuring the standards of its awards offered through the partnership, although it made reference to the high standards set for programmes offered by its partners. University staff informed the audit team that the initial decision that standards were appropriate and compatible was made after some (undocumented) debate, and that reliance was placed on the quality and professional judgement of staff. The team formed the view that, in joining the consortium, the University had accepted implicitly the standards of other members' programmes, and placed substantial reliance on the recruitment of highly capable students. The team heard from senior staff that the University had now introduced a policy on standards, based on scrutiny of the partner, the role of the external examiner, and the processes underpinning the student experience. The team believed, however, that assurance of the standard of its award provided at ICADE remained a challenge to be faced by the University, in the absence of an identical programme offered internally against which to benchmark student achievement, and in the light of the assessment arrangements outlined below (see below, paragraph 34).

Entry requirements

32 The *Agreement* is clear that the selection and admission of students is the responsibility of either the University or ICADE, depending on the domicile of applicants: according to the *Commentary*, 'neither institution has any involvement (such as a right to veto) in the recruitment procedures of the other'. The University's entry requirements in terms of UCAS points are high, and the audit team was informed in Spain that ICADE's entrance examination was highly selective and appropriate to the business sciences and

mathematical orientation of its part of the programme. Students who met the team in Spain referred to the highly quantitative nature of their work at ICADE, and one considered herself fortunate to have A-level mathematics. The University will no doubt be keeping its own entry requirements under review, in the light of the experience of students transferring to ICADE, to ensure that they continue to be appropriate.

The assessment of students

33 The *Commentary* was explicit that the University has no input to, or influence on, the assessment practices and procedures at ICADE. Marks obtained from all consortium partners are put to an annual meeting of a 'Grand Jury', which announces the degree results, but 'does not have power to alter any degree results for any institution'. The audit team noted that these arrangements were contrary to HEQC's *Code*. The *Commentary* also reported that 'marking practices and scales vary widely between countries and thus a conversion table is used in order to convert Lancaster marks into their ICADE equivalent and vice versa'. On joining the consortium, the University adopted the conversion mechanism already in place for an Irish university member, a decision based, the team heard, on the fact that its programme looked very similar. The team noted that the conversion table did not fit the normal grading levels for UK degrees, but that it was the subject of continuing discussions between the partners. It also noted that while the University had no power to alter the marks awarded by ICADE, its internal BBA examination board (the membership of which included the external examiner, see below, paragraph 34) had discretionary powers to interpret the converted marks according to the University's examination regulations, including those approved specifically for the BBA.

34 The *Commentary* stated that the award of the BBA was 'subject to the normal external examination procedures which apply to all Lancaster University degrees'. However, it went on to describe a process that appeared to give the University's external examiner the right only 'to see all ICADE scripts and documents regarding any review of the ICADE courses', on the grounds that 'it may not be practicable to see all question papers in advance or to express a view about appropriate levels of marking before marks are formally awarded'. The *Commentary* stated, however, that the University's examination board could review scripts and marks and also require viva voce examinations, before degrees were awarded. The current external examiner is also responsible for the University's BBA in Management, and his contact to date with the European Management programme has been limited to decisions in respect of the second year students who transferred to ICADE in 1999-2000. The

Commentary reported that a new external examiner, specific to the European Management programme, would be appointed with effect from October 2000. The audit team was informed that criteria for the appointment had still to be discussed, but that the University would not necessarily be seeking a Spanish speaker, because the appointee would be required to cover all of the European programmes. It was also confirmed that the examiner would not visit Spain to view coursework, and that a sample of examination scripts would be translated after marks had been awarded. The planned operation of the external examiner appeared to the team to be restricted in nature and somewhat unclear: in practical terms, it seemed that the appointee might do little more than consider mark sheets and students' performance records before deciding whether the converted marks should be adjusted. In the view of the team, the University's ability to demonstrate that it is securing the standards of its award will be dependent upon the development of a robust process for external examining, and upon ensuring that the external examiner is able to operate in accordance with its requirements and expectations.

35 The audit team saw two pieces of student work in Spain, both fourth-year projects of high quality produced by students at ICADE who were from another partner institution. It saw no assignments or projects by the students who had transferred to ICADE from the University.

Language of tuition and assessment

36 The final two years of the programme are taught and assessed in Spanish. It did not appear, from the documentary evidence available to the audit team, that the University's initial consideration of the programme had been informed by HEQC's *Code*, and taken account of the implications of delivery in a foreign language. The UK students who met the team at the University had considerable worries about whether their Spanish would be good enough, and those met in Spain had clearly experienced problems with language. The University has now taken steps to better prepare students and indicated to the team its awareness that UK students would inevitably experience some disadvantage in their third and fourth years, as compared with native Spanish students who were returning to their home institution for their final two years. The amount of language support required to ensure that students can adjust as rapidly as possible to the demanding programme at ICADE is a matter that the University will wish to keep under close review.

Summary

37 From the documentation available to it in the UK, and from its discussions with staff and students at ICADE, the audit team formed the view that there were a number of difficulties relating to the University's assurance of academic standards. These difficulties focused upon the University's inability to influence the assessment process during the final two years of the programme, and plans for a more restricted role for the external examiner than might normally be expected. This view was confirmed by the visit to Spain.

Conclusions

38 Lancaster University established its partnership with the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in 1997, as part of a consortium arrangement through which university business schools provide programmes of study that enable students to study and undertake work experience in two different countries, and to obtain two awards. The current agreement between the University and the Universidad permits students to spend two years at the University and then to transfer to the Universidad to complete a further two years' study. The partnership is underpinned by a formal *Agreement*, which places considerable emphasis on the autonomy of the partners over the part of the programme that they deliver. The *Agreement* describes the relationship between the partners in terms of a student exchange and the University has conducted the relationship on this basis. In reality, however, the arrangement is one of validation: the University recognises the two years at the Universidad as equivalent to the final years of its own degree programmes, and makes an award on that basis.

39 The University's categorisation of the programme as a student exchange has resulted in a light approach to validating, monitoring and controlling the quality of learning opportunities and standards of awards offered through the partnership. From the outset, it has made decisions largely on the basis of trust in its partner. There is no reason to judge as misplaced the University's confidence in the Universidad's capacity to provide an appropriate learning experience and to ensure that student attainment is of an appropriate standard. It was and is, however, a confidence based on good faith and informality, without the necessary formal mechanisms designed to support the relationship, and to enable the University to assure itself that the programme leading to its award continues to be secure. The quality assurance mechanisms required for the validation of the final two years of a programme, taught overseas and in a foreign language, are likely to be rather more comprehensive than those deemed necessary to support a one-year

student exchange, and many aspects of the partnership, as conducted currently, give rise to concern when considered in the light of the guidance given in HEQC's *Code*. Areas requiring prompt attention include clarifying the information to be provided on students' certificates and transcripts; improving the provision of information to students, particularly in respect of assessment requirements, and their preparation for transferring from the UK to Spain; and putting in place formal quality assurance mechanisms to enable the University to keep an adequate overview of the provision leading to its award.

40 The BBA in European Management offers students the opportunity to acquire a broad and varied business and management education with strong theoretical and practical experience from two countries. The programme and the experience of studying in Spain and the UK are doubtless both challenging and of great benefit to the students. It is precisely because of this obvious benefit that the University will wish to take steps to secure those aspects of its arrangements that are within its direct control, and to work with its partner to ensure that, where arrangements must be negotiated, they nonetheless meet the University's normal minimum requirements in terms of quality assurance. Senior staff at the University recognise those areas where there is scope for improvement, and the University is taking steps, for example, more generally to tighten its monitoring procedures and the formal protocols surrounding liaison visits. Such developments are both welcome and necessary. The *Commentary* prepared for the audit did not address the extent to which the University considered that the partnership typified its approach to managing its overseas collaborative provision. Were the partnership to be representative, the findings of this audit would support only limited confidence in the University's arrangements for the stewardship of quality and standards in such provision.

Appendix A*

Commentary on the audit report supplied by Lancaster University

The University acknowledges the criticisms in the QAA Report and, both as part of its preparations before the review, and since, has been taking steps to address these concerns. In particular it is aware that it validated a complex partnership arrangement as an extension of an existing exchange programme and this is the cause of many of the shortcomings identified. A further opportunity to revise the current arrangements comes from the need to review the formal documentation detailing the link with ICADE later this calendar year.

The University's intention is to set in place procedures that fully acknowledge the institutional independence of its partner University but that also acknowledge the difficulties that result from this and the steps taken to resolve them. These are detailed below in the responses to particular paragraphs but concentrate on ensuring that the role of the external examiner is as full as is to be expected for any degree programme. Other alterations will be made that will improve the monitoring of the student experience at ICADE and thus the University's ability to deal with any resultant problems. Similar changes to the relationship with the two other partner institutions will be discussed with them.

The University notes the following points in relation to the report:

Para 7: The issue of whether QAA is prepared to accept fully the concept of equal partnerships with known and internationally well-regarded institutions becomes important to the way in which the relationship with ICADE is judged. Some paragraphs in the report appear to view the partnership as positive, while in others the fact of there being a partnership in itself seems to raise concerns. Our subsequent comments reflect where appropriate Lancaster's reliance on the positive aspects of a partnership. The University accepts, however, that the partnership draws on teaching and assessment at the partner institution, and is not a student exchange.

Para 10: The University confirms that the QAA *Code of practice* on collaborative provision (July 1999) is now being implemented by the University as the template for all overseas partnership arrangements.

Para 11: The current *Agreement* expires at the end of October 2000, and the new *Agreement* will contain more safeguards for Lancaster students, a fuller and more

exact statement of procedures, and a redefinition of the partnership relationship that sets out how shared responsibilities are to be fulfilled.

Para 12: The form of the student transcript and the information contained on the degree certificate will be determined by Lancaster and agreed with ICADE, by no later than the end of October 2000.

Para 13: The Committee for Overseas Collaborative Provision, which is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, has already and independently agreed to re-examine the basis of the student exchanges with North American universities, predominantly at undergraduate level.

Para 15: Part of the protocol required by the Committee for Overseas Collaborative Provision is a visit, involving both academic and administrative staff, to any institution with which a collaborative programme is being proposed, or documented evidence that so many visits have already been made that a further formal journey would be otiose. Any *Memorandum of Agreement* that follows will contain a statement about the agreed levels of direct contact that form part of the relationship.

Para 19: The director of studies and whoever else visits ICADE will in each case send a written report on the visit to ICADE, detailing points of discussion and change, and retain a copy for institutional monitoring purposes.

Para 20: The Management School has recently appointed a new full-time senior administrator, and part of his induction will be about an appropriate and fuller level of detail for School documentation, especially when it is written for consideration by University bodies. While the University does not consider reports more frequent than annual to be useful, the visits that are made must and will be fully documented.

Para 21: As student numbers grow, we shall give a greater proportion of information to students in documentary form, including strong encouragement to give feedback to Lancaster staff as the year at ICADE progresses. All such feedback will be acknowledged and considered for action (see also Para 26).

Para 25: In line with the spirit of the partnership, the University does and will continue to take very

* as supplied by Lancaster University and the Universidad Pontificia Comillas

seriously the preparation of future cohorts of students for their period of study at ICADE. Drawing on the experiences of the first pilot group of students, and on the good practice in preparing students for periods abroad (especially our Department of European Languages and Cultures) to be found elsewhere in the University, the School will ensure that students are fully versed in what to expect, particularly in terms of the academic learning environment.

Para 26: Again, as an element of a partnership, Lancaster expects to understand fully the academic discipline and appeals procedures by which its students are to be judged, and will ensure that students are confident in advance of travelling to ICADE what they can and should expect. Students will be given a summary of the relevant ICADE regulations and procedures while they are at Lancaster.

Para 31: Lancaster expects to gain further detailed knowledge of ICADE over time, including by means of the Grand Jury. This meeting will take place at Lancaster in 2001, giving other colleagues in the School and the University the opportunity to become knowledgeable about the nature of this process.

Para 32: The UK educational system operates to different prerequisites from programmes in the rest of Europe, and the UK curriculum is based on different assumptions about prior learning, including the level of quantitative competence that is deemed necessary to follow management subjects. Appropriate refresher tuition in mathematics is already available in the Management School for the benefit of students who have little or no mathematics experience beyond GCSE or equivalent. All such students on the BBA in European Management, and others, are and will continue to be strongly encouraged to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Para 34: The important question of the external examining arrangements has been under discussion since the QAA visit. Lancaster has decided to appoint an external examiner for the BBA schemes across the board, including the BBA in European Management. This represents a change of policy from the position stated in the *Commentary*, but reflects Lancaster's concern that all BBA students should be treated equitably and consistently as a body. Having a single external examiner for all the variants of the scheme offers external verification that the standards and quality assurance will be common to students whether they are at ICADE, or Lancaster.

Once the priority of having an examiner in common has been accepted, the appointment of a fluent Spanish speaker is in practice unlikely. Lancaster will therefore have all examination papers written in Spanish

translated for the external examiner so that he can satisfy himself that the level of content of the courses provided by ICADE are appropriate for the students from Lancaster. We shall also arrange for an agreed sample of scripts to be translated from Spanish into English and this material will be made available to the board of examiners, including the external examiner.

Appendix B*

Lancaster University - Student numbers

Scheme of study	Year of initial entry		
	1997	1998	1999
European Management (Spanish-ICADE)	3	6 + (5)	6 + (5)
European Management (German-partner)	6 + (7)	1 + (10)	8 + (10)
European Management (French-partner)	7	6 + (14)	9 + (15)
BBA Management	17	49	41
BBA Management/USA	12	14	15

Note: figures in brackets relate to students admitted via the named partner institution.
All other figures relate to students admitted to Lancaster via UCAS.

* as supplied by Lancaster University and the Universidad Pontificia Comillas