

**Birmingham City University
and the Hong Kong Institute
of Vocational Education**

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Birmingham City University audit of overseas provision

1 This report considers a collaborative arrangement between Birmingham City University (the University) (formerly the University of Central England in Birmingham), through the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD) and the Vocational Training Council (VTC), through the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE).

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 the University 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 Formally, the collaborative relationship is between the University and the VTC. Established in 1982, the VTC has become the largest provider of vocational education in Hong Kong, offering pre-employment and in-service training to over 160,000 students and trainees each year, through a number of institutes and training centres, including IVE. In practice, and at an operational level, the key focus of the partnership is between the University and IVE. Formed in 1999, IVE comprises nine campuses, organised into three 'Nexuses'. IVE provision ranges from one-year Certificate to three-year Higher Diploma programmes. Approximately 55,000 students are enrolled on IVE programmes and, of these, over half are studying on a part-time basis.

11 The partnership between the University and IVE, initially approved in 2003, offers holders of an IVE Higher Diploma qualification the opportunity to undertake an undergraduate top-up degree to honours level in Interior Design, Product Design (Industrial Design), Visual Communication (Graphic Design) and Visual Communication (Time-based Media). The University's partnership with IVE involves an articulation arrangement in which IVE Higher Diplomas are recognised as being equivalent to the first two years of the University honours degree, and a franchised arrangement in respect of the top-up BA degrees delivered at IVE. The programme content of the BA top-up degrees is the same as the final level (level 6) of the corresponding degrees offered at the University. Students studying on the top-up programmes are enrolled as students of IVE and the University. The student population has risen from an initial recruitment, in 2004-05, of 72 students, to 90 in 2005-06, and 111 in 2006-07.

12 The partnership with IVE was developed and approved according to the University's 'International Policy governing Collaboration with Overseas Institutions'. The University has a relatively small amount of international collaborative provision and international partnerships have been entered into with care, following detailed consideration and discussion within the University. BIAD's partnership with IVE has arisen out of a strategy of managed expansion of existing franchise provision in art and design to a limited number of suitable partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

13 The University maintains a register of collaborative provision which includes information about the partner organisation; programme details; student numbers; and details of the Academic Agreement. The University's International Policy is based upon a framework which encompasses clear reporting lines and committee structures which have oversight of all collaborative relationships; procedures for the approval, review and

re-approval of collaborative partners and programmes; regular and effective liaison with staff at the partner institution; an operations manual which governs the management and operation of the programmes; and annual monitoring procedures designed to facilitate effective oversight of the programmes and the student learning experience.

14 The University's Senate is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards, and the oversight of quality assurance programmes. Senate's responsibility is exercised through the Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC), a Senate subcommittee, which oversees and monitors all the University's collaborative provision and makes recommendations to Senate on the approval of potential new partnerships. The Overseas Proposals Group (OPG) is a subcommittee of CPC and gives initial consideration to proposed new international partnerships on behalf of CPC.

15 Faculty boards are subcommittees of Senate and are accountable to Senate for the quality and standards of programmes for which faculties are responsible, including collaborative provision. The BIAD Faculty Board (the Institute Board) is therefore responsible to Senate for the programmes at IVE. The Dean of BIAD reports to the Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) on the overall management of the collaboration with IVE. The Dean is supported by an Associate Dean with responsibility for quality matters, and by the BIAD International Co-ordinator who oversees international collaborative partnerships. Each department within BIAD has a departmental academic monitoring committee (DAMC) which formally reports to the BIAD Academic Committee. The latter is responsible for oversight of quality and standards of all programmes within BIAD departments, including the IVE provision.

16 The audit team found the University's policies and procedures to be clear and considered that they had served to underpin the partnership between the University and IVE, ensuring that the collaborative arrangement has been effectively managed.

Public information, publicity and promotional activity

17 The Academic Agreement with IVE specifies that all publicity that refers to the University must be approved by it before publication, and the University's Operations Manual sets out the procedures for the approval of publicity material. Publicity for the collaborative programmes is submitted to the University for checking by the BIAD International Co-ordinator to ensure that it accurately describes the partnership, and by BIAD's Marketing Officer, to ensure that it conforms to the University's marketing guidelines. The BIAD Dean confirms final approval for all programme publicity material.

18 The IVE Co-ordinator is required to notify BIAD of any proposed changes to the IVE website relating to the partnership with the University and the BIAD Co-ordinator may approve minor changes to publicity. The Academic Registry and BIAD undertake random checks of web pages to ensure that the partnership and the programmes are accurately described.

Formal arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner institution

19 The University's approval process for collaboration with a new overseas partner involves both institutional and programme approval. Through the institutional approval process, the University satisfies itself that a proposed partner organisation is an appropriate partner in terms of its mission and management arrangements, and that it has the necessary infrastructure and culture to offer programmes at the level for which approval is being sought. The process is therefore intended to confirm that the partner is of an appropriate quality and standard to lead to an award of the University.

20 The University expects the partner's rationale for international collaboration to be compatible with its mission and International

Policy. An informal relationship existed between BIAD and IVE for several years. However, discussions began in 2002 regarding the possibility of developing a formal relationship. IVE's rationale for the collaboration with BIAD was based on the reputation of UK art and design higher education and the fact that opportunities for degree-level education in Hong Kong were limited, resulting in potential demand for top-up degree provision. BIAD's rationale for the collaboration focused on opportunities to enhance its curricula through the benefits of international collaboration, staff development benefits (including joint staff development opportunities), and future research links. In addition, the University welcomed the opportunity to enhance its profile in the South East Asia region through partnership with a highly regarded local educational provider. The University undertook appropriate due diligence enquires before any formal arrangement was made with IVE.

21 BIAD staff undertook a comprehensive four day visit to IVE in October 2002 to ascertain the viability of one year top-up degrees for IVE Higher Diploma programmes. Following the visit, the BIAD Institute Board concluded that it wished to proceed with the proposed partnership. The initial proposal to collaborate with IVE was submitted to the CPC in October 2002. Normally, CPC would refer applications to the OPG for advice before submission to Senate. However, due to time constraints, this did not happen and an application was submitted to Senate in November 2002.

22 Senate agreed that authority to approve the establishment of the validation event should be delegated to the Chair of Senate and the Chair of CPC in the light of OPG's advice. In November 2002, the proposal was submitted to the OPG, which requested further information from BIAD. An amended proposal was submitted to the OPG in January 2003. Following discussion, the OPG agreed that the proposal should be submitted to the January 2003 meeting of the CPC, which agreed to

recommend to Senate that approval be given to proceed to validation. Agreement on behalf of Senate was granted by Chair's Action, which was ratified by Senate at its meeting in February 2003.

23 An approval event was scheduled over four days in October 2003. The approval panel was chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), and included internal and external panel members. The panel met managers of VTC and IVE; teaching staff; and current and former students. The panel reviewed the facilities and resources available to students at IVE. It also met employers to discuss their involvement in IVE and their views about the top-up programmes.

24 Following scrutiny of the curriculum mapping exercise undertaken and discussions with staff and Higher Diploma students, the panel approved the articulation arrangements between IVE and the University, and agreed that IVE's Higher Diplomas in Digital Media; Graphic Media and Design; Interior and Environmental Design and Product Design and Technology should be deemed formally to be equivalent to 240 credits, 120 of which were at level 5, and therefore accepted as entry to franchised top-up degrees. The panel approved the partnership with IVE and the four full-time undergraduate top-up-degrees to be delivered at IVE Hong Kong (see paragraph 11 above).

25 The panel's report was considered by Senate in February 2004, when it was agreed that the Academic Agreement and the programmes would be subject to review by July 2008. Senate also approved a minimum of 12, and a maximum of 30, students per cohort for each programme. The number limits are recorded in the Academic Agreement and requests to vary the limits are subject to the approval of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

26 Whilst noting that those involved in the curriculum mapping exercise undertaken at the initial approval stage had found this to be a thorough process, the audit team learnt that little monitoring or revisiting of the curriculum mapping exercise had taken place since then.

Teaching staff who met the team in Hong Kong noted that the transition from the Higher Diploma to the top-up degree had presented particular challenges for some students given the particular nature of teaching and learning on the top-up provision, and associated cultural issues. Consequently, the team formed the view that the 2008 review of the provision would provide a timely opportunity for the University to re-map the curriculum with particular attention being given to the theoretical and historical studies (THS) modules, common to all four programmes, and that it should continue to check that re-mapping through the annual course monitoring process.

27 The audit team learnt that the original collaboration continues to evolve and is expected to develop further in the light of the good working relationships established between the partners and IVE's aspirations for the future. In the view of the team, the strength of the partnership bears testimony to the strong foundations established at the outset of the collaboration and has led to the development of positive working relationships, and a genuine sense of a two-way partnership, providing a secure basis for the University's stewardship of quality and standards.

Programme approval

28 As the preceding section indicates, the institutional approval and programme approval processes were closely linked. The four top-up programmes offered at IVE and approved by Senate in September 2004, are identical to the programmes offered at BIAD. No conditions were set at the time of approval and the programmes will be subject to review by July 2008 as part of the University's review of the partnership. The audit team found that the programme approval procedures were thorough and well managed.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

29 The University's collaborative partnerships are governed by an Academic Agreement setting out the responsibilities of the parties

involved. Dated April 2004, the current Agreement is between the University and the VTC but, in practice, the operational link is with IVE. The Agreement outlines the arrangements under which the University agrees to collaborate with the VTC through the establishment of top-up honours degree provision with the IVE, which is part of the VTC.

30 The Academic Agreement clearly states that the University is responsible for the quality and standards of all programmes of study leading to its awards. IVE's Principal is responsible to the University's Senate for the effective discharge of the responsibilities laid upon the Institute. Whilst the audit team learnt that, in practice, these responsibilities were discharged by the IVE Principal, through the BIAD Dean and then to Senate, the team's discussions with staff in Birmingham and Hong Kong, suggested that there was little shared understanding of the means by which these responsibilities were exercised. Consequently, the team would suggest that some clarification on this point might usefully be added when the Academic Agreement is next reviewed. Overall, the team found the Academic Agreement to be comprehensive in coverage and in line with *Section 2 of the Code of practice*.

31 The Academic Agreement stipulated a maximum number of 30 students for each of the four top-up programmes and specified that any increase in numbers would require the approval of the University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The audit team noted that an over-recruitment of two students on the Interior Design top-up degree for 2006-07 had been approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) following consultation involving the partners and external examiners.

32 The Academic Agreement is supplemented by the University's comprehensive Operations Manual, setting out the agreed processes for the implementation of the Agreement. Updated annually to reflect changes to the University's regulations, this manual requires Academic Registry approval to ensure its currency and validity before its wider circulation to staff at IVE and BIAD.

Quality management of the link

Management of the link

33 The BIAD Dean, assisted by the BIAD Associate Dean, is responsible to Senate for the management of the partnership with IVE. Day-to-day contact between the University and IVE is managed by the BIAD Co-ordinator and the IVE Co-ordinator, supplemented by the BIAD Dean and Head of Department at IVE, as required.

34 Mirroring the role of the BIAD Co-ordinator, the IVE Co-ordinator is responsible for the implementation of academic policy and the coordination of all BIAD programmes delivered at IVE. Principal duties include academic leadership, direction and quality assurance, administered through the relevant board of studies. In addition, each of the top-up degree programmes at IVE is led by a discipline leader who has overall responsibility for the academic delivery of the relevant programme, and who serves as the main point of contact for the University, as appropriate. There is regular direct academic-related communication between the University tutors (faculty link tutors) and IVE tutors. Course directors for the relevant degree programme at BIAD act as the University link tutors for the provision at IVE.

35 The responsibilities of staff involved in the operation of the partnership at the University and IVE are set out in detail in the Operations Manual. Staff at IVE confirmed that both institutions had developed strong and supportive staff links from the start of the partnership. The audit team heard that regular weekly (and sometimes daily) contact is made between key individuals managing the link, ensuring good communication and allowing for discussion of academic programme matters and the interchange of ideas across both institutions. The team noted an increase in the number of visits made by the University staff in the 2006-07 academic year, compared with the previous year, for assessment and teaching delivery purposes. This reflected increased student numbers on the Product Design (Industrial Design) programme and a

change in the schedule of visits for THS (from one visit per programme in 2005-06 to an initial visit to deliver presentations to all programmes, followed by visits by staff dedicated to each programme in 2006-07). A further change to the schedule was also necessitated by staff illness.

36 The Operations Manual states that the objectives underlying the University's admissions policy and procedures, and enrolment to its programmes, are intended to ensure that candidates are appropriately qualified and enable the University to retain control of entry to its provision. Students holding the IVE Higher Diploma in a relevant subject, or an alternative qualification deemed equivalent to a UK Diploma in Higher Education, will be admitted to the start of the top-up programme. The Higher Diploma is conducted in English and therefore applicants to these programmes are expected to have achieved an appropriate standard of English to cope with the demands of their proposed programme of study.

37 Applications for entry are made direct to IVE. However, the University asks IVE staff considering applications to take note of the suitability of applicants to undertake the programme of study; their qualifications, including English language competency; and their chances of successfully completing their chosen programme of study. Wherever possible, joint interview panels are held, involving staff from IVE and BIAD. The University considers this to be a useful mechanism to assure the content and level of the Higher Diploma, as well as providing a valuable means of reaffirming, for the benefit of IVE admissions staff, the University's expectations for entry onto the programmes.

38 The Commentary indicated that a small number of students without the standard entry qualifications have been permitted to join the programmes. University staff members have briefed IVE staff on this and the Operations Manual provides written guidance about the admission of such students. Decisions about their entry are subject to confirmation by the relevant

link tutor at the University. Top-up degree applicants without approved entry qualifications are required to demonstrate achievement of an appropriate level of English before entry.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

39 The Commentary indicated that all academic programmes are subject to annual programme monitoring to ensure that programmes remain current and valid in the subject area, and to evaluate the extent to which students are attaining intended learning outcomes. The annual monitoring process involves the preparation of an annual programme report using a template developed by the University. Annual programme reports are produced by staff at the partner institution, supported by faculty link tutors who provide advice and guidance on their completion. Discussion between senior IVE staff and the audit team confirmed that the procedures documented within the Operations Manual are followed.

40 The relevant DAMC (see paragraph 15) considers programme reports from IVE. Faculty link tutors are also required to complete an annual report on their liaison with IVE during the academic year. This report is discussed at the relevant DAMC, and the BIAD Institute Board, and then forwarded to IVE. The report is submitted to the Academic Registry to inform an overview report presented to Senate on the operation of all of the University's overseas partnerships.

41 The University confirmed that the monitoring process requires programme teams to prepare and implement appropriate action plans in response to any matters identified. Issues are monitored by the programme's subboard of studies at IVE, and by the relevant board of studies and DAMC at the University. The audit team was told by staff in Hong Kong that BIAD provides feedback on the outcomes of annual monitoring processes to IVE programme staff, and the IVE staff found the feedback provided to be useful and supportive.

42 In addition to annual monitoring reports, the BIAD Co-ordinator produces an overview

report on the franchised programmes at IVE. The report provides information on the nature of the collaborative partnership between IVE and the University; comparative achievement data; cohort results; annual evaluation reports; minutes from the subboards; and external examiner reports. The audit team noted the comprehensive nature of the 2005-06 overview report. In discussion with IVE staff, it became apparent that the report had been jointly prepared, further demonstrating the good working relationship established between the two partners.

43 BIAD programme leaders prepare responses to external examiner reports and any comments on the reports, as part of the annual monitoring process. Relevant issues are discussed with the management at IVE. External examiners are provided with a detailed response and action plan, incorporating matters raised and any other issues arising out of student or staff feedback. External examiners are requested to confirm in their next report that they have received a written response to any issues raised. Matters relating to assessment, and to teaching and learning, are addressed in the annual course monitoring reports with appropriate follow-up actions being identified. In addition, student performance is considered in relation to student recruitment, progression and achievement data. Key aspects are identified for further follow-up.

44 Module questionnaires are analysed by programme leaders, and the outcome of this analysis is included in the annual programme report for information or action, as appropriate. Issues that are identified for improvement are taken up initially by the team at IVE to facilitate prompt action as necessary, and such action is reported to the subboard of studies and then the appropriate board of studies at the University.

45 The University considers annual course monitoring reports to be an essential and important part of the process of monitoring academic quality to ensure that students enjoy a high quality educational experience. Reports are considered at DAMC meetings and by the BIAD Institute Board, and the Dean then

presents a report to Senate. Faculties offering awards with partners are required to discuss monitoring of collaborative programmes in their report to Senate, and overseas collaborative provision is addressed separately.

46 The University requires discipline leaders of franchise programmes to produce an annual course report according to a template issued by the University, and the BIAD Co-ordinator provides such support as necessary. Topics covered in the annual report include consideration of the previous year's action plan; recruitment and admissions; progression and achievement; the learning environment; student support and guidance; equal opportunities; student and staff feedback; external examiners; resources; course delivery; good practice; action taken on the previous year's concerns and an action plan for the year ahead. BIAD works with IVE to ensure that each report covers all the headings required.

47 Matters of concern arising from the course reports are discussed with the relevant course director and head of department at the University, and with discipline leaders at IVE. The audit team had access to annual course monitoring reports for 2005-06 and noted the identification of good practice in all the reports, action plans for the year ahead, and details of progress on the previous year's action plans, indicating how actions have been fulfilled. Typical action items have included a request for more formal teaching by BIAD staff; web-based teaching and additional English language provision. In addition, the reports comment on issues raised by external examiners.

48 Whilst annual course monitoring reports do not make direct comparisons with the home-based course, the BIAD overview report does compare the University and IVE student performance. The audit team noted, for example, that there were differences in the performance of students at IVE and BIAD in 2005-06. For example, there were higher initial failure rates in three of the four top-up programmes at IVE, and there were more First class honours awards made at the University. Discussion with IVE staff suggested that the

differential outcomes were now being addressed and staff acknowledged that THS (see paragraph 26 above) and English language might be contributory factors to the difference in performance. University staff did not accept that interpretation, however, and maintained that, generally, student performance was broadly comparable. The audit team noted that the Pass rate had improved following resits.

49 From the evidence available to the audit team, it would appear that the University effectively undertakes its formal annual monitoring procedures in partnership with IVE. It is clear that both partners share an interest in the continued enhancement of the provision offered to students. The University will no doubt wish to reflect on the extent to which IVE students performance in THS and their English language proficiency might contribute to the differences in assessment outcomes identified between IVE and BIAD students.

Periodic review

50 The audit team was told that the first periodic review of the University/IVE provision would be undertaken in 2008. The team noted that the University staff had already held initial meetings with key staff at IVE. IVE staff confirmed that the review would also draw upon quality documentation supplied to VTC as part of that body's own internal arrangements.

Staffing and staff development

51 The University's procedures for the approval and review/re-approval of collaborative programmes require partner organisations to provide information on all staff who will teach on each module of the programme, and copies of staff curricula vitae (CVs) are provided as part of the process. The University had satisfied itself, through the initial approval process, that IVE had in place appropriate staffing for all programmes.

52 The Operations Manual clearly sets out the procedures for approval of new staff at IVE. All new staff must be approved by BIAD and IVE is required to submit a full CV to BIAD, together with a list of modules on which it is proposed the member of staff will teach. CVs

are referred to the relevant BIAD link tutor for a decision on whether the staff member is suitable to teach on the modules indicated. Full staffing details, including detailed appointment procedures carried out by IVE in Hong Kong, were provided for the audit team during its visit to the University.

53 BIAD academic staff members normally make a minimum of six visits to IVE in each academic year. The visits are scheduled by the BIAD Co-ordinator in association with BIAD course directors/heads of department and the IVE Co-ordinator. Visits are timed to support the various phases of the academic year. Visit purposes include the promotion of effective communication between the University and IVE staff; monitoring of the delivery of the provision; monitoring the adequacy of resources and staffing; and new staff induction. Newly appointed members of teaching staff are expected to complete an induction course which provides a briefing on the University procedures and guidance on teaching and learning. At the end of each visit, the tutor concerned produces a visit report based upon the range of activities undertaken. Although IVE staff members are involved in the joint production of some teaching visit reports, the audit team noted that not all IVE staff had seen the teaching visit reports produced. Since the team considered the production of the teaching visit reports to be good practice, it considered that their impact could be maximised by being more widely distributed amongst all teaching staff at IVE.

54 The audit team learnt that IVE staff visit the University on a regular basis to discuss programme-related matters and to take part in BIAD teaching activities on the parent programme. IVE staff involved in such visits indicated that they had found their visits helpful and supportive of the delivery of the programmes in Hong Kong. Discussion with staff at IVE confirmed that the procedures for staffing and staff development contributed to positive working relationships, bringing mutual benefits to the parties involved. Examples of good practice include pre-session staff development and induction sessions. Staff workshops have been provided on accepted models of the University learning, teaching and assessment

strategies; on Personal Development Planning; and on the virtual learning environment (VLE) (known as Moodle).

Student admissions

55 The Operations Manual provides clear guidance on student admissions. Direct entry onto the franchised programmes at IVE requires students to hold the IVE Higher Diploma in a relevant subject or an approved equivalent qualification. Teaching and assessment on the Higher Diplomas is conducted in English and applicants to these programmes are required to have achieved an appropriate standard of English to be admitted. Applicants to the top-up degrees who do not hold an approved entry qualification are required to demonstrate achievement of an appropriate level of English before entry, currently International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) 6.0 or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) 550 (213 for computer testing). A small number of students who do not hold the standard entry qualifications have been permitted to join the programmes. Decisions about their entry are also subject to confirmation by the relevant link tutor at the University.

56 The University and IVE maintain full student records, which are used for progression purposes and for the award of transcripts and certificates. Students at IVE are enrolled as University students and BIAD makes the necessary administrative arrangements to ensure that students complete the University enrolment forms. Students receive a University identity card and a user name and password for the University's information technology network which allows access to electronic resources, including the University's VLE.

57 The University believes that it is important for students on the top-up programmes to identify with the University and the potential benefits of the VLE as a means to increase students' sense of identity with the University are acknowledged. However, the VLE is still being rolled-out and technical difficulties had yet to be overcome. Students are made aware of the partnership through programme publicity, student handbooks, participation at subboards of study, and through BIAD staff attendance at IVE.

58 The applications and admissions process for entrants with both standard and non-standard qualifications follows the procedures set out in the Operations Manual and include effective oversight by the University staff. Holders of the IVE Higher Diploma have been accredited by the University at 240 credits, and therefore approved as providing a suitable preparation for entry to the final level of the University's undergraduate programmes. Applicants who do not hold an IVE Higher Diploma in a relevant subject must be interviewed, where possible with BIAD staff in attendance. IVE staff confirmed that the majority of applicants with non-standard qualifications were individuals with several years of professional practice experience, but lacking a formal qualification.

59 Although the University and IVE staff confirmed that all students had met the minimum English language requirements on entry, the staff also indicated that some students continue to have problems with written and spoken English. Senior staff at IVE are aware of this and have initiated a number of mechanisms to support students with their studies, for example, through the provision of support through the English Language Centre and the English Club at IVE; and the introduction of a summer programme before the start of the academic year. The University will no doubt wish to keep the level of IVE students' proficiency in spoken and written English under review.

Assurance of academic standards

Assessment of students

60 BIAD programmes, and the top-up programmes delivered at IVE, are subject to the University's standard undergraduate assessment regulations (SUAR), although the regulations have been slightly amended to take account of the fact that the programmes at IVE are offered only at level 6. The Operations Manual sets out the procedures for setting, marking, moderating and returning assessments; all of which are consistent with BIAD's assessment

policy. IVE is required to ensure that all assessment is conducted according to the procedures set out in the Operations Manual. Written assessments for THS are marked by staff at IVE and double-marked by BIAD staff. Assessment panels for design projects include staff from IVE and BIAD, wherever possible. Where this is not possible, the judgements of IVE panels are moderated by BIAD staff in accordance with BIAD policy which is articulated in the Operations Manual.

61 The audit team noted that, through regular BIAD staff visits, and continual liaison between IVE discipline leaders and staff, BIAD staff and the external examiners, the University staff members were able to ensure that parity of standards is maintained at module level and that appropriate assessment procedures are followed. Operationally, the equivalence of academic standards is achieved through several interrelated activities. Academic staff members from BIAD spend over 100 days delivering teaching and providing assessment feedback in Hong Kong. The Commentary maintained that this ensures that tutors at IVE have a clear understanding of the standards required.

62 BIAD and IVE staff give oral and written feedback to students as soon as possible after student work has been submitted and the assessment of that work has been completed. BIAD requires all work to be returned and completed within three weeks of submission. Students confirmed that feedback was timely and, in most cases, that it was received in less than three weeks. They also confirmed that the feedback they received from both IVE and the University tutors was helpful, and tutors were always willing to comment on draft work.

63 On the basis of its discussions with staff at BIAD and IVE, and from the documentary evidence available to the audit team, the team found the assessment process at IVE to be effective and consistent.

External examining

64 External examiners are appointed to each programme and are responsible for the BA programmes at BIAD and the corresponding

programmes at IVE. One examiner has overall responsibility for the THS modules which are common to all four programmes. All external examiners are offered an annual one day workshop and induction day provided by BIAD with support from the Academic Registry. The BIAD International Co-ordinator provides additional briefings at the start of every academic session. The Commentary stated that regular dialogue is undertaken with external examiners throughout the year.

65 External examiners attend the IVE sub-Examination Board in Hong Kong, where final award marks are provisionally agreed, and the main Examination Board at BIAD. In order to maintain parity between the franchised award and the BIAD award, and to ensure consistency of practice, the home and IVE Examination Boards are chaired by the relevant BIAD Head of Department or nominee: an arrangement that has been supported by the external examiners involved. External examiners are able to view students' work at the time of their attendance at the IVE sub-Examination Board, and are therefore well placed to compare the performance of BIAD and IVE students and to benchmark these against similar provision in the UK. External examiners confirm that there is parity in the standards achieved by IVE and BIAD students in both the subject areas and THS.

66 External examiner reports are submitted directly to the University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). They are read by the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), and by the BIAD Dean and Associate Dean. Comments originating from their scrutiny are passed to the programme teams. The BIAD programme leaders prepare a response to the reports which form part of the annual monitoring process. Issues are discussed with IVE's management, as appropriate. External examiners are provided with a detailed response to their reports with an accompanying action plan, incorporating issues raised and any other matters which may have arisen from student or staff feedback. External examiners are requested to confirm, in their next report, that they have received a written response to matters raised.

67 Discussion with staff at BIAD and IVE, and a review of the documentary evidence made available to the audit team, demonstrated that the arrangements for external examining operated at IVE are effective and consistent.

Certificates and transcripts

68 The Academic Agreement makes clear that the University is responsible for issuing award certificates and transcripts. The certificate does not make reference to the location of study or language of study, but indicates that award holders have been issued with a transcript which includes information on the location of delivery and the language of tuition.

Quality of information and support for students

Student information and support arrangements

69 Information available to prospective students includes University leaflets and IVE's programme prospectus. Documents seen by the audit team offered a clear description of the relationship between the University and IVE. The material available typically described the top-up BA Honours degree programme, including the programme overview; details of the programme structure; an outline of potential career prospects; detailed admission requirements (including English proficiency requirements); fees; and details of how to apply. Students confirmed the accuracy of the material they had received pre-admission.

70 Students receive a detailed student handbook on registration. The handbook includes staff details and roles; programme details; assessment arrangements; support and guidance arrangements; complaint procedures and information on student conduct. Students who met the audit team indicated that they found the student handbooks useful, and they also confirmed that they had been made aware of the academic regulations.

71 Details of the Disciplinary Procedure are available on the University's intranet and are included in student handbooks. Students wishing to make an appeal are advised to submit an appeal to the University's Representation Committee. Forms and notes of guidance are available for students from the IVE administrator. Contact details are included in student handbooks.

72 The student complaints process, which is managed by IVE, is detailed in handbooks issued to the students. Students are advised of the procedure to be followed within IVE and there is a complaints officer on each campus to ensure that all complaints are properly followed up. The audit team was told that complaints should be acknowledged within five working days of their receipt and that a reply, stating the findings of the investigation undertaken as a result of a complaint, would normally be made within two weeks. The audit team queried what the University's role would be in the event of it not being possible to resolve a complaint locally, and heard contradictory views on the extent to which the University's complaints procedure would be invoked, suggesting that a review and clarification on the University's role in relation to complaints would be helpful.

73 The regular visits by BIAD staff to IVE help to ensure effective communication between BIAD staff and IVE students, since BIAD staff members teach students on all four programmes. Details of such visits for the entire academic year are included in each course handbook. Students have regular contact with academic staff assigned to each module, which provides studio, workshop and theoretical lecture based support for module projects, exercises and general study. Visiting tutors also support student learning through the delivery of specific specialist knowledge or expertise of a taught module. Students indicated that they received good support for their studies from local IVE tutors and appreciated the support provided by BIAD tutors. Students are also assigned a personal tutor who is not aligned to any specific area of study. The role is primarily

associated with pastoral care and provides a confidential staff/student link to advise on matters requiring an impartial view.

74 A wide range of facilities is available to students at IVE on the four University programmes, which are spread between two campuses. Workshops are supported by workshop instructors and technical support staff. Students also have access to a learning resources centre at each campus. The audit team particularly noted the donations and sponsorship that IVE had received from leading companies which had enabled students to have access to 'cutting edge' equipment. Details of the facilities available, and staff contact details, are included in student handbooks. Students confirmed that the facilities available were sufficient and that access was well supported by relevant staff.

75 The University has introduced a student handbook template in the interests of quality and consistency. The BIAD Co-ordinator works with the IVE Co-ordinator to ensure that student handbooks are updated, as appropriate. The approval of the Associate Dean of BIAD, and the Academic Registry, is required before student handbooks are distributed to students.

76 The audit team found the student information and support arrangements at IVE to be comprehensive, clear, accurate and reliable with regard to the student experience on the four top-up degree programmes. The team noted, in particular, the frequency of visits by BIAD staff to IVE, which enabled the University to monitor the student support arrangements. These visits, and their associated reports, ensure that any matters arising are capable of being resolved promptly.

Student input into quality management

77 The IVE Degree Programme Coordinator chairs the Degree Programme Board of Studies at IVE. Students are represented on the subboard of studies, which is modelled on BIAD boards of studies and operates in the same way.

The Board is responsible for all academic aspects of the provision and reports to the DAMC. Course boards comprise the Head of Department, discipline leaders and visiting academic staff actively involved in teaching, including a THS representative. In addition to co-opted members, two student representatives sit on course boards. Monitoring and quality control contribute a major element of the course board's terms of reference. Annual course reports, compiled by the relevant discipline leader, on behalf of the relevant board of studies, constitute the primary form of monitoring. The report comments on academic-related issues; the development and effectiveness of teaching and learning methods; and external examiner reports.

78 Student forums, organised and chaired by each discipline leader, are intended to provide a general opportunity for students to debate and discuss the operation of the programme from their perspective. Such meetings are held at least once per semester and the students are requested to compile or actively contribute to the agenda which ensures that student matters are openly discussed and freely debated. If immediate action cannot be taken to resolve problems, matters can be discussed with the Degree Programme Co-ordinator, or carried forward to the next board of studies by the student representatives on the Board. In addition to participation in formal meetings and forums, students have open access to the Head of Design, programme and discipline leaders, and teaching staff. Student focus groups, facilitated by BIAD's Associate Dean, were introduced in 2006-07. It is too early to determine their impact but students who met the audit team were unaware of the existence of student focus groups.

79 Students are required to complete student feedback module questionnaires after each module. The questionnaires are analysed to judge the extent to which students are satisfied with their experience and, consequently, provide a valuable monitoring system. Action is taken on the basis of continuous improvement, dependent upon the student feedback received.

The University's aim is to learn from the analysis of student experience, so that it can seek to ensure that each module is making an effective contribution to the students' knowledge and skill base in line with programme aims and objectives. The process of refinement is actioned firstly through the boards of studies and reviewed through the BIAD DAMCs. The audit team noted that the University's Centre for Research into Quality publishes an annual report on student satisfaction, which has sections on course organisation and teaching and learning, which will provide general feedback. The team further noted that it is intended that IVE will also contribute to this database.

80 The audit team noted that students were satisfied that their representatives were fully involved in the Board of Studies, and in other forums, that issues they raised were addressed and that actions arising were fed back to them. However, they demonstrated little awareness of the recent introduction of student focus groups. Acknowledging that this might be attributed to the fact that focus groups are a recent innovation (having been introduced in 2005-06 at BIAD and widened to include IVE in 2006-07), and possible confusion about terminology, the team considered that there is a need for a greater degree of awareness-raising. Overall, the team found the arrangements for student feedback to be effective.

Conclusions

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

- the strength of the partnership between the University and IVE which bears testimony to the strong foundations established at the outset of the collaboration which has led to the development of positive working relationships, based on a genuine sense of a two-way partnership, providing a secure basis for the stewardship of quality and standards (paragraph 27)
- the regular and direct communication between University tutors (faculty link tutors) and IVE tutors allowing for the discussion of academic-related matters

and the interchange of ideas across both institutions (paragraph 35)

- the comprehensive nature of the jointly produced 2005-06 overview report of franchised programmes at IVE, which further demonstrates the good working relationships between the two partners (paragraph 42)
- the effective management of University procedures for the approval of all staff teaching on the top-up degree programmes at IVE (paragraphs 51 and 52)
- the University's commitment to staff visits and staff development in support of the collaborative arrangement, including the exchange of programme staff (paragraphs 53 and 54)
- the effective oversight of the admissions process by BIAD staff (paragraph 58)
- the effective and timely staff feedback provided by BIAD and IVE tutors to students on their projects and assignments (paragraph 62).

82 The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by the University:

- re-mapping the transition from the Higher Diploma to the top-up degree provision as part of the forthcoming review in 2008, with particular attention being given to the THS modules and continuing to check that re-mapping through the annual course monitoring process (paragraph 26)
- clarifying the means by which the IVE Principal is expected to fulfil the responsibilities of IVE to the University's Senate (paragraph 30)
- reflecting on the initial higher failure rate on some programme routes, including the extent to which THS and English language proficiency may be contributory factors (paragraph 48)
- keeping under review the level and proficiency of students' spoken and written English language (paragraph 59)

- reviewing and clarifying the role of the University in the complaints procedure (paragraph 72).

83 The audit team found that the Commentary provided a useful account of the operation of the collaborative provision, with particular clarity in establishing where the guidance in the *Code of practice* had been applied to the University's approach to collaborative provision. In the team's view, the University had given careful consideration to the *Code* in its management of collaborative provision and its policies and procedures were considered to be in general alignment with the precepts of the *Code*. The Commentary, which provided the team with an evaluative and accurate appraisal of the collaborative arrangement, indicated that the quality assurance arrangements at IVE were representative of the University's procedures and practices in its overseas collaborative partnership arrangements. The findings of the audit would support a conclusion of confidence in the University's stewardship of academic standards and in its oversight of the quality of the students' experience on its overseas collaborative provision.

Appendix A

Update since the audit provided by Birmingham City University (formerly the University of Central England in Birmingham)

The University is pleased to note the positive comments made in the report about our partnership with IVE [the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education]. We welcome the suggestions for improvements in the report and have begun to take the audit team's comments into account in our preparations for the periodic review/reapproval of the partnership. We also plan to bring forward the next review/reapproval of the BIAD [Birmingham Institute of Art and Design] BA Visual Communication programme and at that time will undertake a detailed remapping of the content of IVE's Higher Diplomas and will investigate the extent to which the Higher Diploma curriculum prepares students for level 6 Theoretical and Historical Studies (THS). At the time of the review/reapproval we will also review the Academic Agreement with IVE to ensure that it appropriately reflects the way the partnership is managed.

We have made some minor amendments to the Operations Manual for IVE in response to the audit team's comments regarding teaching visit reports and student complaints. We are also currently reviewing our complaints procedures and this will include considering the application of our procedures to collaborative partners. Any changes arising from this review will be incorporated into the review of the Academic Agreement with IVE.

The University notes the comments in the report regarding comparative student performance between IVE and the University. We believe that the performance of students at IVE has generally been comparable with that of students at the University, and that this is borne out by progression statistics and by the comments of the external examiners. Nevertheless, IVE is committed to reinforcing the importance of THS on the programme and has indicated an intention to employ additional staff to support the delivery of the subject. Discipline Leaders at IVE are working closely with University staff to improve student performance in THS. IVE has recently recruited several additional native English speakers to help students to improve their spoken and written English and we anticipate that this initiative will have benefits for students studying on the top-up degrees.

Appendix B

Current student numbers 2007-08

BA (Hons) Visual Communication Graphic Design	28
BA (Hons) Visual Communication Time-Based Media	20
BA (Hons) Product Design (Industrial Design)	37
BA (Hons) Interior Design	17
Total	102

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