QAA

Audit of overseas provision

Heriot-Watt University and Trent Global College, Singapore

January 2011

Introduction

1   This report considers the collaborative arrangement between Heriot-Watt University and Trent Global College, Singapore.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

2   The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in UK higher education rests with individual universities and colleges. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) checks how well they meet their responsibilities, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. QAA also publishes guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems to ensure students have high-quality experiences.

3   Many universities and colleges in the UK offer their higher education programmes to students wishing to study outside the UK. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that over 408,000 students were studying for UK higher education awards entirely outside the UK in the 2009-10 academic year, either at overseas campuses directly run by UK institutions or through collaborative arrangements that UK institutions have made with foreign partners. QAA reviews both collaborative arrangements and programmes delivered on overseas campuses through a process called Audit of overseas provision. Audits are conducted country by country, and in 2010-11 we conducted an Audit of overseas provision in Singapore. The purpose of the audit was to provide information on the way in which a group of UK universities and colleges were maintaining academic standards and the quality of education in their provision in Singapore. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

4   In November 2009 QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information about their provision in Singapore. On the basis of the information returned, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with provision in that country.
These institutions produced briefing papers describing the way in which their provision (or subsets of their provision) in Singapore operated and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which they assured quality and standards. In addition, each institution was asked to make reference to the extent to which the provision was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas activity. Institutions were also invited to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), particularly *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, originally published by QAA in 2004. An 'amplified' version of Section 2 was published by QAA in October 2010.

5   Audit teams visited each of the 10 UK institutions between September and November 2010 to discuss their provision in Singapore. The same teams visited Singapore in January 2011 to meet some of the staff responsible for managing and delivering the provision, and to meet students. The audit of Heriot-Watt University was coordinated for QAA by Mr D Greenaway, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor A Holmes and Professor P Maher (auditors), with Mr D Greenaway acting as audit secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Singapore for the willing cooperation that they provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in Singapore

6   In Singapore, responsibility for higher education resides with the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education. The Higher Education Division oversees the provision of tertiary and technical education as well as registration of private schools, including foreign providers. The Singapore higher education landscape currently comprises four publicly-funded autonomous universities, a private institution offering publicly-subsidised part-time degree programmes, five polytechnics, an institute of technical education, an institute of technology, two arts institutions, several foreign universities' branch campuses, and a number of private education institutions.

7   In September 2009 the Singapore parliament passed the Private Education Act to strengthen the regulatory framework for the private education sector. Under this Act, the Ministry of Education has established an independent statutory board, the Council for Private Education, with the legislative power to implement and enforce the new regulatory framework. The new regulatory regime overseen by the Council for Private Education includes a strengthened registration framework called the Enhanced Registration Framework, and a quality certification scheme called EduTrust.

8   The Enhanced Registration Framework spells out the strengthened legal requirements in the areas of corporate governance, provision of quality services, student protection and information transparency that all private education institutions operating in or from Singapore must meet. While private education institutions were previously required to obtain one-time registration with the Ministry of Education and could be de-registered only under extreme circumstances, the Private Education Act has introduced a renewable validity period for registration with the Council for Private Education, which can range from one year up to six years, and has provided the Council with powers to impose a range of graduated penalties on errant private education institutions, including suspension, nonrenewal or revocation of registration or EduTrust certification.

9   EduTrust is a voluntary certification scheme which provides a trust mark of quality. It replaces the previous CaseTrust for Education scheme, which was mainly focused on protection of fees paid by students, adding a number of student welfare and academic standards for all students, whether local or overseas, as well as soundness of finances and school administration requirements. As with CaseTrust, EduTrust is mandatory for private education institutions wishing to enrol overseas students. EduTrust certification is one of the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority's prerequisites for the issue of a Student's Pass. Further information on higher education in Singapore is contained in the overview report.

Section 1: The background to the collaborative link

Nature of the link

10   The link between Heriot-Watt University (the University) and Trent Global College (the College) was established in 2004. The College is an Approved Learning Partner (ALP) for the delivery by distance learning of postgraduate taught and undergraduate programmes offered by the University's School of the Built Environment (SBE). The programmes include BScs in building surveying, construction project management, facilities management, quantity surveying and real estate management, as well as MScs and/or Postgraduate Diplomas in civil engineering, construction project management, quantity surveying, real estate investment and finance, real estate management and development, safety risk management, and safety risk and reliability engineering. The undergraduate programmes are supported by the College at sub-honours level (levels 7, 8 and 9 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework). Any student wishing to progress to honours level must attend the final year at the University. The BSc in quantity surveying as delivered in Singapore is recognised by the Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers. The Singapore Institute of Building recognises the BSc in Construction Project Management.

11   Master's programmes and Postgraduate Diplomas, including dissertation supervision, are fully supported by the College. Master's programmes at the University are accredited by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). However, the audit team heard that the accreditation of the master's programmes delivered by its partners is in abeyance and is currently being reviewed by RICS.

12   The agreement with the College is renewable every three years under University procedures. It was renewed in 2007 and was in the process of being renewed at the time of the audit team's visit to the University. The team heard that the renewal process had been completed and a draft report prepared that recommends renewal. The renewal process involved the scrutiny of a new contract, visit reports, risk assessments and a review of the business case. The new contract has no end date, but is conditional on ongoing academic approval. An internal audit of all of the ALPs linked with the SBE was undertaken in September 2010. The team noted that all programmes with the College were approved with no conditions attached, although the internal audit identified matters for consideration by the School Management Team. This reapproval is for a period of three years.

13   Trent Global College is a private provider of higher education programmes for overseas universities in Singapore. It was established in 2004 as Trent Global Education Group and is now known as Trent Global College. Its vision is 'To be a premier private education institution in Singapore by building on the collaboration with [its] partners in higher learning for the conduct of international education to meet the changing academic and career aspirations of [its] students.' Its quality policy states that it is 'focused and committed in providing high quality education programmes for [its] customers within the environment, legal and regulatory framework', based on 'integrity and continuous improvement'. Under the Enhanced Registration Framework, the College has achieved registration for one year, since when the College has introduced a number of policy statements including a very detailed student contract and fee protection scheme. At present it cannot admit overseas students to the University programmes.

14   The University currently has more than 70 partnerships with other institutions in the UK and overseas. Off-campus development has been a significant strategic activity since the mid-1990s, and there are now more than 12,000 students studying other than on the Edinburgh and Scottish Borders campuses including 1,700 at the University's campus in Dubai. The off-campus provision now represents about half of the University's student

population. The University has approximately 4,800 publicly funded undergraduate places on campus, and the off-campus development has been part of a strategy to widen the student base. Apart from the provision offered by its ALPs, other off-campus provision includes independent learners, exchange agreements and validation agreements.

15 The link with the College is representative of the way in which the University delivers its programmes through its ALPs. The University is responsible for the development of the curriculum, the preparation of the teaching and learning materials, summative assessment, admissions, progression and awards, as well as placing materials on the virtual learning environment (VISION). The partner recruits the students and provides teaching, as well as academic and pastoral support, formative assessment, general student support and teaching and learning facilities.

16 The SBE has an established network of ALPs including the partnership with the College. The College is the largest external provider of University/SBE programmes. The network of ALPs extends to Malaysia, Greece, Trinidad, Hong Kong, Bahrain, Jamaica and Kirkcaldy. The University has three partner institutions in Singapore.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

17 The audit team was informed that overseas collaborative provision is a key part of the University's core business. The strategic significance of developing overseas collaborative partnerships is reflected in the University's International Strategy, which has recently been updated and at the time of the team's visit was awaiting approval by Court. The University's intention is to continue to develop its provision for students overseas through the establishment of further ALPs. However, the need to provide students overseas with an equivalent learning experience to those studying on campus is at the centre of this strategy. To ensure equivalence the curricula, learning materials, admissions, assessment and awards are provided by University staff at the Edinburgh campus. The partner is responsible for marketing, recruitment, contextualising the materials as appropriate and local student support. In addition to the materials supplied by the University, the team was shown at its visit to the College additional learning materials that the College supplied to the students through its own website.

18 The University has sole responsibility for assuring the quality and standards of the programmes delivered by its partners and the quality of the learning opportunities. The audit team was informed that this oversight is maintained through the University's procedures for annual monitoring, periodic approval and reapproval of programmes, as well as the ALP agreement. In addition, the fact that the students have the same learning materials (albeit supplemented by the College tutors' notes and slides used to contextualise the subject), the same summative assessments, where possible at the same time, and access to the virtual learning environment, as well as the marking of assessments being undertaken by the academic staff of the University or approved markers (including PhD students), is taken by the University to reinforce this ownership and oversight of quality assurance and enhancement.

19 The University has developed a range of policies for managing its ALPs. The policy documents include: the process for approval of ALPs; guidelines for approved learning partners; visit report forms and procedures for ALP visits; approved learning partner agreement templates; risk assessment templates and internal audit guidelines. In addition, the University has developed a code of practice for flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning). The code covers qualitative aspects of learning delivered, supported and/or assessed through flexible and distributed arrangements, whether in collaboration with a partner or ALP or to independent learners. This code of practice maps onto the *Code of*

practice, Section 2: Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning (including e-learning), published by QAA. The University recognises that its flexible and distributed learning arrangements must not undermine either the academic standard of the award or the quality of what is offered to the students. It follows therefore that its arrangements for assuring quality and standards must be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided on campus by conventional teaching mechanisms. The University's code of practice is intended to help manage the potential risks posed by the challenges and complexities in the arrangements for flexible and distributed learning programmes and to safeguard academic standards. Responsibility for ALP activities lies with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), who has oversight of the ALP contracts and also the review and monitoring processes.

20   The University recognises that delivery through ALPs brings increased operational, financial and reputational risk compared with programmes delivered on its campuses. The approval and review monitoring process requires the completion of a detailed risk assessment report. This allows the University to distinguish between low and high-risk activities. Where high risk is identified, this is added to the University Risk Register. Risk reporting is part of annual monitoring, and all high-risk activities are audited at least once every three years. Schools are expected to review risks associated with partnerships on a regular basis and maintain their own risk register. Any risk identified is reported to the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and will be reported to the Risk Management Strategy Group to be added to the University Risk Register. The University's guide to the assessment of risk associated with partnerships identifies potential risks associated with ALPs to be considered as part of the approval and review process.

21   The documentation provided by the University demonstrated clear lines of responsibility for the development and maintenance of links with the ALPs. Although initial development and ongoing maintenance of the partnership rests with the academic schools, overall responsibility for ALP contracts and monitoring rests with the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching). Academic matters are overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), and programme approval by the University's Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committee, all of which report to Senate.

22   The audit team found that the University had a clear framework and detailed and robust written procedures for developing and approving collaborative partnerships. Tutors at the University were aware of the requirements at school level, and the documentation provided by the University demonstrated that oversight of the implementation of the policies was taking place within the University's committee structure. However, the team felt that the University should keep under review the application of the risk assessment at a local level as part of the reapproval process to ensure that it is sufficiently robust in its application to identify particular risks associated with the private provision of higher education.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

23   Responsibility for establishing ALP links is devolved to schools. In the case of the SBE, the Director of Transnational Education (DTE), which is a school post, has responsibility for setting up and maintaining collaborations including the partnership with the College. The Academic Registry has produced very detailed guidelines approved by the QSC for establishing an ALP. There are two stages in the approvals process. In the negotiation stage, which may either be triggered by an enquiry to the University (or directly to the SBE) or be initiated by the SBE, the school and the ALP work together to provide an

overview of the partnership, a risk assessment, a financial case (signed by the Head of School and Financial Controller), a completed contract, a visit report, evidence of any necessary government approval and the formal recommendation of the programme leader. All of these elements are supported by documentation. In the second stage the completed documents are submitted to an approvals team, which includes the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), Secretary of the University, Head of School and Legal Services Manager. Approval depends on whether the Agreement contributes to the University's Strategic Plan, the ALP is a suitable organisation, and the school can support the course and the contract. The partnership contract is for an initial period of three years. Subsequent reviews are on a three-year cycle. The audit team was informed that more requests from potential partners are rejected than are actually approved.

24   The academic case for the collaboration is included in the documentation prepared for approval. The documentation contains a profile of the ALP and sets out programme delivery and learning support arrangements. The ALP contract provided by the University for the College sets out in considerable detail the roles and responsibilities of the partners for programme delivery and learning support, as well as ensuring that support for academic standards and quality assurance provisions are in place. The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for selecting an ALP are effective and robust, with adequate attention being paid to the compatibility of the partner, risk, and the respective responsibilities of each partner. The arrangements are supported by clear policies, procedures and documentation.

Programme and partner approval

25   The approval of the partnership includes details of the courses to be supported by the partner and includes consideration of the proposed partner's ability to support the programmes, its physical resources and any necessary regulatory requirements to deliver overseas university programmes, as well as the perceived reputation of the organisation. Potential partners are requested to provide likely student numbers over the duration of the programme and to suggest appropriate fee levels. All courses/programmes must be approved by the University's own programme approval procedures before they can be delivered at the ALP. The audit team was informed that, where an ALP wishes to add further programmes to those currently approved in the agreement, the programme must have been approved by either the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee as being suitable for delivery at an ALP; these committees have oversight of all programme approval for the University. Guidance for programme approval is provided on the University website.

26   There are course descriptors for each programme included in programme handbooks. The audit team was advised that these are also available on the University website. The students are also provided with a programme descriptor. The team heard that the current programme descriptors will be included in the programme handbooks for the programmes delivered by the College, but not in their entirety, as not all aspects are seen as appropriate particularly in respect of professional and statutory body accreditation. The team saw examples of the programme-specific handbooks which contained programme descriptors. However, the students at the College who met with the audit team were unaware of the existence of the programme descriptors.

27   The partner tutors do not contribute to the design of the curriculum or to the summative assessment process. The staff at the College informed the audit team that this has proved to be an issue on occasions, where the course content is UK-specific and is not only inappropriate for students studying in Singapore, but tutors and students may also find a lack of relevant material to support the course (see paragraph 69). The language of tuition

is English. The English language requirements for entry onto both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are laid down in the documentation.

28   Modifications to the delivery of the programme, such as developing the delivery of the honours year at the College, are approved initially at school level by the School Studies Committee and then referred to either the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee for approval.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

29   The Approved Learning Partner Agreement is a formal contract which sets out in very detailed terms the roles, responsibilities and rights of the partners to the Agreement. The University is responsible for the provision of programme content, learning materials, admissions, summative assessments and awards. The College is responsible for marketing and recruitment, and the provision of local academic support in the form of class-based lectures, tutorials and local administration. Student records are maintained at the University using the same systems as for on-campus and independent distance-learning students. The contract with the College is for three years and together with its attached schedule provides details of the approved programmes and the roles and responsibilities of the partners, including quality assurance arrangements, intellectual property rights and termination clauses. The written agreement with the College is well developed and provides a basis for the partnership in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The new contract with the College is for three years in the first instance, but is effectively open ended, subject to reapproval every three years as part of Internal Audit.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

30   The arrangements for institutional oversight and assurance of academic standards and the management of quality are specified in the approved learning partners' contract with the responsibilities of each partner laid out in the annex. The University retains responsibility for the academic content of its programmes, setting and managing all assessment processes, maintaining student records, and issuing results and transcripts of performance. The University devolves to the College responsibility for the provision of facilities, premises, teaching and learning resources, and the delivery of teaching and learning support. The College has produced a policy manual to meet Council for Private Education (CPE) requirements. The manual also states that it is compliant with the requirements of the University. It covers management and governance, appointment of staff and staff development, marketing and publicity, the student experience including recruitment and selection of students, the delivery of the programmes and quality assurance.

31   The programme leader for the programme on campus has responsibility for day-to-day management of the programme, and liaises closely with the DTE and his deputy to ensure that the students at the College are receiving an experience equivalent to that of on-campus students in terms of curriculum delivery and assessment. The programme leader retains responsibility for the management of the reporting cycle and ensures that annual programme monitoring and review (APMR) reports from the College enter the annual programme reporting processes. The University expects the DTE to visit at least once per year, but visits usually take place two to three times per year, normally over two days; during

these visits the DTE tries to meet with staff and students. Some visits are formally recorded as quality assurance visits and a report is completed which identifies issues raised by students as well as consideration of issues relating to resources. The DTE is expected to comment on the overall suitability of the ALP in this report. This report then feeds into the annual monitoring process.

32 The College has an Academic and Examinations Board, which is a requirement of the Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF). It is chaired by the Chief Executive of the College and attended where possible by the DTE, who is a designated member of the Board. The principal objective of the Board is to provide advice regarding the College's academic programmes of study and related activities. The College and SBE have excellent and effective administrative support for these programmes. The Board meets at least twice per year and considers academic policies and procedures, quality assurance matters and student issues. The DTE is expected to respond to any actions identified for the University. The College also has five to six tutor meetings each year to discuss developments and issues; these are chaired by the Chief Executive and the minutes forwarded to the DTE. There are also fortnightly staff meetings with the administrative team to consider operational issues as well as student attendance.

33 The roles of the DTE and his recently appointed deputy, the Associate Director, are critical to the effective operation of the partnership with the College as well as the ongoing oversight of quality assurance and the reapproval of the partnership on behalf of the University. Significant responsibility for managing the recruitment and requisite approvals rests with these two key personnel. University oversight of the ALPs rests with the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching). The University's committee structure also plays an integral part in ensuring that the approval and monitoring of the ALP and its programmes are carried out.

34 The day-to-day responsibility at the College rests with the Chief Executive, who is supported by an administrative team. In addition, there is a dedicated administrator for this partnership within the SBE. This administrator is responsible for day-to-day liaison with the College. The audit team heard that the University is in the process of rolling out a new management information system, although the College does not have access to this. There is now online enrolment for continuing students. The College can update information such as a change of address but cannot access student progression and achievement data. Day-to-day liaison takes place between the appropriate administrators at the University and the College and through regular email contact between the DTE and Chief Executive.

35 Communication between tutors at the College and the SBE is generally through the SBE administrator and the DTE. The University recognises that there have been issues regarding communication between the College Chief Executive and the SBE staff in terms of their response rate to queries and identifying key staff contacts. In future all communication will be directed through the DTE and the SBE administrator. The University's virtual learning environment is being developed as a major repository for course material and for informing tutors and students of organisational information. However, not all staff have engaged fully with the virtual learning environment.

36 The contents of the programmes developed by the University are common across all ALPs. The University provides electronic and printed materials for each course; students and tutors also have access to the virtual learning environment. College tutors only see, or have access to, the student version of the virtual learning environment (VISION). This is primarily a repository for materials and does not include discussion boards or access to tutors on campus. The audit team heard that staff and student access to discussion boards would enable closer contact and interaction between the SBE tutors and College tutors, who currently have limited engagement with SBE tutors. The College has operational

responsibility for providing tutorial classes, academic and pastoral support, information on examination arrangements and changes to courses, as well as the provision of dissertation supervision. The University provides a comprehensive dissertation guide for students, which includes the role of the supervisor, presentation and assessment. The team was informed that the College provides additional guidance for dissertation tutors. However, the University does not provide training or guidance for the ALP tutors. Dissertation proposals have to be submitted to the SBE for approval.

37   All tutors are approved by the University through the approved tutor procedures involving the DTE and programme team. Tutors also have to be approved by the CPE as part of the ERF accreditation. College tutors are responsible for delivering lectures and tutorials, designing and marking formative assessments and contextualising the materials provided by the University. Dissertation supervisors are approved by the DTE and other staff.

38   Student discipline and appeals are the responsibility of the University and are handled in the same way for on-campus, independent and off-campus students. Responsibility for managing these matters is delegated by the Head of School to the Director of Learning and Teaching. However, the College has a role as the first recourse for students when they have issues with matters within the College's range of responsibilities, for example the organisation of classes. In all cases, if a student is unable to resolve their issue they have a right of appeal to the University.

39   The students who met with the audit team were not aware of the University procedures. However, they were confident that they could raise issues with the Chief Executive of the College.

40   The College's student services team provides pastoral care and information on funding, accommodation and counselling. The career advisory service provides careers advice and support.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual monitoring

41   All programmes are required to be reviewed annually and the subsequent reports inform the annual monitoring and review process, which applies to all modes of study. The SBE holds a separate meeting each year to review the APMR reports. Each ALP is required to submit a partner APMR report to the University, to which the school prepares a formal response. The report and the school's response are considered by the Dean and the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching). The response from the SBE is prepared by the Director of Learning and Teaching and the Director of Transnational Education. The College receives a copy of the school's response. Follow-up actions are pursued by the DTE during his visit to the College. The partner APMR reports are consolidated with the school reports and are then considered by the University Quality and Standards Committee. The annual monitoring process was reviewed and strengthened for 2010-11. The audit team was provided with the revised procedures.

Periodic review

42   The University has two periodic review processes. Internal review takes place on a five-year cycle in line with the expectations of the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework. These reviews focus on discipline level and are undertaken by external reviewers and students as well as internal staff. The internal review

considers generic issues of quality and standards and includes a review of enhancement activities. The documentation provided by the University demonstrated that an internal review on a themed basis had taken place in 2009 and 2010. The University has reviewed its internal process following an evaluation of the first cycle of review. The focus of future reviews will be at discipline and programme level rather than school level to ensure greater staff engagement, and there will be significant emphasis on enhancement.

43   The second process of review involves an internal audit of high-risk activities. The partnerships with ALPs are regarded as potentially high risk by the University. As a result these audits are undertaken on a three-year cycle and consider the operation of each partner through the examination of APMR reports, visit reports, examination performance and other data. The purpose of internal audit is to ensure that the ALPs are being properly managed and that quality and standards are being maintained. The internal audit of the SBE's ALPs took place in 2010. The partnership with the College was audited under the 'high risk activity' procedure and programmes were reapproved without conditions. The school risk register was not considered as part of this internal audit. It was unclear to the audit team from the documentation provided how robustly the risk assessment had been applied in identifying critical risk factors with regards to the sustainability of this partnership, in particular the location of knowledge and understanding of the partnership in one senior manager at the College.

44   The internal review reports are considered at school level by the DTE, the Director of Learning and Teaching and school committees. At University level the reports are scrutinised by the Quality and Standards Committee. Committee minutes are not forwarded to the College for information.

Staffing and staff development

45   Following the approval of a College as an ALP all teaching staff appointed by a partner must be approved within the University's Approved Teachers and Tutors Framework. Local staff at the College are approved tutors and are not therefore involved in the summative assessment process. The approval process involves the CVs of the local staff being sent to the DTE. They are then scrutinised by the Programmes Team, which recommends approval to the Head of School. Approval is for specific named courses. All local tutors have to be qualified to teach at the appropriate level and have the requisite knowledge, expertise and experience; the audit team was informed that they are not expected to be research active, as many will in practice be working outside higher education. Approved Tutor forms are sent to the Academic Registry, which informs the College and tutor of the decision. The team heard that there are 36 part-time staff employed by the College. The College has sole responsibility for their employment and staff development. The Chief Executive carries out induction and orientation of the local tutors. The CVs of staff currently in approval demonstrated that local tutors are required to have an appropriate first degree and/or professional qualification, as well as relevant professional experience.

46   The College Policy manual required by the ERF states that the College shall have a comprehensive training plan that applies to all of its staff and includes training in teaching strategy and assessment. Although the College provides mentoring and personal support for its tutors through the Chief Executive, there was no evidence of formal staff development taking place or procedures for identifying staff development needs. Individual tutors may, however, undertake relevant staff development through their full-time work. The audit team heard that the University does not maintain any oversight of the staff development undertaken by the College tutors, nor does it stipulate any minimum requirements for staff development. The University has introduced a university-wide Partner Conference and invites all ALP representatives to attend the University annually in order to disseminate

changes in procedures and share good practice. An outcome of the partner conference held in June 2010 was to improve the quality and quantity of interactions between academic staff at the University and its ALPs. To this end the University has agreed to create a partner website. The team noted that at the time of the audit visit this was in the process of being developed.

Student admissions

47   Admissions to programmes offered by the SBE are managed through the DTE. There is a minimum IELTS score of 6.0 for undergraduate programmes and 6.5 for postgraduate programmes. The DTE has responsibility for ensuring that the English requirements are met. All admission decisions rest with the SBE. However, the College only forwards to the DTE the application forms of students who meet the essential criteria. The College provides induction and orientation for the students. The College currently does not provide any form of academic English language support for the students at the College, nor does the University require the College to provide such support. However, the audit team was informed that the College was in discussions with the School of Management and Languages for the delivery of pre-sessional English language programmes in Singapore.

48   The entry requirements for the programmes are presented in the University prospectus, which is available on the University website.

Assessment requirements

49   All assessments and awarding of degrees are subject to the undergraduate or postgraduate regulations of the University as appropriate. The assessment tasks are set by the academic staff at the University. They are also responsible for marking the work. Alternatively approved markers may be appointed to undertake initial marking, but this marking is then moderated by the course leaders. Assessments are the same as those undertaken by the students studying on campus. Examinations in Singapore are arranged under a Service Level Agreement with the University's Business School, which provides this service across the University through its International Centre for Examinations. The University has a clear procedure for ensuring the security of the examination papers for off-campus delivery to examination centres outside Edinburgh and for managing the loss of or damage to scripts. In the case of the College, the examination arrangements are handled by the local British Council office, which is responsible for the collection and return to the University of the completed scripts. Examinations are held in British Council premises. The audit team learned that the examinations in Singapore take place on the same day as those in Edinburgh, although not at the same time. The team was assured that there would always be overlap between the times to ensure that no misconduct could take place. The tutors at the College take no part in the examination process.

Student feedback

50   The University has a code of practice on student feedback. This covers feedback at course and programme level, as well as feedback on services and the institution. Course and programme feedback is managed within schools. The code does not refer specifically to feedback from students studying at ALPs. However, the audit team was informed by the students that they completed module evaluation forms at the end of each module, although they were unsure what happened to them. They did not receive feedback on any of the issues raised, nor were they aware of any action taken by the University or College. The Chief Executive of the College receives copies of the course evaluations and provides feedback individually to the local tutors.

51 The College does not have a staff-student liaison committee or any formal forums for students or their representatives to make known their views or provide feedback to the University. The audit team was informed that this was due to the fact that the tutors and students were part-time, and as a result had significant work and family commitments that would impact on the scheduling of meetings, attendance and their effectiveness. Schools delegate the requirement for student feedback opportunities to their ALP. Although students felt able to raise issues informally with the Chief Executive, it was unclear how the University captured the views of these students in any formal way, other than through course evaluation, as even when the DTE visits the College he is not always able to meet with tutors and students. The audit team was informed that the school has introduced an Academic Board at each of its ALPs, which will provide a forum for the University and ALP tutors to discuss academic and student issues; the DTE represents the University on this board. The team concluded that the opportunities for the students to provide formal feedback were limited, and that further thought should be given to other mechanisms for students to provide such feedback and to ways in which feedback on actions taken is disseminated.

52 Course leaders at the University mark and moderate all student work. On occasions the University may appoint approved markers, with moderation being undertaken by module leaders. The audit team heard that there is an approval process for the appointment of approved markers. A significant issue, which has been identified as part of the APMR process and was raised by the students, is that the assessment process from the assessment point until results and feedback are published takes between three and four months. The University acknowledges that this is a weakness and says that it intends to take action to provide feedback faster. However, it was not clear to the team exactly how and when such action would be taken. The delay is clearly problematic for the off-campus students. In addition, there is evidence that the quality of the feedback provided by the University tutors is variable. In some cases only a mark is provided on the assessment cover sheet. While there is generic feedback on examinations, there is no opportunity for individual feedback to College students. The team concluded that the students are not as a matter of course receiving feedback that is sufficiently timely and informative to help them prepare for future assessments (see also paragraph 72).

53 The assessment boards for the postgraduate programmes are held at the University for both on and off-campus students. For undergraduate programmes there are separate boards for on and off-campus students, which are all held at the Edinburgh campus.

Student achievements

54 There are currently 630 undergraduate students and 130 postgraduate students studying on the University's programmes. The SBE undertakes performance comparison of the students at its partner institutions. This is shared with the College. The College receives the results and decisions made by the board. From the comparison data provided the team noted that the students at the College outperformed other partners. The audit team was informed by the University that the data comparing the performance of on and off-campus students will be addressed through the new management information system. The College also maintains its own very detailed student database that is used to monitor attendance, track performance and debtors.

External examining

55 The same external examiners are appointed by the University to cover its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on campus and overseas at its ALPs. For the postgraduate taught programmes the external examiners are actively involved in approving

assessments, assessing standards and attending assessment boards. The University's handbook on External Examining for Taught Programmes requires all draft examination papers to be sent to the external examiner for approval. However, for the undergraduate students at the ALP the external examiner is only involved in the approval of the assessment tasks, including assignments and examination papers, but does not see students' work, therefore playing no part in confirming academic standards; nor does the external examiner attend third-year progression boards, where award decisions are made for ALP students. The University's rationale for this is that these students are non-honours students, and external examiners are not involved other than in the approval of assessment practice for on-campus programmes at non-honours level in the SBE and other schools. However, the University's own summary of the duties of external examiners requires external examiners to attend boards, where a significant number of students leave at the end of year 3 of an honours course. The University needs to make more explicit the rationale for this practice and how this is being implemented at school level, with reference to the *Code of practice* published by QAA, in particular *Section 4: External examining* (precept 8).

56   The University has produced guidelines on external examining, which include procedures for the selection and appointment of external examiners, their responsibilities including reporting requirements, and procedures for the scrutiny of reports within the University and any follow-up actions. External examiners are able to access this information on the website. In addition, external examiners are provided with course documentation and student handbooks.

57   External examiners for undergraduate programmes are not able to comment on the performance of ALP students, as they are not identified separately in the assessment process. External examiner reports are sent by the Academic Registry to schools for review and action. A response is prepared by the school and approved by the Dean before a letter is signed by the Deputy Principal.

58   The audit team was informed that the University intends to address the involvement of external examiners in the scrutiny of examination scripts and assignment submissions for sub-honours students, including the appointment of an external examiner with specific responsibility for off-campus provision. The team noted the University's intention and would encourage it to ensure as a matter of urgency that appropriate arrangements are made for external scrutiny of the assessed work of the students on the BSc (non-honours) programmes. Without such scrutiny it is unclear how external examiners are able to confirm the quality of the process or that appropriate standards are being met by students at the ALP.

Certificates and transcripts

59   The students based at the College receive the same form of certificate as those studying at the University. The certificate gives the name of the award and the date of graduation. The accompanying transcript shows the courses passed and the number of credits gained, including credits and level awarded for prior learning. However, the transcript does not identify the ALP or that the student studied off campus. This conforms to CPE requirements. The audit team recognises this local requirement and acknowledges that it reflects precept A24 of the *Code of practice*, *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, which states that 'subject to any overriding statutory or other legal provision in any relevant jurisdiction, the certificate and/or the transcript should record the name and location of any partner organisation….'.

Section 4: Information

Student information

60   Prospective students have access to information from both the College and the University. The College website provides a link to the University website that gives information about the programmes leading to University awards, including outline curricula and the student handbook.

61   Registered students are provided with student handbooks by both the College and the SBE. The SBE handbook is designed specifically for ALP students at both postgraduate and undergraduate level. It includes a brief section on ALPs; how to transfer to the Edinburgh campus to study for honours; details about the content of the programmes and assessment as well as general information, for example on appeals and complaints. The College handbook covers registration, administration, fees and regulations. The students informed the audit team that they found the handbooks useful. As required under the ERF, the College has produced a student contract, which has to be signed by each student and the College. It covers payment of fees, refunds and details of the fee protection scheme, as well as information on the grievance procedure.

62   All ALP students have the right to raise complaints and appeals with the University. Procedures for student discipline are documented in the College's handbook. The University's handbook gives a useful guide to plagiarism, and summary information supported by weblinks to the University's guidelines on appeals, academic conduct and student discipline.

63   The audit team heard that there is limited communication between the students at the College and SBE staff. However, students were able to raise issues with the Chief Executive of the College, who would then liaise with the DTE at the University.

Publicity and marketing

64   The College has responsibility for marketing the programmes. The College is obliged to submit draft leaflets and adverts for approval prior to their use. The College submits a generic template for adverts to ensure that the style and content are in line with the University guidelines. The audit team was informed that the checking of publicity information including the website is undertaken by the DTE. However, the audit team was told by staff at the University that there had been communication problems with the College regarding marketing and the content of webpages which had led to subsequent increased scrutiny of the publicly available information published by the College.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

65   The University's agreement with the College recognises that some undergraduates at the College may wish to transfer to the University either to complete their degree programmes or study for the honours degree. Progression to the University is subject to the approval of the SBE. However, in practice few students progress to the UK as this would involve a career break which is not attractive to the majority of the students studying at the College. Details of the academic arrangements for progression are provided in the University Student Handbook.

Conclusion

66   The audit team concluded that the University engages with the precepts in the *Code of practice*, with particular reference to *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).* There is a robust annual monitoring process and evidence of visits by the DTE.

67   The partnership between the University's School of the Built Environment and the College is founded on mutual areas of interest and expertise. However, its success is based on the relationship between two people, the SBE's Director of Transnational Education at the University and the Chief Executive at the College who, although supported by administrators, is the only person with any management responsibility for the partnership. The audit team agreed that this left the University exposed to a high risk in terms of the need to ensure that knowledge and understanding is not located in single individuals at the respective institutions. Although the SBE has appointed an Associate Director to act as deputy to the DTE, the team agreed that this role needs to encompass all aspects of the management of the relationship with the College.

68   The University in identifying collaborative partnerships as potentially high risk has very detailed procedures for approving, reviewing and reapproving such partnerships. However, on the evidence provided by the University, the application of the procedures at a local level for reapproving the partnership may need to be reviewed to ensure that the critical risks are being identified and appropriate action taken (see paragraph 22).

69   The College tutors appointed to support this programme are well qualified and experienced in their field of expertise. The University's procedures for approving the appointment of tutors are robust and applied rigorously. Staff development for local tutors is left to the individual to identify their own needs, although there was evidence of mentoring and pastoral support provided by the Chief Executive. Neither the University nor the SBE has any oversight of any staff development undertaken by the local tutors. The programme is generally well supported by the University's virtual learning environment. However, there is some variability between courses, and the audit team heard that some courses are not accessible at the time of delivery at the College; nor can local tutors or students access the discussion board. Under the ALP agreement, the ALP is expected to provide tutorials to supplement the distance-learning materials supplied by the University, and this involves developing tutorial materials to contextualise the subject. In light of this agreement, the College has developed its own repository for materials provided by local tutors, which is easily accessible to the students.

70   The day-to-day management of the partnership involves regular liaison between the DTE and the Chief Executive, and on occasions between the programme leader and the Chief Executive; such communication is generally by email.

71   Annual monitoring procedures are well organised, with the Chief Executive at the College completing the annual monitoring form for consideration by SBE. Students at the College complete online course evaluations that inform the process. However, the University does not consistently provide feedback to the tutors or students at the College. Furthermore, the same issues have been raised by the College in subsequent annual monitoring reports.

72   A fundamental problem for the University, that has been raised in other reviews and has not been adequately addressed by the University, is the significant delay of between three and four months in providing feedback to students on their assessments. This issue has been raised by the College, along with the variable quality of the feedback provided by

some markers at the University, on a number of occasions. While the University is aware of the issue, its response has not demonstrated a commitment to finding a solution to this problem, which impacts significantly on the student experience and student learning opportunities, as students are unaware of their performance, including any improvements that could be made before undertaking the next piece of assessed work. The University states that the delay is caused by the volume of coursework generated through its overseas partnerships but offered no strategy to address this evident problem. This delay in providing feedback to students and the variable quality of that feedback when it is received has led the audit team to conclude that the University's practice does not reflect the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*.

73   A further issue is that within the SBE, at undergraduate sub-honours level, external examiners are not currently involved in the scrutiny of students' assessed work at sub-honours level and are not therefore fully able to confirm that appropriate standards are being met. The University has said that it intends to appoint an external examiner with specific responsibility for off-campus provision, a development which the audit team recommends should include appropriate arrangements for external scrutiny of the assessed work of students on the BSc (non-honours) programmes in order to confirm that appropriate standards are being met by students at the ALP.

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

- the repository for lecture notes and slides developed by the College for use by tutors and students (paragraph 17)
- well-documented procedures for partner approval and flexible and distributed learning (paragraph 19)
- the development and introduction of a risk-based approach to collaborative provision (paragraph 24)
- the approval process for approved teachers and tutors (paragraph 45)
- the introduction of the Partner Conference as a means of disseminating information and sharing good practice (paragraph 46)
- arrangements for secure examination script management (paragraph 49)
- the attendance monitoring system maintained by the College (paragraph 54)
- the selection of experienced and well-qualified local tutors (paragraph 69).

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

- ensure that the application of the University's risk assessment procedures at local level is sufficiently robust in their implementation to identify potential threats to the sustainability and operation of its partnership arrangements (paragraph 43)
- identify a variety of mechanisms to enable students to have their views represented to the institution and to ensure that feedback on actions taken is disseminated to the College, its tutors and students (paragraph 51)
- the provision of more timely and consistently helpful feedback to students on their assessed work (paragraph 52)
- the need to broaden the knowledge and understanding of overseas collaborative programmes beyond the role of the DTE within the School of the Built Environment (paragraph 67)
- ensure oversight of appropriate staff development undertaken by the partner's tutors on SBE programmes (paragraph 69)

- extend the role of the external examiners for undergraduate programmes to ensure that through the external examiner system the University has oversight of the quality and standards of its overseas programmes (paragraph 69)
- ensure that the outcomes and actions arising out of annual monitoring are disseminated to the College, including its staff and students (paragraph 71).

76   The audit team was able to confirm the University's view of the partnership as set out in its Briefing Paper.

77   The University is aware of a number of the issues raised and in some cases is planning to take appropriate action to resolve them. However, some of these matters have been outstanding for some time. The audit team recommends that the University considers taking urgent action to remedy these matters, particularly as they relate to feedback on assessed work, both timing and quality, and the role of the external examiner in the non-honours degree.

78   The audit team recognises the University's well-developed policies and procedures relating to the management of its overseas provision in order to oversee the management of academic standards, and systems for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students studying under its collaborative arrangements overseas. Nevertheless, the team agreed that there is further work to be undertaken within the SBE to ensure that the expectations of management are being met and that practice not only reflects University procedures but also the *Code of practice* published by QAA, in particular *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, *Section 4: External examining* and *Section 6: Assessment of students*.

Appendix A

Heriot-Watt University's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with Trent Global College, Singapore

The School has put in place a number of actions to address issues raised in the report. In addition the issues raised will be considered through the Quality and Standards Committee as some matters are relevant to other Schools.

RICS accreditation
The RICS have announced that accreditation will be reinstated for all students.

Ensure that the risk assessment procedures at local level are sufficiently robust
The Risk Strategy Management Group will review academic partnership risks and the processes for risk assessment at its next meeting in September 2011. The Head of School of the Built Environment will be invited to join the meeting to ensure that there is shared view of the risks at School and University level.

Identify mechanisms to enable students to have their views represented to the institution and to ensure that feedback on actions taken is disseminated
The University and College have processes for collecting student views and these are clearly not as effective as they should be. The processes involve the University, College and students and will be a matter for detailed discussion at the next Academic Board and student meeting scheduled for early in 2011/12 so that more effective processes can be identified. The outcomes will be reported to Quality and Standards Committee.

The provision of more timely and consistently helpful feedback to students on their assessed work
Faster summative feedback will be achieved from 2011/12 through additional resources for handling and marking student work and by a planned reduction in the number of assessments in the programmes. The School aims to have formative and summative feedback provided in the same timescale as it is provided for on-campus students.

The quality of feedback was addressed in January 2011 through formalised induction and training of markers to provide the same level of written feedback to both campus-based and ALP students. The quality of feedback is being monitored by the Associate Director.

The need to broaden the knowledge and understanding of overseas collaborative programmes beyond the role of the DTE within the School of the Built Environment
The remit of the Associate Director has been extended to include responsibility for academic matters and additional academic and support staff have been appointed to the ALP unit to support growth. This will extend the number of staff with a knowledge and understanding of partnerships.

Extend the role of the external examiners for undergraduate programmes
The University has appointed an external examiner with responsibility for off-campus provision to scrutinise students' assessed work and ensure appropriate standards are being met. The external examiner will participate fully in the University external examining process for existing students as well as future cohorts.

Ensure that the outcomes and actions arising out of annual monitoring are disseminated to the College, including its staff and students
The University changed its annual monitoring process in 2010 with more detailed reports being provided to the College in 2010-11. The usefulness of the feedback and the

dissemination to tutors and students will be discussed at the next Academic Board and student meetings.

Appendix B

Student numbers for 2010-11

Programme	Number of new students	Total number of students
BSc Construction Project Management	95	249
BSc Facilities Management	102	285
BSc Quantity Surveying	60	107
BSc Real Estate management	16	31
MSc/PGDip Construction Project Management	9	46
MSc/PGDip Quantity Surveying	5	28
MSc/PGDip Real Estate Investment and Finance	1	4
MSc/PGDip Civil Engineering and Construction Management	1	4
MSc/PGDip Construction Financial Management		5
MSc/PGDip Facilites Management		24
MSc/PGDip Real Estate Management Development		2
MSc/PGDip Safety Risk Management		11
Total	**289**	**796**