



Audit of overseas provision

**Staffordshire University and the
University of Madras, India**

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Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between Staffordshire University and the University of Madras, India.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a United Kingdom (UK) organisation that seeks to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and the standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded. It provides public information about quality and standards in higher education mainly by publishing reports resulting from a peer review process of audits and reviews. These are conducted by teams, selected and trained by QAA, and comprising academic staff from higher or further education institutions. The most recent Institutional audit of Staffordshire University was conducted by QAA in April 2005, and the most recent Collaborative provision audit was undertaken in December 2006.

2 One of QAA's review activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative links between UK higher education institutions and their partner organisations in other countries. In 2008-09, QAA conducted audits of selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in India. 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 India.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

3 In April 2008, QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information on their collaborative partnerships in India. On the basis of the information returned on the nature and scale of the links, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with links in India. Each of the selected institutions produced a briefing paper 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 to make reference, in the briefing paper, to the extent to which the link was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas collaborative activity. Institutions were also invited to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, particularly *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA in 2004.

4 In October/November 2008, one of three audit teams visited each of the selected UK institutions to discuss its arrangements in the light of its briefing paper. In January/February 2009, the same team visited the relevant partner organisations in India to gain further insight into the experience of students and staff, and to supplement the view formed by the team from the briefing paper and from the UK visit. During the visits to institutions in India, discussions were conducted with key members of staff. Due to the fact that students in this particular link were located across the whole of India it was not practical to meet with current students, therefore a questionnaire was devised to gather the views of students (see paragraph 47). The audit of Staffordshire University (Staffordshire) was coordinated for QAA by Mr Matthew Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor Gareth Roberts and Dr Carol Vielba (auditors), with Mr Matthew Cott acting as secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in India for the willing cooperation they provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in India

5 In India, responsibility for higher education resides with the Department of Higher Education within the Ministry of Human Resources Development. The University Grants Commission (UGC) is the national body responsible for granting recognition to all higher education qualifications; it also regulates the use of university title. Constitutional responsibilities for education are shared between the national parliament and state legislatures. Both can authorise the establishment of universities, public or private, while the national government can grant 'deemed university' status to an institution on recommendation from UGC. Degree awarding powers are vested in universities, but there are also numerous colleges that offer the degrees of universities to which they are affiliated. Colleges may be categorised as public or private based on their ownership; however, funding arrangements blur the distinction because of the self-financing activities of public institutions and because private institutions may receive government aid. The number of private institutions has grown in recent years and these tend to offer more employment-orientated programmes than their public counterparts; some award qualifications through collaboration with foreign institutions. The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is one of several bodies established with responsibilities in particular subject areas. The remit of AICTE is broad and includes engineering and technology, business and management, hotel and catering management, architecture and town planning, pharmacy, and applied arts and crafts. AICTE introduced regulations in 2005, under which foreign institutions imparting technical education are required to obtain approval from AICTE for their operations in India. There is currently no legal framework for recognising qualifications awarded by foreign institutions on the basis of programmes delivered entirely in India. The so-called 'Foreign Providers Bill', which would introduce such a framework has been the subject of parliamentary debate, but has yet to reach the statute books. Further information on higher education in India is contained in the overview report.

The background to the collaborative link

Nature of the link

6 The partnership between Staffordshire and the University of Madras (Madras) at Chennai, India, was established in 2004. The link is described by Staffordshire as an Outreach Partnership, providing a platform for the delivery of Staffordshire's MA in Sustainable Development that supplements other provision of the award both at home and abroad. The programme recruits students from across India and, in September 2005, the first group of eight Indian Ocean students based in Mauritius, the Seychelles and the Maldives also began the course, effectively joining the Madras cohort.

7 The MA is an e-learning course within a suite of environment and sustainability awards developed by Staffordshire since 2000 and is subject to Staffordshire's postgraduate academic awards regulations. All curricular and assessment materials are in English. In 2007-08 there were 40 students pursuing the award on a part-time basis as part of this link, the majority of whom were recipients of grants from the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC).

8 Madras was established in 1857 and is a publicly-funded university located in the state of Tamil Nadu. In establishing the partnership with Madras, the audit team was told that Staffordshire had sought advice from the British Council and had been informed that formal accreditation by relevant Indian authorities was unnecessary in this case. The team was also informed by staff at Madras that the Memorandum of Understanding with Staffordshire had been registered with the Indian authorities as a matter of course.

9 The number of students registered on the course as part of this link dropped to 30 in 2008-09. Cessation of the CSC grants had adversely affected recruitment and there had been no new registrations to the Madras link during 2007-08 or 2008-09. Although a number of students had exited the course with a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma, no students had yet completed

the full master's award. The audit team was told that Staffordshire expected a significant number of full completions during 2008-09.

10 At the time of the audit, Staffordshire was considering how best to sustain and develop the link. In particular, it was in the initial stages of discussions with Madras regarding the possibility of establishing a joint award, aiming to provide a model that was more economically attractive to potential students. Both institutions recognised that such a model would change the nature of the link and the quality assurance mechanisms associated with it. They also viewed the development as a natural progression of the partnership, building on the capacity-building element in relation to distance learning that had featured strongly in Staffordshire's successful application for CSC funding when the link was established and providing further opportunities for student mobility and staff exchanges. The institutions were also intending to extend the joint award model to cover other distance-learning programmes. Additionally, both partners have been considering ways to extend student mobility between the two countries, including the achieved fast-tracking of some India-based students (see paragraph 64) and the desire to permit Staffordshire-based students to visit India for short study visits.

11 The distance-learning courses focusing on the environment and sustainability have been developed by Staffordshire's Department of Geography at its Stoke Campus. They are delivered to students in over 20 countries.

12 In its Briefing Paper Staffordshire stated that it did not consider the link with Madras to be representative of its normal procedures and processes, as it is the only overseas award offered on the basis of distance learning, delivered and assessed entirely by Staffordshire staff using web-based distance learning.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

13 In its Briefing Paper, Staffordshire stated that it has full responsibility for the management of academic standards and quality. The operational detail governing any particular collaborative link is then shaped by formal institutional agreements, including memoranda of understanding, memoranda of cooperation, the application of Staffordshire's formal quality assurance policies and procedures, and a range of day-to-day mechanisms that ensure the maintenance of academic standards.

14 Staffordshire's approach to overseas collaborative provision is informed by two key documents. An International Strategy, developed within Staffordshire's overarching University Plan, provides a framework that sets out the institution's strategic aims and the parameters that define its approach to developing collaborative arrangements. The International Strategy is reviewed on a regular basis, the version covering the period 2003 to 2008 having been supplemented before the period of the audit by a document covering 2007 to 2012.

15 At an operational level, a Quality Assurance Handbook for International Collaborations (the Handbook) provides detailed procedural guidelines for the establishment and management of collaborative links. These procedures are based on those that pertain to Staffordshire's standard in-house programmes, except where these need to be amended and elaborated in the context of collaborative provision generally and particular modes of such provision in particular. An additional document, of relevance to this partnership, sets out Staffordshire's policies regarding quality assurance for e-learning and distance/distributed learning.

16 In terms of management of its collaborative activity, the Quality Development Committee (QDC) is the senior committee within Staffordshire's deliberative structure. It reports to the Academic Board and has delegated authority to confirm all validation reports, including those relating to international provision. The main Staffordshire committee responsible for overseeing the quality assurance of international collaborations is the International Collaboration Subcommittee (ICSC) of QDC. It reports to QDC on any significant strategic or operational issues concerning international collaborations. ICSC is responsible for monitoring the quality of the

provision including annual monitoring and periodic review, approving the curricula vitae (CVs) of staff appointed by partners, appointing internal international programme advisers (IPAs) and receiving their reports. ICSC also considers formal reports for establishing new international partnerships, considers memoranda of cooperation and schedules for such collaboration and makes subsequent recommendations to QDC (see also paragraph 22). The membership of ICSC is drawn from Staffordshire's faculties and schools, the Quality Improvement Service (QIS), the International Office and the Students' Union. It is chaired by the Faculty of Sciences' Director for Recruitment. The staff of the International Office include a Director of Partnership (India) who oversees developments within the subcontinent.

17 The specific role of QIS is to assist in the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of Staffordshire's educational provision. It provides a range of quality assurance and improvement services to faculties, schools and services. QIS maintains a central, internal register of collaborative provision, including overseas collaboration. The register is reviewed annually and includes information on student numbers, but it is not publicly available.

18 Operational issues are considered by the International Partnerships Operational Management Group (IPOMG), reporting to ICSC. IPOMG is chaired by the Director of Staffordshire's International Office and its members are appointed by those faculties and schools with a significant volume of collaborative provision. Representatives of QIS also attend these meetings.

19 The audit team concluded that Staffordshire has developed a comprehensive framework comprising institutional structures and policy documents that underpin the management of its collaborative provision.

Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

20 The link with India was motivated by the interests of Staffordshire's Department of Geography, within the Faculty of Sciences, in sustainable development as an academic discipline, coupled with an awareness of the challenges in this area associated with India's rapid economic development. An initial partnership was established with Jadavpur University in Kolkata in 2003, supported by a successful application to the CSC to provide grants for individual students. This initial success prompted Staffordshire to identify other possible partners with similar common interests, leading to discussions with Madras at Chennai. This latter link began in 2004, also supported by CSC scholarships. Recruitment to the Jadavpur cohort came to an end in 2007 at the request of Jadavpur University, following the cessation of the award of CSC scholarships, and the partnership is being phased out.

21 Staffordshire's procedures for the establishment of a new partnership are documented in its Handbook. They include an initial assessment by a Staffordshire Business Delivery Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, which takes a strategic overview of the proposed partnership, based on documentation provided by the relevant faculty in the form of an Initial Notification Form.

22 Based on the findings of the Business Delivery Group it is then the joint responsibility of the Director of Quality Improvement and the Director of the International Office to decide if an institutional visit is required. The Handbook sets out the constitution of an institutional approvals panel, involving both academic and administrative Staffordshire staff, and its expected agenda, which covers a range of matters, including the financial and legal status of the partner, its management structure and quality assurance systems and its learning resources. Reports based on the visit are then submitted to ICSC, which makes recommendations for approval or otherwise to QDC.

23 Approval of the link with Madras predates the current procedure for institutional approval. In April 2004 the then International Strategy Group approved the partnership based on an Initial Notification Form and supporting documentation in the form of an assessment of the appropriateness of the partner in relation to its capacity to support the already validated MA in Sustainable Development. Three days later the course was validated to run in partnership with Madras. The institutional approval had not involved a formal visit but had, in effect, relied on information regarding resources that had been gleaned by Staffordshire staff during visits to Madras, augmented by information available on Madras's website, subsequent to an agreement in principle by the Vice-Chancellors of both Universities in February 2004 to explore avenues of cooperation based on the MA in Sustainable Development.

24 A Memorandum of Cooperation was then signed by the Vice-Chancellors of both institutions in May 2004, together with a Memorandum of Understanding. The latter covered a three-year period until 2007, and established the agreement of the two institutions 'to explore academic collaboration to their mutual benefit'. The Memorandum of Cooperation is a comprehensive document and becomes due for review at the end of a period of five years, or earlier at the request of either partner.

25 The audit team was informed that other validated courses had been added to the partnership, that the possibility of the development of a joint award was under active discussion and the Memorandum of Cooperation would be amended in due course to take account of these changes. The team considered that such post hoc arrangements had the potential to lead to misunderstandings and that a more secure methodology would entail preparing draft revised memoranda in advance of adding further programmes to the partnership so that validation panels could take them into account. In this respect, it appeared to the team that Staffordshire's current system does not fully reflect the spirit of the *Code of practice, Section 2*.

26 The audit team was also concerned that information available at Madras regarding the portfolio of validated courses appeared to be limited and, in some instances, contradictory. The team therefore considered that Staffordshire should supply its partner institution with comprehensive information and should assure itself that both partners have a clear mutual understanding.

27 The audit team concluded that Staffordshire has broadly satisfactory processes in place for selecting and approving partner organisations. Since the link with Madras was approved, steps have been taken to strengthen those processes. The team noted that the initial motivation for establishing the partnership had been driven by recognition of the potential to offer and develop programmes having direct relevance to India's economic development. The development of programmes that provide relevant opportunities for students working in public bodies and non-governmental organisations in India and countries in the Indian Ocean is identified as a positive feature of this partnership. However, as the link has developed the team also considered that the Memorandum of Cooperation had not kept pace with the validation process and that there were gaps in the shared information between the institutions. Staffordshire may therefore wish to consider the development of amended memoranda of cooperation in advance of programme validation in accordance with guidance in the *Code of practice* and ensuring the completeness of information shared with the partner institution.

Programme approval

28 Within Staffordshire's taxonomy of collaborative links, International Outreach is described as an arrangement whereby Staffordshire provides a programme of learning leading to one of its awards at a location remote from the University and receives teaching support from a partner institution.

29 The Handbook states that the approval of a programme within an outreach partnership is a process of judgement regarding the quality of the planned student experience of learning, teaching, assessment, administration and support. The process involves the establishment of a validation panel, including an external member with subject expertise in the relevant discipline and, preferably, with experience of international quality assurance.

30 A streamlined process was followed in the particular case of approving the MA in Sustainable Development within the outreach partnership with Madras. The programme had already been through an approval process at Staffordshire when the proposal arose for a partnership with Madras. Staffordshire based its judgement on visits by Science Faculty staff to the institution to consider resources, and it was not felt necessary to involve an external subject expert in approving the programme's extension to this link. These resources were seen as 'extras' to enhance the partnership, as the students in India were to be treated in the same way as any of the other global students pursuing the award, accessing the virtual learning environment from home or their place of work, using websites, e-journals and study packs sent to them by Staffordshire. In addition, visits to Madras by Staffordshire staff had helped to establish links between colleagues in the cognate departments. The validation report noted that any further development of the programme, involving delivery of the modules by academic staff at Madras, would need to be the subject of a revalidation exercise.

31 A significant feature of the collaborative link is the encouragement and assistance provided by Staffordshire to staff at Madras to develop their own modules for the MA as part of a capacity building strategy. Following successful trialling of modules developed in cooperation with Madras colleagues, they would then be made available to all students on the programme. The audit team was told that progress in this regard had been slower than anticipated, partly because of a change to 30-credit modules from the original 15-credit structure. However, the first of these collaborative modules - 'Community Action Planning' - was developed by 2007 ready for delivery in 2009-10. The Briefing Paper reported that a Staffordshire tutor provided guidance regarding some of the key issues to be addressed in the module, including aspects of assessed assignments, the schedule of delivery, links to other modules in terms of module learning outcomes and award objectives. Although largely created by Madras staff, the module is 'owned' by a Staffordshire tutor who oversees learning, teaching and assessment relevant to the module. The team was also informed that other collaborative modules are planned as part of the capacity building strategy and that Staffordshire considers that their development can be highlighted as a key positive outcome of the collaboration.

32 In June 2007, Staffordshire undertook a review and revalidation exercise of undergraduate and postgraduate provision in Geography. The new module was validated as part of this exercise (see paragraphs 67-68).

33 The audit team concluded that programme approval processes at Staffordshire for collaborative programmes are comprehensive and well documented. The approval of the MA in Sustainable Development within this outreach partnership had been consistent with those processes.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

34 Staffordshire has both a Memorandum of Understanding and a Memorandum of Cooperation to cover its partnership with Madras, based on institutional pro formas. Both institutions confirmed the importance of these documents as a basis for the partnership. The Memorandum of Cooperation includes sections on all aspects of collaboration and is supplemented by a codicil that sets out the basis of the financial agreement between the two institutions. Notwithstanding those matters considered above (paragraph 27), the audit team considered that the document is fit-for-purpose and is consistent with the advice provided in the *Code of practice*.

Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

35 Responsibility for day-to-day management of the link rests with the Department of Geography at Staffordshire which liaises directly with the Department of Geography at Madras.

36 The Memorandum of Cooperation requires that an Award Management Team for the MA in Sustainable Development at Staffordshire be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the award subject to policies agreed by the Award Committee. The latter is a committee of Staffordshire's Faculty of Sciences. The Award Management Team for the MA takes the form of a distance-learning team integrating both academic and administrative staff from both the MA and other postgraduate distance-learning programmes within the Faculty. Its membership comprises senior staff from Staffordshire's Department of Geography, the IPA, the Award Leader, the Geography Subject Leader and the Award Administrator. Under this arrangement the strategic and operational decisions are devolved to the distance-learning team instead of being vested in the Award Leader alone. A distance-learning Student Manager is responsible for tracking the students and is the key liaison person between academic and administrative staff. Other roles that have been developed by Staffordshire to support distance-learning programmes include a Recruitment Manager (to oversee recruitment strategies, admission processes, marketing and advertising) and a Dissertation Tutor to oversee the overall management of the dissertation stage of the MA programme.

37 Regular contact is maintained with colleagues at Madras, where the key members of staff involved are the Head of the Department of Geography and Madras's Programme Coordinator, although the latter does not have a formal role description agreed with Staffordshire. At the time of the audit the Department of Geography at Madras had a further three members of staff. All staff are actively engaged with the link and, with support from Staffordshire, two members of staff were developing new modules with a view to their subsequent validation.

38 In relation to students currently registered on the programme, staff at Madras facilitate the organisation of workshops. Direct academic and personal support is supplied by Staffordshire staff, although Madras staff have become increasingly involved as they gain experience through participating in workshops. Students have access to the facilities at Madras, although only a small number are able to take advantage of them other than at the workshop sessions.

39 The Memorandum of Cooperation emphasises the importance of regular visits between the two Universities in order to facilitate a high level of communication and understanding. It is expected that such visits allow regular verification of the accessibility and appropriateness of approved learning facilities; that problems experienced by either partner can be identified and addressed in a satisfactory manner; and that sustained liaison can lead to mutually beneficial research and staff development activities.

40 The IPA (more recently termed the Partnership Manager) is the key member of staff at Staffordshire whose role is to ensure effective liaison. The IPA's duties are comprehensively listed in the Memorandum of Cooperation and elaborated in the Handbook. They include the completion of an annual monitoring report (AMR) and the requirement to visit the partner institution at least once per year and 'produce a written report for the sponsoring faculty/school/service and the University on the findings from each visit'. For this link, the IPA's annual report is considered by the Faculty of Science's Quality Committee, chaired by the Faculty Director for Teaching, Learning and Quality Enhancement and, ultimately, by QDC. The audit team was able to verify that the IPA for this link played a key role in accordance with the Memorandum of Cooperation. The team also saw examples of reports written following visits to Madras by other members of staff. The team considered that these reports provide a comprehensive review of the progress of the programme within the link.

41 At the time of the audit there had been changes of personnel, including the post of IPA (Partnership Manager). The audit team was concerned that staff at Madras had not been fully apprised of this situation, or of other staffing changes, but continued to liaise with staff at Staffordshire who had taken up new internal appointments. While this did not appear to threaten the link in the short term it emphasised the need to secure a clearly defined staffing framework and to share its details with the partner.

42 Student admissions, student records, and student data on progression and achievement are all managed by Staffordshire, using the same procedures that apply to all students enrolled on the MA Sustainable Development award.

43 Student support and guidance are provided for all students following the programme. This support includes the provision annually of two on-campus workshops held at Madras for students from India and Indian Ocean states, typically held over a weekend. They are normally delivered by two Staffordshire staff in collaboration with the staff at Madras, although the audit team also learnt that Madras staff had also run a workshop without Staffordshire staff being present where the emphasis had been on the use of resources. Workshops have also been held in Mauritius for Indian Ocean students. These mirror similar workshops held at Staffordshire and the team was informed by students who completed the questionnaire (see paragraph 47) that they confer substantial academic and social benefits, particularly in relation to the strengthening of links within and between student cohorts and also with tutors. In addition, all MA students are registered on a student support module within the virtual learning environment, which offers support in areas such as the use of e-learning resources. Student retention is recognised as a specific issue and Staffordshire's Faculty of Sciences has appointed a retention administrator to offer appropriate support to students as necessary. The team was informed that special factors have been identified as being peculiar to this particular link, including features of the work/study balance and the impact of environmental catastrophes.

44 A particular feature of the distance-learning programme that provides additional support is the establishment of learner groups, each consisting of up to 10 students identified within the virtual learning environment, to engage in debates, chat room discussions or the sharing of work. As the programme progresses, students are allocated to different learner groups in order to encourage interaction across the entire cohort.

45 During visits to Staffordshire, Madras staff have been involved in workshop sessions on student guidance and support in order to become familiar with implementing standard devices such as a template for recording face-to-face staff-student counselling sessions to use at workshops in India, working alongside UK colleagues.

46 Students at Madras are invited to complete feedback questionnaires at the end of each module. Results are fed back to the Award Management Team and key issues addressed in the AMR. In addition, workshops are individually evaluated on the basis of verbal feedback and by using an open questionnaire. The outcomes of these workshop evaluations are shared with Madras staff. Students also provide feedback on the programme as a whole.

47 As part of the audit exercise, 48 current and former students were invited to respond to an online questionnaire administered by QAA with the cooperation of Staffordshire. A total of 16 students responded to the questionnaire, nine of whom lived in India. Most of these students were in environment linked employment and all but two had been awarded CSC grants. Half of the respondents were pursuing the dissertation stage of their award. All but one of the students had attended at least one workshop at Madras. They had chosen to pursue this course primarily because of its direct relevance to their work and to their professional development, but some of the respondents also cited reasons such as the opportunity to gain a UK qualification, the delivery of the course online and the availability of scholarships.

48 All but two of the students reported that the materials required for the course were available online and provided in good time and that, for most of the students, they were sufficient for their needs. Of the 16 respondents 12 could access the intranet from their homes and 11 could gain access from their workplace, while one student used facilities at Madras. Four of the respondents reported problems with server reliability, the cost of access, and slow download speed.

49 All the respondents reported that they turn to Staffordshire staff to answer queries regarding their learning experience on the course and, almost invariably, they also turn to Staffordshire staff if they need help to resolve personal difficulties that may affect their ability to continue their studies. Two-thirds of the respondents described such staff as being consistently or generally helpful.

50 Every dissertation student had been allocated a supervisor and reported that they were able to locate relevant information for the dissertation from a variety of sources, including Staffordshire.

51 The audit team considered that the day-to-day management of the partnership was generally effective. In particular, the strength of the links between staff at both institutions facilitated the capacity-building strategy. In addition, the high quality of the regular reports produced by Staffordshire provided a firm basis for the evaluation of the link's development. The quality of the analysis underpinning the regular monitoring and reporting on the partnership is identified as a positive feature of this partnership. However, the team was concerned that changes in staffing at Staffordshire and their effect on the link had not been effectively communicated to its partner.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

52 The AMR compiled by the IPA is fed into Staffordshire's standard quality assurance procedures in accordance with the Memorandum of Cooperation which requires that the same procedures apply to this link as for all Staffordshire awards. The Award Team also produces an annual report for the CSC on the progress of those students who receive CSC grants for the Madras partnership. The latter draws heavily on the AMR.

53 Staffordshire's Handbook details the procedure, including the content of the AMR. Specifically, the IPA prepares the AMR covering the previous year during September/October following a standard pro forma. At the same time the ICSC nominates from its membership a rapporteur for each faculty to report on the annual monitoring process. The rapporteur is an internal appointment, but external to the relevant faculty, and is required to prepare a report for the faculty that independently verifies the monitoring process. The report is required to confirm, or otherwise, that all reports have been received and scrutinised, that outstanding issues have been responded to, actions from the previous year have been completed, and action plans for the forthcoming year have been identified. In addition, the report is required to identify examples of good practice and common issues to be drawn to the attention of ICSC.

54 In the case of the link with Madras, the audit team reviewed the AMRs for 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08, the reports of the rapporteur to ICSC for 2005-06 and 2006-07, and the report to CSC produced in January 2008.

55 The AMRs cover a range of distance delivery postgraduate programmes within the Department of Geography. In general, the statistics generated centrally by Staffordshire, which inform the AMRs, cluster the programmes together to present an overall picture. They also report specifically on the collaborative partnership with Madras and report the statistics relevant to that partnership. However, the general presentation of data makes it difficult to identify numbers on individual programmes and make meaningful comparisons.

56 Notwithstanding this limitation, the AMRs report in detail on progress on the issues identified in the previous year's report and set out comprehensive action plans for the following year to be addressed both by the Award Management Team and by the Faculty. The AMRs also include analyses of the progress of individual cohorts in India pursuing the programme, but the omission of data regarding other cohorts limits the extent to which the AMRs are able to include comparisons of progression and completion data across all cohorts registered on the programme.

57 Recurrent themes covered within the AMRs include the need to continue to review and monitor the staff base for the delivery of awards and modules and to review student retention issues.

58 In the 2007-08 AMR, concern was expressed that key staff roles remained unfilled and that further development of the link may thereby be hampered. This is echoed in the external examiner's report which noted that staff may be unduly stretched in maintaining the link. While applauding the clarity achieved by the AMR in pinpointing such operational difficulties, the audit team formed the view that such difficulties had the potential to undermine the integrity of the link and the capacity of Staffordshire to fulfil its obligations within its Memorandum of Cooperation with Madras. Staffordshire may therefore wish to consider securing a clear staffing base and the clarification of the roles of staff supporting the partnership.

59 In terms of student retention, the 2006-07 AMR identifies a number of factors including the number of applicants who withdraw after clarifying the compulsory nature of the introductory workshops; the heavy burden of a part-time postgraduate course; the lack of employer support in terms of time-off for students in the public or NGO sector in India; and difficulties with accessing the internet from remote rural locations.

60 The CSC report reiterates some of the factors identified in the 2006-07 AMR that affect retention and progression, and adds personal and family illnesses, pregnancy, work transfers, and natural disasters.

61 Both the 2006-07 and 2007-08 AMRs provide detailed analyses of all three cohorts of students: 28 who began in September 2004; 22 who began in 2005 (including students from the Indian Ocean states for the first time); and 18 who began in 2006. As indicated above, they do not, however, extend the analysis to cover home and global students registered on the course.

62 No students have yet achieved the full MA award. This compares with the standard completion period of three years with Staffordshire regulations allowing up to five years to complete the full award. The CSC report includes additional analyses of the progression of scholars, based on gender and age, that are both perceptive and informative. In discussions with staff, the audit team confirmed its view that Staffordshire's procedures were comprehensive and had facilitated detailed and productive analyses of retention issues.

63 The 2006-07 AMR also identified issues that continue to require attention, such as securing the timely return to students of graded summative assessments, as well as possibilities for course enhancement, such as using podcasts, while being mindful that bandwidth accessibility remains problematic in some locations. The 2007-08 AMR drew attention to problems experienced by students in India regarding ease of access to library e-resources, particularly online journals. It subsequently became clear that this problem was being experienced by both staff and students in India and the UK, and the AMR highlights the need to monitor the situation in consultation with Staffordshire library staff. In India, the audit team was told that such problems were exacerbated by bandwidth issues and securing efficient internet access from the workplace.

64 A particular innovation analysed in the 2006-07 AMR is the fast-tracking of a small cohort of CSC students by enabling them to undertake a three-month period of full-time study in the UK. The audit team was told that this development, repeated in 2008, had been undertaken at the request of the CSC in order to assess its impact on progression and, in particular, to assist

students to engage with the dissertation element. Particular challenges had arisen, and been resolved, in relation to the timing of the study in relation to the students' completion of Diploma-level work prior to starting the dissertation. An unforeseen consequence had been the backlog of work awaiting students on their return to employment in India, thus delaying their continued progression on the course.

65 Overall, the audit team concluded that the AMR provided Staffordshire with a valuable planning tool that was used effectively to review the quality of the provision, identify successful innovations and pinpoint areas that needed further attention. It also found that the rapporteur's report to ICSC is an effective tool that enables ICSC to oversee the operation of the AMR process at an institutional level, and identify issues that need further consideration.

66 However, the audit team also noted that staff at Madras have no involvement in the AMR process; they do not provide any direct input into that process and had not routinely received copies of internal Staffordshire review reports or of reports prepared for CSC on a regular basis. The team considered that Staffordshire was missing an opportunity to involve colleagues at Madras in the quality assurance process and to enlarge its interpretation of capacity-building to include the development of sensitivity to such processes. The provision of such an opportunity appeared to the team to be particularly relevant given the intention by both institutions to develop the concept of joint awards and to embrace the quality assurance implications entailed. Staffordshire may therefore wish to consider further development of capacity-building strategies by a greater involvement of partnership staff in quality assurance procedures (see also paragraph 100).

Periodic review

67 Staffordshire's procedures for periodic review include the requirement for an award or group of awards to be reviewed quinquennially. In June 2007, the MA in Sustainable Development, including its international links, was included in a review and revalidation exercise of undergraduate and postgraduate provision in Geography.

68 The Geography review was undertaken over a period of two days by a team that included two external members with experience of collaborative provision and distance learning and three internal members from other faculties, including the panel chair. Comprehensive documentation was prepared for the event, including a self-evaluation document. The panel commended the development and integration of the virtual learning environment, web-based and other electronic resources within the delivery of the postgraduate provision under review. However, the report made no direct reference to that part of Staffordshire's Quality Assurance Handbook that encompasses e-learning and distance/distributed learning. While the report made recommendations regarding particular modules, including some that contribute to the MA in Sustainable Development, there is no specific reference to the new module developed in conjunction with Madras staff or an evaluation of its appropriateness, and it was therefore difficult for the audit team to verify that the validation process had given this significant development due consideration.

69 A detailed Faculty response, submitted to and approved by QDC, includes particular action points relevant to the MA in Sustainable Development that address general recommendations in the report. These include mechanisms to improve the timeliness of feedback on assessment by exploring the use of tablet PCs and audio files, and an increase in the level of e-learning interaction by the creation of the student support module to facilitate the development of tutor-student and student-student support networks.

70 The MA has also been the subject of two external QAA reviews. In 2004 it was considered as part of the subject review of Geography, and in 2006 the award was also the subject of a desk-based study as part of the Collaborative provision audit.

71 The Collaborative provision audit report included recommendations concerning Staffordshire's management of partnerships, including 'formalising and undertaking on a periodic and regular basis the review of all partnerships, as distinct from the periodic review of programmes, in order to provide for further assurance of quality and standards'. An internal Collaborative Provision Audit Working Group at Staffordshire had developed a position paper in response to this recommendation that was being considered by the institution at the time of the current audit.

72 A five-year review of the overall partnership with Madras was due to take place during 2008-09. One of the primary considerations of the review will be the possibility of developing joint awards to replace the current framework and the implications of such changes for the partnership. At the time of the audit, details of the timing and programme for the review had yet to be finalised.

73 The audit team concluded that Staffordshire had satisfactory processes in place for reviewing programmes on a periodic basis and noted that, at the time of the audit, it was reviewing its policy in relation to the periodic review of partnerships.

Staffing and staff development

74 The Memorandum of Cooperation sets out Staffordshire's responsibilities in terms of recognising teaching staff at Madras. Following their approval by ICSC, Staffordshire retains the CVs only of those staff directly involved in the delivery of courses. In the view of Staffordshire, staff at Madras involved in supporting students do not fit into this category and, as a consequence, their details are not scrutinised by Staffordshire or held on record at Staffordshire. The audit team was informed that, as and when MA in Sustainable Development modules are delivered by Madras staff, their details would then be subject to standard Staffordshire procedures. The team noted that as part of the capacity-building exercise Madras staff were progressively being encouraged to take over the delivery of partnership workshops in India, and that Madras staff were active in the development of new modules, one of which had already been validated as part of the 2007 review and revalidation exercise (see paragraphs 67-68). All staff at Madras had links with one or more of the programme's modules.

75 In discussions with staff, the audit team found that the spirit of this latter development had been one of close partnership, with staff at both institutions working together to ensure that both the content and level of modules were appropriate.

76 In terms of determining the timing of CV scrutiny, the audit team recognised that maintaining a spirit of cooperative working was an important component of the partnership, but also considered that it was difficult to distinguish module development and module delivery in terms of ensuring that related staff had appropriate qualifications.

77 The Briefing Paper reported, and the audit team was able to confirm, that communication between staff included contact at-a-distance using email, telephone and the virtual learning environment, and also face-to-face communication as part of a strategy to promote collaboration. This strategy is partly underpinned by CSC funding to support capacity-building among Madras staff to enable them to develop their own distance-learning expertise and delivery mechanisms. The funding enables Staffordshire staff to travel to Madras, and Madras staff to travel to Staffordshire to participate in workshops, research seminars, consultations and themed meetings as part of a phased plan. In discussions with staff at Staffordshire, the audit team was told that issues currently under discussion in such meetings include work on specific modules; the nature of the challenges presented by e-learning and the contrast with traditional teaching; and the particular challenges of developing joint awards. Staff at Madras also confirmed to the team the value of such discussions and their sense that they are able to influence both the content of the curriculum, such as by providing contextualised resources relevant to India, as well as the general progress of the partnership.

78 Staff at Madras also articulated the value that they attached to a range of well-structured staff development opportunities provided by Staffordshire, assisted by their access to Staffordshire's virtual learning environment and online library resources. In their view these opportunities, including their involvement in programme validation processes, had contributed to their enhanced understanding of e-learning strategies, how such strategies complemented student-focused and interactive pedagogic methodologies, and how academic frameworks can be developed to form whole programmes. They had found, in particular, that they had altered their perception of the staff-student relationship within a learning-based environment and had developed their understanding of a variety of assessment methods, including continuous and formative assessment. They also underlined the value of the whole experience in the enhancement of their own academic development and the benefits that had accrued by being part of an international collaboration. Equally, they believed that staff at Staffordshire had benefited from Madras in terms of gaining a greater understanding of links with employers and the potential to use such links to develop mutual internships.

79 During a visit to Madras the audit team was able to confirm the adequacy of the facilities available, including the provision of specialist subject-based equipment, and the availability of online access to facilities at Staffordshire.

80 The development of e-learning strategies by Staffordshire and their dissemination to the partner institution, coupled with an effective programme of academic and pedagogic staff development, are identified as positive features of the partnership. The audit team noted Staffordshire's intentions regarding the scrutiny of partner staff CVs and encourages it to keep its policy in this regard under close review.

Student admissions

81 Application and admissions procedures to the MA in Sustainable Development are regulated and undertaken by Staffordshire staff. Each application form is assessed by an Admissions Tutor (who is also the Recruitment Manager) who has responsibilities covering all students on the award, wherever they are located, and the IPA. Candidates follow the standard Staffordshire application process including, for some candidates, attending for 'interview' at Madras by Staffordshire and/or Madras staff. At Madras the audit team learnt that the purpose of such meetings with applicants was to verify the details included on the applicant's form and CV, rather than to conduct formal interviews.

82 Successful applicants who are also applying for CSC scholarships then follow an additional and separate process. Those who do not gain the benefit of a CSC scholarship are entitled to benefit from scholarships provided by the partnership.

83 Staff at Madras prepare a shortlist of candidates that informs, but does not determine, the shortlisting process undertaken by Staffordshire. In discussions with staff at Madras, the audit team learnt that the application process at Madras involves the initial sorting of applications into the four categories stipulated by the reservation criteria set by the Government of Tamil Nadu. Students are then shortlisted separately within each category.

84 About a third of the students who had completed the online questionnaire had attended meetings at Madras to check their application forms, and all the respondents agreed that the application process had been managed effectively.

85 Criteria for admission to the course, as set out in the Programme Specification, stipulate the possession of an honours degree in a related subject. Candidates with degrees (or equivalent) in other subjects may also be considered if they have relevant employment experience or a demonstrable interest in, or a commitment to, sustainable development issues. Normal Staffordshire arrangements for accreditation of prior (experiential) learning also apply, although no applicants had followed this route. The regulations also stipulate that applicants may be asked

to attend an interview at Staffordshire in order to establish/confirm their eligibility, although the practicality of such a course of action appeared to the audit team to be limited.

86 Proficiency in English is not regarded by Staffordshire as being problematic, since applicants normally have first degrees that have been delivered and assessed in English. The audit team was informed by staff at Madras that they took account of proficiency in English as part of the shortlisting process. Nevertheless, the 2007-08 external examiner report on the global delivery of the programme drew attention to questions concerning some students' competence in written and spoken English. The team noted that these concerns were not addressed within Staffordshire's AMR for 2007-08 and encourages it to keep the issue under closer review.

87 In an example of publicity material seen by the audit team the admission requirements include the possession of an honours degree 'in any discipline' and state that 'applicants with work experience will be given preference'. In the view of the team there appeared to be inconsistencies between the wording of admission criteria as set out in the Programme Specification and those available in course publicity material, and Staffordshire will wish to address this.

88 Notwithstanding these observations, the audit team considered that admission and application processes were generally well managed and that they included clear distinctions between the roles of Staffordshire and its partner.

Assessment requirements

89 The Memorandum of Cooperation stipulates that the programme is assessed according to regulations as laid out in 'the definitive award document' - the Programme Specification. The memorandum also stipulates that assessments are set and marked by Staffordshire staff and that the management of assessment is undertaken by Staffordshire through the MA in Sustainable Development Award Examination Board, more recently subsumed within a Distance Learning Award and Progression Board that covers both MA and MSc distance-learning programmes in the Faculty of Sciences.

90 The Programme Specification sets out the assessment workload for each module as a combination of essays, tasks and reports, each with a stipulated word length, and a 15,000 word project to satisfy the requirements of the Research Project Dissertation. Additionally, the format of the course includes formative assessment organised and administered by each module tutor, currently Staffordshire-only staff, that can be used by students as a device for self-assessment. Learners are sometimes provided with individual feedback from tutors on formative assessments, and sometimes with collective feedback commenting on the profile of work across the group. When work is shared with a learner group, individuals can compare their work with that of others, comment on each other's work and sometimes work collaboratively to produce joint documents that are then evaluated. The students who responded to the online questionnaire reported that formative assessments had been particularly valuable, had encouraged team work and that their tutors had provided critical and constructive feedback. In discussions with Madras staff the audit team learnt that their exposure to innovative assessment techniques, including formative assessment within an e-learning context, had been an important contribution to their own staff development.

91 The audit team was informed that all formative assessment tasks, marking and moderation of student work and feedback to students is undertaken by Staffordshire staff, thus ensuring that students within this collaborative link are treated in exactly the same way as all other students on the MA award. Modules developed on a collaborative basis (see paragraph 37) had yet to run and the team was told that when such modules become operational, Madras staff would then be involved in the assessment process following an approval process for the staff.

92 The Distance Learning Award and Progression Board considers the progress of all students registered on the programmes covered by the Board, irrespective of their location. Board meetings are held twice a year at Staffordshire and are attended by the relevant external examiners.

93 Most of the students who responded to the online questionnaire had been made aware of assessment criteria relating to individual assignments, and many of them indicated that such information was readily available in handbooks and from their tutors. Almost all the respondents agreed that they received feedback on formal assignments, a slightly smaller number indicating that such feedback was useful. By contrast, only half the respondents indicated that feedback was timely.

94 The audit team concluded that the assessment processes operating within an e-learning context in the delivery of this programme were generally well managed and contributed to Staffordshire's assurance of standards. The team also considered that the University effectively disseminated these processes to staff at the partner institution and that they formed an integral component of staff development.

External examining

95 In accordance with the Memorandum of Cooperation, an external examiner is appointed to the programme by the Faculty of Sciences on the basis of Staffordshire's criteria and procedures as described in the Handbook. The Faculty also provides an induction programme tailored to the needs of the programme. Experience of distance learning is not a formal prerequisite for appointment as an external examiner for the programme although, in practice, recommendations made by the Award Team have been based on ensuring that the external examiner has both subject specialist expertise and experience of distance learning.

96 The remit for the external examiner includes a consideration of 'the range of student performance by reviewing students' work every six months'. The examiner is required to submit an annual report covering the two Award Boards held each year. Staffordshire considers that consistency of standards is assured because the external examiner oversees the award as a whole regardless of where students are located.

97 Comments in the 2006-07 external examiner report, endorsed in the 2007-08 report, emphasised the support provided for students and the global relevance of the course material. In the 2007-08 report the external examiner articulated a concern that staff input into such a dynamic course 'may not be sufficiently well recognised or fully rewarded'.

98 The external examiner's reports do not respond to a prompt in the pro forma concerning the comparability of standards at collaborative partners. The audit team was informed that issues related to the performance of various cohorts of students were analysed by the Award Tutor and IPA and fed into the AMR (see paragraph 56) and that there was no expectation that the external examiner would engage in such an analysis. Rather, the examiner's function was to consider the standards achieved by the whole cohort. While recognising this argument, the team considered that there was a lost opportunity to analyse the progression and performance of the various cohorts of students registered on the programme.

99 External examiner reports are not routinely shared with colleagues at Madras because they refer to the whole cohort enrolled on the programme. The audit team learnt that salient points made by external examiners are communicated by Staffordshire to its partners.

100 The audit team was able to confirm that Staffordshire's arrangements for external examining as it affects this programme are sound and contribute to the University's effective oversight of academic standards. However, the team considered that the capacity-building strategy that forms a basis for this link could be enhanced by sharing external examiner reports more openly with the partner institution so as to develop the latter's awareness of this feature within the package of procedures used by Staffordshire to assure quality and oversee standards.

Certificates and transcripts

101 Certificates and transcripts are issued by Staffordshire following meetings of the Award Board. The transcript includes a results profile indicating the level of performance on each of the modules contributing to the award, together with a standard explanatory sheet for students.

102 Neither the certificate nor the transcript seen by the audit team identified the name or the location of the collaborating institution. The team was informed that Staffordshire has adopted this policy on the basis that the MA is a distance learning programme and that Madras is not currently involved in its delivery. The team learnt that Madras' expectation is that there will be acknowledgment of Madras' role on certificates and transcripts as and when joint awards are developed. In other respects the team was able to confirm that the certificates and transcripts were clear and comprehensive.

103 Staffordshire and Madras have formed a formal partnership within which the MA programme is marketed under the partnership brand. The audit team therefore considered that, notwithstanding the anticipated development of joint degrees, the omission of any reference to Madras on both the certificate and transcript was contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of the Code of practice. The University is therefore encouraged to keep its policy under review as the partnership develops.

Information

Student information

104 The audit team reviewed recruitment and other promotional materials made available to prospective students in hard copy and on the Staffordshire website. The details on the website include the structure of the programme and brief descriptions of each module, entry requirements, details of fees and a statement of the course aims. The website does not refer specifically to the availability of the programme within the context of its Outreach Partnerships.

105 The audit team also saw an example of publicity material in the form of a pamphlet, published in 2006, aimed at prospective students in Mauritius, the Seychelles and the Maldives wishing to study the MA offered by 'Staffordshire University in Partnership with The University of Madras'. The additional material included on this pamphlet refers to the availability of a limited number of CSC scholarships to 'outstanding students' from these countries and to the intention to hold weekend workshops twice a year both at Madras and in Mauritius. The pamphlet also states that membership of Staffordshire assures access to a wide range of resources and expertise, and that computer and pastoral advice can be accessed by students at Madras.

106 The students who responded to the online questionnaire reported unanimously that the course publicity had proved to be both accurate and informative and that the course had largely met their expectations. Six of these students had experienced face-to-face teaching in the UK as part of the fast-track programme. They had not all been aware that this provision would be available but had welcomed the opportunity when it arose.

107 New students have access to the MA in Sustainable Development Student Handbook and individual module handbooks via the virtual learning environment. The audit team reviewed the content of both the general Student Handbook, and an additional handbook tailored specifically for students enrolled as part of the 'Staffordshire Madras Universities Partnership'. The team also reviewed a sample module handbook and confirmed that these documents were comprehensive and accurate. In particular, they provide details of student entitlement to academic/personal support and learning resources. The great majority of the students who responded to the questionnaire had found the Handbook to be useful or very useful.

108 In its Briefing Paper, Staffordshire also stated that these documents include details of the procedures covering student discipline, academic appeals and student complaints. However, the audit team was unable to locate such details within these documents, other than in reference to appeals in the specific context of extenuating circumstances. Students may locate details of all procedures on the Staffordshire website by searching Staffordshire's Quality Assurance Handbook or its Postgraduate Regulations. By way of an example, the Handbook includes a relevant section concerning Staffordshire's procedures for the review of an examination board decision that relates specifically to students on distance-learning awards and those studying at partner institutions. However, the team was unable to confirm that easily accessible information concerning these procedures is provided for students on the MA programme. Moreover, the majority of the students who responded to the online questionnaire reported that they were unaware of how to lodge an appeal against a mark awarded for an assignment or how to make a formal complaint about any aspect of the course. Other respondents provided only a hazy knowledge of the procedures involved but were confident that they could be located, if needed. Staffordshire will wish to ensure that students receive comprehensive information regarding procedures covering appeals, complaints and student discipline.

109 Information regarding the arrangements for workshops is sent to all students, including new students, via email. Course documentation stipulates that attendance at workshops is a compulsory part of the programme, although the audit team heard conflicting views from staff. The first workshop doubles as a general induction session as well as an introduction to the first two modules. In an example of a programme for a three-day workshop seen by the audit team, sessions were timetabled covering e-learning skills; use of online journals; counselling and personal tutorials; and introductions to individual modules. Students attend for those days that are relevant to the stage they have reached in the programme. The Briefing Paper stated that 'face-to-face communication between Staffordshire and Indian students occurs at these regular workshops which are held in both institutions. In addition, there is regular contact between students and staff throughout their award via emails and the virtual learning environment (for instance via discussion boards)'.

110 The audit team was able to confirm that, with the exception of appeals, complaints and student discipline noted above, the information available to students was comprehensive, clear, accurate and reliable.

Publicity and marketing

111 The Memorandum of Cooperation sets out the nature of the agreement between Staffordshire and Madras regarding Staffordshire's role in checking advertising and publicity material and the use of logos. Ultimate responsibility lies with the Academic Registrar at Staffordshire and with the Vice-Chancellor of Madras, or their nominated deputies, for use of their respective logos.

112 Staffordshire's International Office and Student Office check the content of partners' websites to ensure the accuracy of information contained therein. The International Office also signs off all other promotional material which is then transmitted to Madras via the Dean of Students. The audit team was informed that the IPA also monitors information, although this is not a formal requirement. The team also learnt that, in practice, staff at Madras's Department of Geography check the format and content of advertisements placed via outlets within Tamil Nadu and more widely. They also respond to initial enquiries from prospective students and provide advice regarding the formal admissions process.

113 The audit team concluded that the arrangements in place to check publicity and marketing materials were effective.

Student progression to the UK

114 The link does not incorporate a formal element whereby students progress to the UK. However, as detailed already (paragraph 64), two small cohorts of CSC students had spent three months in the UK as part of the programme. The audit team was provided with information regarding the arrangements that had been made for these students and noted that those students who had participated in this experience and who had responded to the online questionnaire had appreciated the support provided by staff at Staffordshire. Both institutions anticipated that the development of a joint award would include the possibility of more structured student exchanges.

Conclusion

115 The audit team found that the link between Staffordshire and Madras is based on well-understood memoranda of understanding and cooperation. The quality assurance procedures covering course approval, management and review are generally sound and safeguard the academic standards and quality of the provision. The opportunities available for international collaboration are valued by students and staff and make significant contributions to the achievement of institutional targets. Difficulties identified in relation to student recruitment and retention are encouraging both partners to explore new models for collaboration.

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

- development of programmes that provide relevant opportunities for students working in public bodies and non-governmental organisations in India and countries in the Indian Ocean (paragraphs 20, 27)
- development of e-learning strategies and their dissemination to the partner institution (paragraphs 37, 51, 75, 77, 78, 80, 90)
- effective academic and pedagogic staff development at the partner institution (paragraphs 31, 33, 37, 51, 75, 77, 78, 80)
- quality of the analysis underpinning the regular monitoring and reporting on the partnership (paragraphs 40, 51, 56, 63).

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

- development of amended memoranda of cooperation in advance of programme validation in accordance with guidance in the Code of practice and ensuring the completeness of information shared with the partner institution (paragraphs 25, 26, 27, 41, 51)
- further development of capacity-building strategies by a greater involvement of partnership staff in quality assurance procedures (paragraphs 66, 100)
- securing a clear staffing base at Staffordshire and the clarification of the roles of staff supporting the partnership (paragraphs 41, 51, 58)
- ensuring that students receive comprehensive information regarding procedures covering appeals, complaints and student discipline (paragraph 108).

118 The audit team considered that, in general terms, Staffordshire was operating the partnership with an appropriate regard for the advice contained in the *Code of practice* and made effective use of that advice. In those few instances where aspects of Staffordshire's practice could be improved in the context of the *Code of practice*, these are identified in the main report and among the points for further consideration.

119 The audit confirmed Staffordshire's view of the link as set out in the Briefing Paper. In particular the team noted Staffordshire's view that this link is not representative of its normal procedures and processes, as it is the only overseas award offered on the basis of distance learning, delivered and assessed entirely by Staffordshire staff using web-based distance learning. Nevertheless, Staffordshire's quality assurance procedures encompass this provision and the findings of the audit confirm the generally satisfactory way in which this particular collaborative link is managed. It therefore provides evidence to support a conclusion of confidence in Staffordshire's stewardship of academic standards and oversight of the quality of the student experience in its overseas collaborative provision.

Appendix A

Staffordshire University's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with the University of Madras, India

Staffordshire University welcomes the very positive QAA report on the collaborative arrangements between SU's Geography Department and the Department of Geography at University of Madras, India. It is especially pleasing to note the many positive features identified by the audit team in paragraph 116 and their overall confidence in this collaboration.

In particular, staff are encouraged that the report highlights the relevant opportunities provided for students working in public bodies and NGOs in India and also that it considers there to be effective academic and pedagogic staff development as a result of the partnership.

The University is grateful to the audit team for their constructive comments and is already addressing the points identified for consideration in paragraph 117. Indeed, all of the four points mentioned are currently being dealt with as part of SU's quinquennial Partnership Review process.

Appendix B

Student enrolments for 2008-09

MA Sustainable Development - 30

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