Audit of overseas provision

The Open University and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

January 2011

Introduction

1   This report considers the collaborative arrangement between The Open University and LASALLE College of the Arts, 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 The Open University was coordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Mrs M Drowley and Professor D Timms (auditors), with Mr M Cott, 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 the 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   LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore (LASALLE) became an accredited partner of The Open University (the University) in May 2004. The following provision is offered by LASALLE under its validation agreement with the University.

- Fourteen programmes leading to the award of BA (Hons) in: Acting; Arts Management; Dance; Design Communication; Fashion; Film; Fine Arts; Interior Design; Media Arts; Music; Musical Theatre; Product Design; Technical Theatre; and Theatre and Performance.
- Five programmes leading to the award of MA in: Arts and Cultural Management; Art Therapy; Asian Art Histories; Design; and Fine Arts.

In addition, LASALLE students were completing 10 University-validated programmes for which the validation period has come to an end. At the time of the audit, some 1,780 students were pursuing University awards at LASALLE.

11   LASALLE was founded in 1984 as a centre for the visual and performing arts. In 2007, it moved from the suburbs to a high-profile, purpose-built campus in the city centre. LASALLE's website and other sources of publicity currently emphasise that the institution is embarking on a period of academic renewal and artistic reorientation. The focus on western cultural practices that prevailed when the partnership was first established appears to be shifting towards an emphasis on Singapore's role as a cultural hub, bringing together western and Asian traditions. The change in emphasis coincided with the sudden departure of LASALLE's president and two other senior members of staff in 2007-08. A new president was appointed in September 2008, new members of the senior management team followed and a new strategic plan has since been developed.

12   LASALLE is categorised within Singapore's educational system as a private education institution and operates autonomously with financial support from the Ministry of Education. Without degree awarding powers, LASALLE has, since 1993, entered into collaborative arrangements with various international universities to deliver franchised programmes. All these arrangements have now terminated, leaving the University as the sole awarding body. LASALLE was attracted to partnership with the University by the opportunity it presented for LASALLE itself to develop its own academic programmes under a validation arrangement with a UK higher education institution. The Singapore government subsidises funding of students for the two-year Singapore Diploma that forms an integral part of the University undergraduate awards offered by LASALLE.

13   At the time of the audit, LASALLE was in discussion with the University and the Ministry of Education in Singapore regarding an alternative awarding body. The University and LASALLE were proceeding on the basis of 'business as usual' while bearing in mind that the 2011-12 intake of University students might be the last and actively considering potential exit strategies.

14   LASALLE is one of the University's largest partners and is one of two located in Singapore, the other of which has acquired taught degree awarding powers. As a result, the validation of provision at this second partner is coming to an end. The Briefing Paper stated that the link with LASALLE can be considered representative of the University's normal procedures and processes for overseas collaborations involving validation of taught programmes originated by partners and leading to University awards.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

15   The University takes full responsibility for academic standards and delegates to its partners functions associated with assuring the quality of University programmes they deliver. The degree to which the University delegates responsibility for quality assurance is determined by the maturity of the partner. In September 2006, the University introduced two progressive categories of institutional partnership which it was piloting at the time of the 2005 QAA Audit of collaborative provision: associate institution and partner institution (see paragraphs 22 and 27). These progressive categories, which subsequently constituted a significant part of the University's response to the audit report, were designed to provide greater support to institutions operating under validation agreements for the first time. They were thus intended to address the concern that the substantial degree of authority delegated to partners rendered the University's framework insufficiently robust and rigorous to enable it to have full confidence in its effectiveness for assuring the quality of provision and the academic standards of its awards in validated programmes.

16   The University's governance arrangements apply equally across the full range of its academic provision. They incorporate several changes that emerged from a review of the University's governance, in part undertaken in response to the 2005 Audit of collaborative provision report. Senate is the University's senior academic committee with overall responsibility for academic standards and quality. It delegates authority for standards and quality of collaborative provision to the Curriculum Awards and Validation Committee (CAVC) which replaced the Curriculum and Awards Board in October 2006. CAVC has a more explicit role in respect of partnership approval and validation than its predecessor, together with terms of reference and membership designed to enable the University to maintain an overview of standards and quality across its collaborative provision. The Validation Committee (VALC), a sub-committee of CAVC, is responsible for initial consideration of institutional approval and review and reports its findings to CAVC. Its membership and terms of reference have also been reviewed to strengthen its role in forming judgements about the quality of potential and existing partners. Members are drawn from a range of stakeholders in higher education, including staff of the University and partner institutions, together with representatives from industry, commerce, the professions and the public sector.

17   During 2006, extensive revisions were also made to the Handbook for Validated Awards (the Handbook) to address, among other things, the 2005 audit report's concerns about the model of institutional accreditation and the degree of delegation it entailed (see paragraphs 22 and 27). The current version of the Handbook contains detailed procedures on institutional approval; institutional review; programme approval; programme review; annual monitoring; external examiners; exam boards; staff development and quality enhancement activities. Information about all collaborative partnerships is published on the University's main website, while a dedicated website provides further guidance for partners. The audit identified the dedicated website, which provides a network of support, guidance and information to collaborative partners, as a positive feature of this partnership.

18   The Vice-Chancellor takes overall responsibility for management of collaborative provision. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum and Qualifications) assists the Vice-Chancellor in respect of taught provision. Open University Validation Services (OUVS) is a unit of the University through which it validates awards for academic institutions, professional bodies, companies and other organisations without degree awarding powers. OUVS manages approval and review of institutions and validation of their programmes on behalf of the University. The Director of Validation Services reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum and Qualifications) and leads the team managing operational aspects of partnerships. Each partner is appointed a Quality and Partnerships Manager (QPM) from

within OUVS. The faculty within which provision is located is represented by nominated Academic Reviewers (see paragraphs 44-48). This role was accorded considerable significance in the University's action plan to address the concerns of the 2005 audit report.

19   The audit team concluded that the University's policies and procedures offer a sound basis for managing overseas collaborative arrangements.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation (or agent)

20   The University defines four strands of collaborative partnership. The partnership with LASALLE falls within the second strand: validation of taught courses originated by partner institutions leading to University awards.

21   The University does not have a dedicated strategy for acquiring new overseas collaborative partnerships. Instead, it responds to approaches made by potential partners and assesses how capable they are of engaging successfully with the University through one of its partnership models. In LASALLE's case, an approach by the partner institution coincided with the University's desire to expand operations in Singapore. At the time, LASALLE was keen to pursue taught degree awarding powers and was aware that the University had successfully supported another Singaporean partner in achieving this goal.

22   Institutional approval is the process by which the University approves a potential collaborative partner, signalling that it provides a suitable environment for offering validated awards and exercising associated quality assurance functions. Institutions must meet the University's general principles for institutional approval. Since 2006, the status of 'associate institution' has been awarded following a successful process of initial institutional approval.

23   The process for approving a potential collaborative partner has not changed substantially since the approval of LASALLE in May 2004, except in respect of the introduction of the administrative audit (see paragraph 24). The early stage of the institutional approval process includes an advisory visit, designed to establish the viability of the potential partnership and a facilitation visit, designed to provide advice to the University and the aspiring partner, prior to the institutional approval and validation event. LASALLE received a facilitation visit in October 2003. Panel members concluded that LASALLE represented an exciting opportunity for the University but that there were significant risks. A strong developmental dimension to the proposed partnership was recommended to mitigate these.

24   The administrative audit was introduced to assess the administrative infrastructure of the institution in order to determine the extent to which it provides the necessary underpinning to support validated programmes. It sits slightly apart from other components of the approval process and may generate conditions and recommendations to be addressed as the process unfolds. Although LASALLE did not undergo an administrative audit as such in 2004, elements of it were incorporated into other stages of the process. Thorough scrutiny of this sort was applied explicitly to LASALLE during 2005 following the audit and again prior to institutional re-approval in October 2008.

25   In May 2004, LASALLE successfully completed the institutional approval and validation event, which constitutes the final stage of the institutional approval process. It thus became an 'accredited institution' of the University, authorised to deliver a suite of programmes, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, under a validation agreement. Institutions must meet the University's five general principles for institutional approval as set

out in the Handbook. The institutional approval report provides evidence that LASALLE met four of these. Less persuasive was the evidence for robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement that are informed by the Academic Infrastructure. Consequently, approval was conditional upon addressing this matter.

Institutional review

26   Institutional review, conducted at LASALLE in 2009, provides the University with assurance that an institution continues to maintain a suitable environment for the conduct of approved programmes, and is effective in the assurance and enhancement of quality and standards. Since 2006 it has also provided the opportunity for the University to review the approval status of institutions and the level of faculty support and other University support deemed appropriate. The partner institution contributes a self-evaluation document to the process which is also intended to be developmental.

27   The advanced partnership category of 'partner institution' was introduced in 2006 along with the category of 'associate institution' for newly approved partners. The category of 'partner institution' is reserved for more mature partners that meet additional explicit criteria demonstrated at institutional re-approval. Progression from associate institution to partner institution status is not automatic and institutions that have achieved partner institution status may lose it if they can no longer demonstrate they are meeting the criteria. The introduction of the two partnership categories of 'associate institution' and 'partner institution', with the opportunity to progress from the former to the latter at institutional re-approval, formed part of the bedrock of the University's response to concerns expressed in the 2005 audit report about the degree to which it was delegating authority concerning standards and quality to partner institutions.

28   The University informed the audit team that LASALLE is regarded as a mature institution. As such, the audit team would have expected LASALLE to have been redesignated as a 'partner institution' under the new regime when it went through institutional re-approval in 2009. LASALLE, however, continues to be categorised and known as an 'accredited partner', the status accorded to it when it was first approved in 2004 (see paragraph 25). The audit team heard from senior managers at LASALLE that the term 'accredited partner' would carry more weight in Singapore than the term 'partner institution'.

29   The full report of the administrative audit conducted in 2008 was not made available to the institutional review panel who saw only the conclusions of the report. The panel therefore considered that the exercise had not been conducted in a timely manner. Since then, the University has decided to incorporate explicit conditions as well as recommendations from administrative audit within institutional review reports. This step has been taken because administrative matters raised in administrative audits were not being followed up as systematically as matters arising from institutional review.

30   Re-approval of LASALLE was granted subject to two conditions: submission of a staff development plan; and submission of the revised strategic plan with accompanying revised committee and governance structure. The report was silent in respect of LASALLE's fulfilment, or otherwise, of the explicit criteria set out in the Handbook for acquiring or retaining the status of partner institution. As noted in paragraph 25, LASALLE continues to be described as an 'accredited' institution. It is sometimes also referred to as an 'approved' institution, a generic term that covers both associate and partner institutions.

31   As part of the 2006 action plan, the University has adopted a fresh approach to institutional re-approval, regarding it as a two-year process rather than a one-off event. The change has been well received at LASALLE, where its developmental emphasis has

been found to be beneficial. The process entailed the University's Quality and Partnership Manager (QPM) attending examination boards and academic committees, as well as serving on the institutional re-approval panel, representing OUVS. The panel was chaired by the Faculty of Arts representative who had also chaired the original institutional approval panel and subsequently took on the role of Academic Reviewer in 2010. The University asserted that this did not constitute a conflict of interest as the roles were held sequentially, not simultaneously. Other members of the panel, constituting the majority, were external to the University.

32   Supplementary information, provided to QAA following submission of the action plan, committed the University to ensuring that all accreditation (now institutional approval) or institutional re-approval panels would be chaired by a University member of staff, with University majority membership. Given the concerns of the 2005 audit report that University academic staff were under-represented on panels, and given that the chair was the sole representative of University academic staff on both occasions and that University staff were in the minority, the present audit team concluded that this left the University vulnerable to the same criticism. A self-evaluation conducted by OUVS in August 2009, six months after LASALLE's institutional re-approval, recognised this shortcoming and set out new recommendations: that panels should be chaired by a member of the University; that a member of VALC should be on the panel; and that University staff should form the majority. The audit team noted that there was no recommendation, however, in respect of University academic staff representation on panels.

33   The Handbook sets out the University's principles concerning local recognition in the host country. In 2010, LASALLE successfully acquired mandatory approval by the recently established Council for Private Education in Singapore. LASALLE was, at the time of the audit visit, preparing to submit its application for certification under EduTrust, in June 2011. Although voluntary, EduTrust certification is likely to prove significant in terms of reputation and is essential in terms of overseas student recruitment.

34   The audit team concluded that the introduction of progressive categories of partnership status by the University has strengthened its ability to safeguard standards, but noted that the categories and their associated criteria need to be applied consistently, systematically and explicitly to partners who were first approved prior to the introduction of the new regime (see paragraph 30).

Programme approval

35   Principles, procedures and guidelines for programme validation and re-validation are set out in the Handbook. Documentary records seen by the audit team provided evidence of the effective operation of these procedures at LASALLE. Embedded within the principles is the requirement to consider comparability in respect of learning outcomes, transferable skills and external reference points.

36   Programme approval for collaborative provision delivered under validation agreements adheres to the following broad sequence of events, although timescales may vary according to the partner's maturity and variations in internal processes. Firstly, internal approval of the programme proposal is secured within the partner institution. A programme development team is then established, and work commences in preparation for a validation planning meeting. The University and the collaborative partner may each nominate a representative to serve as a process panel member for both internal and external stages of validation. Where possible, the University nominee is a member of the relevant University faculty. The validation documentation is prepared and presented to a preliminary validation meeting, the report of which guides the preparation for the final validation meeting,

scheduled after an appropriate interval. The University encourages nominated observers from collaborative partner institutions to attend final validation meetings for developmental purposes and/or to assist the panel with factual information where appropriate. Potential outcomes of approval include: full-term approval; approval for a shorter, specified period; non-approval; or conditional approval which may also be for a full term or a shorter period. At LASALLE, validations and re-validations of cognate subjects have usually been grouped together, enabling the panel to pay attention to each individual award while also identifying cross-subject issues. Outcomes of events have generally been positive and any conditions or recommendations have been dealt with promptly.

37   Prior to February 2010, validation panels had delegated authority to approve programmes on behalf of the Validation Committee. Approval was a matter of report. Evaluation in 2009 led the University to conclude that the Validation Committee should make final decisions about approval, on the basis of recommendations from validation panels.

38   Procedures for making amendments to programmes are set out in the Handbook. The distinction between major and minor amendments has been clarified recently: major changes usually require a change to the programme specification, whereas minor changes do not. However, in the samples provided to the audit team, the template still required minor changes to be reported under the section dealing with review of the programme specification. As a partner institution, LASALLE is empowered, and indeed expected, to make minor changes in response to outcomes of monitoring and evaluation and as a manifestation of its commitment to continuous improvement. All such changes are required to be reported within annual monitoring reports. LASALLE routinely fulfils this responsibility. As LASALLE has not been granted delegated authority for re-validation, major changes would require the approval of the University, with OUVS managing the process on its behalf. Within the sample of annual programme monitoring reports provided to the audit team, such developments were often signalled in advance.

39   The audit team concluded that the University's comprehensive and thorough principles, procedures and guidelines for programme approval have proved effective in enabling LASALLE to develop a suite of well-founded programmes leading to University awards.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

40   The written agreement between the University and LASALLE covers a wide range of pertinent matters in line with the *Code of practice*.

41   Written agreements were reissued in 2006 to incorporate changes in terminology and other requirements. The University and LASALLE signed the updated agreement in October 2006 just prior to the implementation of the new progressive categories of associate and partner institution (see paragraphs 22 and 27). Attached to the most recent written agreement is a letter dated 10 January 2010, sent to the President of LASALLE following institutional review. This confirmed LASALLE's continued status as an 'accredited' (rather than 'partner') institution of the University. This perpetuates a mismatch between nomenclature used by the University in the written agreement and that used in documentation supporting the relationship.

42   Coverage of the written agreement between the University and LASALLE appears comprehensive except in two respects: firstly the role of external examiners in relation to academic standards is not made explicit; secondly the stipulation that the full cost of residual obligations falls upon the partner in the event of termination may not be adequate in

circumstances where the University might be deemed to be at fault or in breach of the agreement.

43   The audit team concluded that the clarity of the written agreement in establishing the respective responsibilities of the University and LASALLE would be enhanced by aligning the agreement with significant changes made to the University's nomenclature in 2006. The University should ensure the consistency of nomenclature in key documents to avoid all doubt concerning the degree of authority delegated to its collaborative partners.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

44   Most day-to-day contact between the University and LASALLE is channelled through OUVS. The University's QPM, who reports to the Director of OUVS, liaises with LASALLE's Director of the Division of Academic Planning and Policy and other support staff, as appropriate. The Briefing Paper stated that LASALLE also works closely with the Academic Reviewer from the Faculty of Arts. The audit team was told that this tends not to occur on a day-to-day basis but to be concentrated during the time when the Academic Reviewer is visiting Singapore.

45   Along with the progressive categories of partnership status, the role of Academic Reviewer constitutes a key element of the University's response to the 2005 audit report. The role of the Academic Reviewer is designed to assist in addressing concerns including: the model of institutional approval and the extent and nature of delegated authority it entails; the need to make institutional approval (and review) and validation (and re-validation) arrangements more systematic; and concerns about the University overview of quality and standards of validated programmes. The progress report submitted to QAA in March 2007 confirmed that more than 60 Academic Reviewers had been appointed from University faculties and that formal agreement about the nature and amount of engagement had been achieved across all partners. It stated that arrangements had been effective since September 2006 and were captured in a revised version of the Handbook for 2006-07.

46   References were made in the documentation provided to the audit team to the evolving role of Academic Reviewer and the particular challenges of implementing it with overseas partners. During the UK visit, the team became aware that the Academic Reviewer role had not operated as intended at LASALLE prior to January 2010. Instead, a range of activities, usually undertaken by University academic staff visiting LASALLE for other purposes, had been designated 'Academic Reviewer activities' by the University. The University and LASALLE both confirmed that LASALLE had primarily been concerned about cost and value for money, given that the University passed costs on to the partner institution. Modifications have been made recently both to the role and the way it operates, including the question of who bears costs. Instead of charging LASALLE for a set number of Academic Reviewer days per year, the University now agrees a range of Academic Reviewer activities and absorbs the cost within the validation fee. Fresh guidance on the role was issued in 2010, when the new arrangements came into effect.

47   Responsibility for admissions, maintenance of student records, provision of student support and opportunities for student representation and feedback all rest with LASALLE. The University monitors these aspects of provision through institutional review, programme review and annual monitoring processes.

48   The audit team concluded that arrangements for day-to-day management have been strengthened recently, but that those prevailing between 2006 and 2010 fell short of commitments made by the University in response to the 2005 audit report, potentially putting standards and quality at risk in the early years of a new partnership, which was considered by the University to represent an exciting opportunity for the University but with significant risks attached.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual monitoring

49   The University considers annual monitoring to be a key aspect of the responsibility for quality assurance delegated to LASALLE. The annual institutional overview LASALLE is required to produce covers changes to administrative structure made since the last review; a statement of compliance; all annual programme evaluations; and a flowchart illustrating the monitoring process.

50   The sample of annual programme monitoring reports provided to the audit team indicated that LASALLE programme teams adhere to the process set out in the Handbook, making good use of the University's comprehensive template. A draft report, including an action plan, is produced for LASALLE's Academic Standards Committee. Institutional issues are identified and an accompanying action plan is devised by the Committee and submitted to Academic Board for onward transmission to OUVS. The University QPM scrutinises reports and drafts feedback for a working group that provides feedback to LASALLE and other partners and reports to the University Validation Committee. An overall report is then prepared for CAVC. OUVS also prepares annual subject overviews for the Validation Committee and relevant faculties.

51   Documentary evidence seen by the audit team demonstrated that these processes had been conducted conscientiously in relation to LASALLE. Scrutiny of the range of partner reports by the working group provides a means of addressing effectively concerns raised in the audit report about instances in QPMs' reports on annual monitoring where issues were recorded as having been raised in previous annual reports, and instances where no action taken had been reported on serious matters relating to quality and standards. Associated concerns that failure to act has no consequences for partners and that the University has limited sanctions available, beyond triggering re-validation or institutional review, have been addressed by the introduction of a scaled set of sanctions that can be applied to collaborative partners if and when necessary.

52   The issue of greatest magnitude, namely the departure of LASALLE's president and two other members of the senior management team did not arise through annual monitoring processes and was dealt with urgently by senior executives and senior faculty staff of the University. At institutional re-approval it was noted that three issues had arisen, over a three-year period of annual monitoring, that required immediate action: the brevity of the institutional executive summary; staff retention; and staff development. In all cases immediate action had been taken by LASALLE and had been signed off by the University. Staff development was the subject of conditions at both institutional approval and institutional review, as well as featuring in annual programme monitoring as a matter requiring immediate action.

53   The audit team concluded that the University has sound procedures in place for annual monitoring and is rigorous in checking that LASALLE complies with these. The team noted repeated references to shortcomings in staff development at LASALLE, suggesting that recommendations for immediate action and responses thereto were not proving

sufficient to deal effectively with problems. Senior staff at LASALLE conceded that staff development had never been a strength of the institution. This matter draws further attention to the ineffective implementation of the Academic Reviewer role (see paragraph 46) in relation to LASALLE, since Academic Reviewers might be expected to fulfil a significant developmental brief, including staff development, for a newly approved institution.

Periodic review

54   Periodic review is carried out via re-validation. Re-validation follows a process similar to validation (see paragraph 35). It varies according to the degree of change proposed to established provision. The audit team concluded that the University assured itself that full and thoughtful consideration had been given to key issues by LASALLE and its revalidation panels.

Staffing and staff development

55   Teaching staff are appointed by LASALLE and arrangements for staffing and staff development are evaluated via institutional approval, institutional review and annual monitoring processes. Specific staffing for programmes is evaluated via validation, re-validation and annual monitoring processes. In addition, the audit team was informed that the Academic Reviewer now receives CVs of new staff to increase oversight of staffing in-year. The team saw evidence that both partners have benefited from four staff development events, provided by University staff at LASALLE over the last two years. In addition, LASALLE staff have participated in generic University and faculty events.

56   The audit team was concerned, however, to note how frequently staff development features as a condition of institutional (re-)approval and as a matter requiring immediate attention in annual programme monitoring (see paragraphs 30 and 52). There is, for example, no mention in the institutional re-approval report of the key role of Academic Reviewers, introduced three years earlier, despite the focus of the panel on staff development and the recommendation of the preceding administrative audit that further urgent discussions should be held about implementing the Academic Reviewer role.

57   LASALLE has drawn up a comprehensive staff development strategy, but still does not consider that it has made sufficient headway in this respect. The University should ensure that it addresses the staff development needs of collaborative partners promptly and effectively, especially in the case of new partnerships.

Student admissions

58   The University assured itself of LASALLE's capability to take delegated responsibility for the conduct of applications and admissions through the administrative audits conducted in 2005 and 2008.

59   Comprehensive entry requirements for LASALLE students are set out in prospectuses and programme-specific leaflets produced by LASALLE. The University's template for programme specifications has only recently been amended to cover entry requirements. In keeping with the University's policy on open access, guidance on entry requirements within the Handbook is permissive.

Assessment requirements

60   Responsibility for assessment processes is delegated to LASALLE. The University's regulatory framework for assessment is set out in the Handbook. At institutional approval, LASALLE was required to submit its own overarching regulatory framework. All validated programmes, approved at that time or thereafter, must comply with this. LASALLE's first submission was not sufficiently extensive or comprehensive to meet the University's expectations. Consequently, approval was made conditional upon submission of a revised regulatory framework. VALC noted in July 2004 that the panel had been impressed with the speed and the quality of LASALLE's response. At institutional review in 2009, academic policies and regulations were found to be appropriate, with the necessary systems to support them. Generic assessment methods for broad genres of work are contained in LASALLE's programme specifications, while programme handbooks contain student-friendly detail. The University has not ensured that LASALLE has met its requirement that there should be a clear process for dealing with suspected cases of academic misconduct, prior to matters being brought to the attention of boards of examiners. LASALLE also carries responsibility for assessment boards, although the Academic Reviewer now attends and the QPM attended meetings in the year leading up to institutional review. The Academic Reviewer's report on the 2010 assessment boards described them as 'painstaking and rigorous'.

61   With the exception of the procedure for dealing with cases of suspected academic misconduct prior to consideration by boards of examiners, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements with LASALLE for the conduct of assessment processes are well-founded, comprehensive and robust.

External examining

62   The University delegates to LASALLE responsibility for appointing external examiners. The Director of OUVS approves external examiner appointments after checking nominations against criteria contained in the Handbook and following approval by the relevant faculty. LASALLE is responsible for induction and briefing of new externals which takes the form of a well-attended, week-long event, culminating in the assessment boards. The audit team identified the week-long induction programme for new external examiners as a positive feature in this partnership. In addition, the University holds annual briefing sessions in the UK for new external examiners and issues them with an informative leaflet.

63   The University has further strengthened direct links with external examiners since the 2005 audit by ensuring that external examiners' reports are addressed to the Vice-Chancellor and sent simultaneously to the University and LASALLE. External examiners are required to respond to a specific question about the comparability of academic standards. In the documentation sampled, all of LASALLE's external examiners returned adequate positive responses in this respect. The QPM identifies matters of concern, consults with the relevant faculty and refers to the Director of OUVS. LASALLE's routine responses are received as part of annual programme monitoring. At the UK visit, staff who met the audit team appeared unaware of LASALLE's feedback about some UK-based external examiners who appear to them to be out of touch with Asian cultural contexts. The audit team was assured by staff at LASALLE, however, that the problem was resolved in consultation with the Academic Reviewer.

64   The audit team concluded that the external examining system, as applied to LASALLE, has benefited from measures taken by the University to strengthen direct links with external examiners and is operating effectively.

Certificates and transcripts

65   The University issues award certificates. LASALLE creates and issues transcripts subject to University approval of local systems and in line with guidance contained in the Handbook and the *Code of practice*. Attention was given to this matter at the administrative audits in 2005 and 2008. The University and LASALLE confirmed that LASALLE's transcripts will be fully compliant with the requirements of the Bologna Agreement in respect of Diploma Supplements by 2012-13.

Section 4: Information

Student information

66   During administrative audit, the University checks that its generic student's guide leaflet is distributed to new students at registration. Student handbooks are required as part of validation and re-validation documentation. Minimum contents for student handbooks are prescribed in general terms in the Handbook and in greater detail in guidance on the OUVS website. In response, LASALLE has produced substantial student handbooks written in a student-friendly style. The sample provided to the audit team revealed some inconsistencies and failures to meet fully the minimum requirements of the University. These had not been detected by the University at validation and re-validation. The student handbook for BA (Hons) Arts Management was the only one to include a staff list with contact details. None indicated teaching staff associated with particular modules. Undergraduate handbooks contained more of the required information than postgraduate handbooks, which lacked basic information on matters such as attendance or the consequences of failure. None made reference to definitions and consequences of academic misconduct nor referred students to the overarching regulations where this information could be found. The University should audit partner information for students to ensure it consistently meets expectations of the University, especially in respect of key academic procedures such as investigation of suspected cases of academic misconduct.

67   LASALLE has its own procedures for student discipline, academic appeals and complaints, approved by the University to ensure that such matters are dealt with equitably between the University and LASALLE and between LASALLE and other University partners. It appears not to have parallel procedures for dealing with cases of academic misconduct (see paragraph 60). Students can appeal to the University once LASALLE's procedures have been exhausted. The audit team saw evidence of students availing themselves of this option.

68   There is no requirement for systematic contact between University staff and students between approval/validation and review/re-validation. Neither the Academic Reviewer nor the external examiner is required to meet students, although either might and sometimes does choose to do so. The University should consider requiring Academic Reviewers and external examiners to meet systematically with students during visits to collaborative partners.

69   The audit team concluded that, while the quality of information for students at LASALLE is generally high, the University's claim that all programme handbooks are checked against the Handbook at (re-)validation was not substantiated.

Publicity and marketing

70   University administrative staff check all material produced by LASALLE in connection with University awards. This includes the website and the prospectus, although the audit team was informed that the latter is only received post publication each year. The University recommended in its 2008 administrative audit that the relationship and the full meaning of accreditation and validation in promotional literature should be more clearly described and that greater use of the University logo would emphasise the partnership. In the examples provided to the team, information about the relationship between the University and LASALLE was brief, hard to find and occasionally inaccurate. The University should strengthen its procedures for checking the accuracy of publicity and marketing materials of its collaborative partners.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

71   The link does not include a formal arrangement for students to undertake part of their studies in the UK.

Conclusion

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

- the dedicated website which provides a network of support, guidance and information to collaborative partners (paragraph 17)
- the comprehensive and thorough principles, procedures and guidelines for programme approval which have proved effective in enabling LASALLE to develop a suite of well-founded programmes leading to University awards (paragraph 39)
- the well-attended, week-long induction programme for new external examiners (paragraph 62).

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

- implementing its policies and procedures fully and explicitly in every partnership especially in respect of providing developmental support for new partners, based on risk and need (paragraphs 32, 34, 48, 56, 60)
- ensuring consistency of nomenclature in key documents to avoid doubt concerning the degree of authority delegated by the University to a particular collaborative partner (paragraphs 41-43)
- addressing staff development needs of collaborative partners promptly and effectively, especially in the case of new partners (paragraphs 53, 56, 57)
- auditing information for students to ensure it consistently meets expectations of the University, especially in respect of key academic procedures such as investigation of suspected cases of academic misconduct (paragraph 66)
- requiring Academic Reviewers and external examiners to meet systematically with students during visits to collaborative partners (paragraph 68)
- strengthening procedures for checking accuracy of publicity and marketing materials (paragraph 70).

74   The audit team considered that the University was operating the partnership with an appropriate regard for the advice contained in the *Code of practice*. Where the team found

aspects of the University's practice that could be improved in the context of the *Code of practice* these are identified in the main report and the points for further consideration.

75   The audit confirmed certain aspects of the University's view of the link as described in the Briefing Paper. In particular, the audit team noted the University's view that this link is typical of its overseas collaborative partnerships operating under validation agreements. The Briefing Paper was less helpful in its presentation of the way in which the University had implemented the Academic Reviewer role in this particular partnership. If typical, the failure to fully implement commitments, regarded as central to safeguarding of standards and oversight of the quality of the student experience, raises concerns about the effectiveness of the University's management of overseas collaborative arrangements.

Appendix A

The Open University's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

We welcome QAA's audit report and its findings that The Open University has 'comprehensive and thorough principles, procedures and guidelines for programme approval' at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. We were also pleased to note the audit team's observations that the University's arrangements with LASALLE for the conduct of assessment processes are 'well-founded, comprehensive and robust'.

We have developed an action plan in response to the areas for consideration with a number of measures already implemented, for example, consistent use of the designation 'Partner Institution'.

Following a review of the role of Academic Reviewer in 2009, the OU has made improvements. The role was first established in 2006-07, but proved challenging in this instance due to the distance between the two institutions. As a result, we sought to meet the aims of the Academic Reviewer role through alternative means. These included the provision of seminars at LASALLE to support key areas of development and a partnership conference in 2008 at which Academic Reviewers and Arts colleagues from partner institutions came together over two days. We believe these activities were successful in contributing to the development aspects of the Academic Reviewer relationship with the College.

In response to the internal evaluation in 2009, the role has been enhanced with the Academic Reviewer now attending a sample of examination boards at each Partner or Associated institution, including LASALLE. The Reviewer's other engagements now include a particular focus on follow-up to recommendations from approval and review processes and on matters arising from annual monitoring. The University has since established the Academic Reviewer role in a consistent manner with the position firmly embedded at LASALLE.

These enhancements to the role will better ensure that areas such as staff development are more systematically supported, helping LASALLE to make improvements, particularly where immediate needs or recurring issues are identified.

We shall continue to evaluate and further enhance our arrangements for assuring standards and quality in validated provision at LASALLE College of the Arts and throughout our network of collaborative provision partners.

We would like to thank LASALLE College of Arts for its continued support and cooperation in the partnership and for the assistance of staff and students in the audit process.

Appendix B

Student numbers for 2010-11

BA Hons Acting	27
BA Hons Advertising Design	3
BA Hons Arts Management	118
BA Hons Dance	13
BA Hons Design Communication	385
BA Hons Fashion	276
BA Hons Fashion Communication	1
BA Hons Fashion Design	5
BA Hons Fashion Management	2
BA Hons Fashion Textiles	1
BA Hons Film	73
BA Hons Fine Arts	190
BA Hons Graphic Design	1
BA Hons Interior Design	164
BA Hons Media Arts	123
BA Hons Music	106
BA Hons Music Technology	1
BA Hons Musical Theatre	26
BA Hons Product Design	55
BA Hons Technical Theatre	21
BA Hons Theatre and Performance	11
DipHE Communication Design	13
MA Art Therapy	29
MA Arts and Cultural Management	12
MA Asian Art Histories	15
MA Fine Arts	22
MA Art History	4