



Audit of overseas provision

**University of Plymouth and the
International Maritime Institute, Delhi**

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Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of Plymouth and the International Maritime Institute, Greater Noida, Delhi.

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 report on the University of Plymouth was published by QAA in March 2005; this was supplemented by a collaborative provision audit report, published in May 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 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 and with students. The audit of the University of Plymouth was coordinated for QAA by Ms J Holt, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The auditors were Professor Paul Periton and Professor Graham Chesters, with Ms J Holt acting as audit 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.

The background to the collaborative link

Nature of the link

6 The collaboration between the University of Plymouth (Plymouth) and the International Maritime Institute (IMI) was first established in 2003, and involves articulation arrangements between HND programmes (leading to Edexcel awards) at IMI and degree programmes at Plymouth, as follows:

- HND Nautical Studies (IMI) and BSc (Hons) Marine Studies (Plymouth)
- HND Marine Engineering (IMI) and BSc (Hons) Marine and Composites Technology (Plymouth).

7 The articulation arrangements provide for entry with advanced standing to the final stage (stage 4) of the degree programmes. The HND qualifications at the required standard are treated as equivalent to successful completion of stages 1 and 2 of the degree programmes; stage 3 is an optional industry placement. The degree programmes are respectively the responsibility of the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Technology, although they will shortly be brought under the remit of a single faculty as part of a current academic reorganisation.

8 IMI is a specialist private college in Greater Noida (outside Delhi) providing training for the merchant shipping industry. It was established in 1991 in response to manpower shortages in the industry and is located in northern India, traditionally a recruiting ground for the merchant navy. Prior to the start of the HND programmes, IMI's core activity was the training of deck and engineering officers, and it has formal recognition by the Indian government as a training provider for the merchant navy. In 2008, IMI had a total of 250 students.

9 The first students transferred from IMI to Plymouth in 2005-06 and, to date, 17 students have elected to 'top up' their Edexcel HND qualification to a Plymouth degree through the articulation arrangements, although only one student transferred in 2008-09. Four students have joined the BSc (Hons) Marine Studies and 13 have joined the BSc (Hons) Marine and Composites Technology.

10 As the link does not entail collaborative programme delivery in India, obtaining approval from AICTE has not been necessary, although IMI has AICTE approval for its own degree in marine engineering. With regard to professional accreditation in the UK, the BSc (Hons) Marine and Composites Technology is recognised by four professional bodies; students transferring from IMI qualify for accredited status on the same basis as students completing the whole programme at Plymouth.

11 There is no longer any professional accreditation associated with the BSc (Hons) Marine Studies, although it used to include an accredited training scheme which has since been withdrawn. This has reduced the appeal of the degree to IMI students, and has led to a decline in the numbers transferring to Plymouth under this articulation arrangement. The potential for establishing an articulation to the BSc (Hons) Shipping and Logistics (which currently has students from IMI who applied as individuals) is being pursued as an alternative progression route. The possibility is also being explored of extending the collaboration to include provision in digital art and technology at IMI's 'sister institution', the Integrated Management College (IMC). This was opened in 2007 on a nearby campus, although it has recently moved to premises in Delhi. So far, no arrangement has been formalised.

12 Plymouth has two other partnership links in India, both relating to articulation arrangements, and it currently has 13 such arrangements on its collaborative provision register. These all involve overseas links and are largely focused on South-East Asia. In 2007-08, around 50 students gained entry to Plymouth programmes through overseas articulation arrangements. The Briefing Paper indicated that, although the link with IMI forms only a small part of Plymouth's collaborative provision, it was seen as representative of the University's approach to articulation arrangements in the international context.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

13 In the 2007 interim review of its Corporate Plan, Plymouth reinforced its objective 'to seek and build proactive international partnerships providing internationalisation of the student experience, development of collaborative programmes and targeted international recruitment'. The audit team was told by senior University staff that given Plymouth was not well placed geographically for recruiting international students, providing students with an international experience was more difficult than in some other universities. One mechanism being employed was to put in place 'sensible' articulation arrangements that brought students to Plymouth for their final year. These arrangements were being targeted in areas of subject strength, such as marine-related studies, which had been designated by the University as an area for investment. Thus it was put to the team that the link with IMI formed a small, but nonetheless important, part of a much broader vision for the University.

14 Within Plymouth's comprehensive typology of partnerships a clear distinction is drawn between articulation, which applies to programmes, and accreditation of prior learning, which applies to individuals. An articulation arrangement grants specific credit and advanced standing to students who complete a named programme of study pursued in a partner organisation (usually overseas), allowing them to join a Plymouth programme at a specified stage.

15 The procedures governing the initial contact with a potential overseas partner are set out in one section of the Quality Assurance Handbook for taught programmes, and are supplemented by guidance notes on overseas articulation arrangements. These procedures provide for early notification, through the 'host' faculty to the institutional level, of a school's intent to proceed with any potential link. The precise route is via the relevant faculty teaching and learning committee to the Academic Development Committee that in January 2008, subsumed the responsibilities of the former Institutional Partnerships Committee.

16 The approval process for articulation arrangements is dealt with more fully below (see paragraphs 20-22). Key roles in the process are, at faculty level, the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, who chairs the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee and, at institutional level, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Partnerships) who chairs the Academic Development Committee. Along with the appropriate head of school, both are signatories to the approval form for articulation arrangements. Plymouth maintains centrally a register of its collaborative provision, which includes articulation arrangements, through the Quality Support administrative unit.

17 The audit team found the specification of procedures to be clear and appropriate to the level of risk associated with articulation arrangements perceived by Plymouth. In particular, the guidance for faculties on quality assurance arrangements developed against the background of a well-constructed typology of collaborative provision is identified in the audit as a positive feature of this partnership.

Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

18 Plymouth has stated in its procedures that in selecting partner institutions it wishes 'to ensure that the broad educational objectives of any collaborating organisation are compatible with its own and that there are mutual benefits for students in any potential collaboration'. In the case of the link with IMI, this compatibility stemmed from mutual interest in maritime education and in offering programmes with an international dimension which incorporated accredited training.

19 IMI was first identified as a possible partner for Plymouth on the basis of research conducted by the University's International Office, and it was subsequently included in a programme of visits in India undertaken by faculty staff in conjunction with the International Office. At that stage, as explained in the Briefing Paper, the University did not have 'well-developed processes for the approval of articulation arrangements', but the fact that the feeder programmes at IMI were taught and assessed in English and operated according to standard Edexcel procedures contributed significantly to Plymouth's decision to proceed with the link.

20 Senior staff clarified to the audit team that, while the standing of the partner organisation was always a factor in any collaboration, articulation agreements were essentially concerned with alignment at the subject level, rather than with a matching of institutional missions. Thus the guidance notes on overseas articulation arrangements (introduced in August 2005) emphasise the need to ensure that adequate information is gathered on curricula and standards. In this regard, it was explained to the team that the HND qualification at the required standard gave the generic credit (see paragraph 40 below), while the content of the HND units and its relevance to the Plymouth degree pathway gave the specific credit for advanced standing (see paragraph 22).

Programme approval

21 Plymouth's process for establishing articulation arrangements is based on its perception of the risk associated with them as compared with other types of collaborative provision. Thus granting entry with advanced standing to programmes by recognising awards made by other institutions is considered to be of substantially lower risk than the delivery by other institutions of collaborative programmes leading to Plymouth awards. As a result, the University's institutional approval process (partnership approval), which is integral to establishing new partnerships for programme delivery, is not applicable to articulation arrangements. Nevertheless, Plymouth still checks on the academic and financial standing of any prospective partner, usually through the International Office, while faculty staff carry out an inspection of the partner's premises which includes an assessment of staffing, resources and examination processes.

22 According to the approval procedure, the proposing school is responsible for mapping the learning outcomes of the feeder programme against those at the appropriate stage of the recipient Plymouth programme. The purpose of this exercise is to express the extent of advanced standing in terms of specific credits towards the award, and it forms the basis for approval of the proposal by the 'host' faculty. This in turn triggers the site visit by faculty staff to the partner organisation which leads to a report and a recommendation to institutional level. The relevant information is captured on a standard form and the time from initial proposal to final recommendation is envisaged to be not more than three months. In the case of a successful proposal, the arrangement is formalised in an articulation agreement, and it is only after this has been signed that the transfer of students can begin (see paragraph 28).

23 With respect to the match between the curricula delivered at IMI and that delivered at Plymouth, the audit team was told that in the case of the BSc (Hons) Marine Studies the HND had started off as a 'mirror image' of the first two years of the Plymouth degree, and that although the linkage had evolved into a different arrangement centred on the Edexcel HND, there was still close alignment with the recipient programme. As previously mentioned, the accredited training scheme, linked to the degree, leading to a UK National Vocational Qualification has been withdrawn. While this has affected individual students' decisions about whether to transfer to Plymouth, it has no bearing on their capacity for transition to the degree.

24 With regard to the BSc (Hons) Marine and Composites Technology, it had been identified during the approval process that students were likely to find a gap in their knowledge in the area of composite materials. This had been addressed through the attachment of conditions to the articulation agreement requiring students to complete an additional academic unit and practical training while in India, and undertake a bridging course during their induction period at Plymouth. This is based on a stage 2 module offered by the University, and students, while still at IMI, are given internet access to notes relating to this module. The Briefing Paper also referred to assistance given to students on an ad hoc basis throughout the year, a point confirmed by students met by the audit team.

25 From its discussions with staff, both at Plymouth and IMI, the audit team was unable to clarify how the University was overseeing that the conditions for preparatory tuition in India were being met. For instance, the academic unit (Materials and Processes) appeared not, as required by the agreement, to have been approved through any University process. Moreover, IMI staff indicated that there was sufficient flexibility within the HND itself for them to offer their own 'centre-based' unit approved by Edexcel. In any case, the students' perception, as expressed to the team, was that on joining the programme from IMI they are some way behind other students in the area of composite materials, although the team also noted that this factor did not seem to adversely affect students' final results. Nevertheless, Plymouth may wish to consider the scope for reviewing this aspect of alignment between the HND and the degree programme.

26 The current approval procedure postdates the articulation agreements with IMI, although the audit team was of the view that the basic process had not changed significantly since the first of these agreements was approved in 2004. The consideration in 2007 of establishing an articulation arrangement with IMC in the area of digital art and technology was also not useful as an illustration of the approval procedure, as it became linked to a proposal for IMC to deliver programmes leading to Plymouth awards, and this entailed institutional approval. This proposal has not been progressed to a conclusion, but is still the subject of a detailed action plan. More recently, a variant of the earlier proposal for an articulation arrangement with IMC was approved in June 2008, with the first group of students eligible to transfer to Plymouth in 2009-10. However, subsequently there has been further negotiation between the parties, against a backdrop of a shift in faculty responsibility at Plymouth. Given these various factors, the team was unable to reach any firm conclusion about the effectiveness of the approval process for articulation arrangements, although it considered that the timeliness of the process was open to question.

27 In tracing the developments with IMC through committee minutes, the audit team found that events were not being fully reported. For instance, there was no follow-up of the recommendation made to the former Institutional Partnerships Committee that a formal articulation agreement should be signed by September 2007. Neither was there any explanation given as to why the subsequent 2008 proposal, once approved by the Academic Development Committee, did not lead to an articulation agreement. The team appreciated that during the period in question the relevant institutional committees were being reorganised; nevertheless Plymouth may wish to consider strengthening the mechanisms for reporting the development of articulation arrangements by its faculties through the committee structure.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

28 Plymouth uses a standard template for drafting written agreements, which must be in place before the commencement of the related collaborative activity. In respect of articulation agreements, the particular programmes involved (both feeder and recipient) are set out in an annex. The level at which a feeder programme articulates with the recipient Plymouth programme must also be specified, together with the grades to be attained in the entry qualification. Where English is not the student's first language, the language qualification for entry must be stated. Additional requirements, such as bridging courses are also to be covered in the annex.

29 The audit team considered the articulation agreements with IMI to be fit for purpose and consistent with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, in terms of setting out the rights and responsibilities of both partners. There was an explicit statement of Plymouth's responsibility to students already embarked on its programmes should notice of termination be given. The agreements also dealt clearly with how publicity about the programmes would be agreed between the parties (see paragraph 49). The team asked why there was provision for a Plymouth nominee to attend assessment boards at IMI as an observer, since this seemed excessive in an articulation arrangement; however, staff indicated that it had never occurred in practice.

30 The agreements are each for a fixed term (five years in the case of Marine Studies and three years in the case of Marine and Composites Technology), but include provision for automatic extension for a further term if neither side terminates the agreement before the end of the period. The audit team understood that both agreements would be due for review prior to expiry or extension during 2008-09 and encourages Plymouth to use this as an opportunity to bring the agreements up to date in the light of changes (such as the change in title of the Plymouth degree from Nautical to Marine Studies) and to correct discrepancies between the agreements (for example, in the way in which the English language requirement is presented). The team also noted that the collaborative register listed an articulation arrangement with IMC from 2009. As no agreement has ever been signed, this entry in the register is a source of confusion.

Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

31 The Briefing Paper made it clear that Plymouth had no direct involvement in the day-to-day running of the HND programmes at IMI; arrangements for student support, the provision of learning resources and general administration, including student records, are all the responsibility of IMI. Student admission to Plymouth is organised by the University centrally (see paragraph 41 below) and, following transfer, student records, including records of academic progress, are managed in the same way as for all other students on Plymouth degrees.

32 The articulation agreements with IMI make specific provision for 'liaison and moderation visits' by Plymouth for the purposes of managing the collaboration and publicising the Plymouth programmes to prospective students. As indicated in the Briefing Paper, regular visits are made to IMI by senior faculty or school management, supplemented by ad hoc visits by staff from the subject area; these are in addition to promotional visits conducted by the International Office.

Plymouth uses staff visits to communicate general information on studying in the UK, as well as specific information about the degree programmes; they also afford the opportunity for giving feedback to IMI on the progress of former students currently at the University.

33 In separate meetings with the audit team, staff and students from IMI confirmed the usefulness of the visits undertaken by Plymouth staff. The student view on how well the feeder and recipient programmes meshed together seemed to the team to be influenced by whether the staff they had met while at IMI were directly involved with their programme and by how much assistance they had received in making their application to Plymouth. The students identified the difference in study patterns between India and the UK as being the major adjustment they had to make, giving the example that group project work was a key feature of the Plymouth programmes, whereas the emphasis at IMI was on individual examination performance. According to the notes of guidance on articulation arrangements, programme specifications should be made available to prospective students, and the team considered that this represented a systematic approach to helping students understand how their entire programme fitted together and to introducing them to the teaching and assessment regime at Plymouth.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

34 Plymouth's procedure for annual programme monitoring does not extend to feeder programmes within articulation arrangements, although recipient programmes are included in the normal way. Instead the University relies on reports emanating from staff visits in order to monitor the continued suitability of curricula, academic standards, staffing, and learning resources at the partner organisation in the context of particular articulation agreements. This form of monitoring is supplemented by tracking students' performance on the recipient programme against the performance of the cohort as a whole. Plymouth considers its monitoring arrangements to be appropriate for articulation arrangements and proportionate to the level of perceived risk. In addition, in the case of IMI, external examiner reports on the HND programmes, as generated by Edexcel's quality assurance processes, are made available to visiting staff from Plymouth through an informal arrangement, together with assignment briefs and examples of student work, and the team was told that the transparency this afforded was welcomed by all parties.

35 The audit team found that visit reports relating to the BSc (Hons) Marine Studies had been produced annually and were comprehensive, covering such matters as the style of teaching, assessment methods, academic referencing and learning resources. Reports relating to the BSc (Hons) Marine and Composites Technology, on the other hand, were intermittent and less detailed, with the pattern of reporting reflecting the pattern of visiting which had been less frequent in the case of Marine and Composites Technology. The team was told that, as the operational processes were the same for the two articulation arrangements, Marine Studies staff could deal with most issues relating to Marine and Composites Technology and vice versa.

36 With regard to monitoring student performance on the recipient programmes, the degree results attained by students from IMI over the past three years were in line with those achieved by the overall cohort. In terms of student performance at module level, the Briefing Paper indicated that in 2006-07, three students from IMI had contributed to a prize-winning group project in naval architecture, but also stated that in the following year some students from IMI had experienced difficulties with this module and needed additional support. The audit team considered that, while these examples provided some evidence of monitoring taking place at module level, this fell short of systematic analysis of the performance of students joining programmes with advanced standing. In the light of this point, and also the variability observed by the team in routine reporting on the two feeder programmes, Plymouth may wish to consider promoting greater consistency in the way it uses annual programme monitoring to track the progress of students transferring to the University through articulation arrangements.

37 Plymouth's normal procedure for periodic review is operated at school level. The audit team noted that the recent review report on the School of Earth, Ocean and Environmental Sciences, in which the Marine Studies programme is based, had commented on lower levels of student attainment in the context of an overseas articulation arrangement. While this was not connected with IMI, the team saw it as evidence that the review process was able to pick up on relevant issues through exception reporting on student statistical data.

Staffing and staff development

38 IMI is responsible for providing the staff resources for the HND programmes and also for all related quality assurance procedures, including staff development. IMI staff who met the audit team explained that they continually updated their subject knowledge, since under Indian regulations they had to revalidate their professional qualification every five years; they also clarified that it was mandatory for them to hold a teaching qualification. They indicated that they made use of student feedback, which was provided anonymously, to identify problems with teaching and to inform both corrective action and the developmental needs of staff.

39 Under Plymouth's current procedure for approving articulation arrangements, an assessment of staff resources should be part of the faculty report on the initial site visit and subsequently monitored through visits to IMI by Plymouth staff. The audit team was able to verify that the visit reports did deal with staffing matters, for example, one mentioned an increase in staff resources and another, in the context of curricula delivery, referred to the enthusiasm of staff for their subject. Reciprocal visits to Plymouth are made by IMI staff, although according to the Briefing Paper, their primary purpose is staff liaison rather than staff development and to meet former IMI students at the University. The team considered that the arrangements for staffing and the continued training and development of staff were appropriate to the nature of the collaboration, also noting that the BSc (Hons) Marine Studies articulation agreement included provision for IMI staff to participate in relevant staff development activities provided by the University.

Student admissions

40 The requirements for entry with advanced standing to the Plymouth degree programmes are set out clearly in the respective articulation agreements. These are five passes with Merit or Distinction in the relevant HND qualification, proficiency in English language, completion of a bridging course and, in the case of Marine and Composites Technology, completion of an additional academic unit and practical training in composite materials.

41 Students from IMI complete a standard application form which is sent via IMI together with an academic reference and the students' record of achievement in the HND (as issued by Edexcel) to a central admissions unit at Plymouth. This unit makes a number of checks, including that the student meets the threshold requirement for entry to the University's undergraduate programmes (a mark of at least 60 per cent in the Indian Year XII examination) before forwarding the application to the relevant faculty for approval. The audit team was shown copies of applications which illustrated the process.

42 The Briefing Paper indicated that students from IMI usually had very good English language skills because their HND programmes are delivered in English, which is also used widely in the course of their naval training. From its visit to IMI, the audit team could appreciate the emphasis given to spoken English; students received coaching and practice in making presentations as part of their personal development programme. Students meeting the team at Plymouth explained that their induction had included classes in English language and communication skills aimed at international students in general, not just those from IMI, and from these they gauged their language ability on arrival to be relatively good.

43 The audit team concluded that the admissions process was working well, with clear lines of responsibility and communication between Plymouth and IMI. The team regarded this as

important to the effective operation of the articulation arrangements, since under this type of collaboration the University would have no direct involvement in the programmes contributing a significant proportion of the credit towards its degrees.

Assessment requirements and external examining

44 Given that the collaboration involves articulation arrangements, there is no participation by Plymouth in the assessment of students on the HND programmes at IMI, and there is also no involvement by the University's external examiners. The requirements for both assessment and external examining are set by Edexcel. The recipient degree programmes are governed by the University's Academic Regulations, which cover assessment and the classification of awards, external examining and the operation of assessment boards. Students from IMI are treated in the same way as the other students on the programmes to which they transfer.

Certificates and transcripts

45 In relation to the articulation arrangements with IMI, Plymouth's policy on the content of certificates and transcripts is premised on the HND and the degree being separate awards. The HND is regarded as an entry qualification for students giving them advanced standing, so the degree certificate does not make any reference to the location of study of the HND or the partner organisation involved, and the transcript details only the stage of the degree programme studied at Plymouth. The Briefing Paper clarified that the policy was the same for all students with advanced standing irrespective of whether or not an articulation agreement existed. Plymouth is solely responsible for the production and issue of certificates and transcripts relating to the degrees, and provided a sample of both.

46 The audit team noted that the transcript indicated clearly the credit value for each module and the percentage grade attained by the student. It also included explanatory notes on how these should be interpreted in the context of the relevant UK framework for higher education qualifications and the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulative System*. However, the team considered that Plymouth's treatment of the feeder programme as entirely separate from the recipient programme could be regarded as omitting information that would be needed for a full understanding of a student's achievement, and therefore running counter to the explanatory guidance in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* relating to the precept on certificates and transcripts. Given this observation, Plymouth is encouraged to look again at its policy in the context of providing complete information on the overall pattern of study, where students join its programmes with advanced standing through articulation arrangements.

Information

Student information

47 Students obtain information about the articulation arrangement with Plymouth from a variety of sources. For example, one student at the University reported that he learnt about the link with Plymouth when he took the entrance exams for IMI. Other students, attracted by the prospect of a UK degree, stated that they were informed about the opportunities available during visits to IMI by Plymouth staff. According to the Briefing Paper, the International Office makes promotional visits at least three times a year, when its representative is usually accompanied by a staff member from one of the host faculties. Programme information is contained in programme specifications and handbooks produced by Plymouth, and students are directed to the University website for details of specific subject areas and for general information about studying at Plymouth. They are also encouraged to start an email dialogue with Plymouth staff regarding the development of their final-year project. Following transfer, students receive further information during induction (see paragraph 50) when their respective programme managers explain the structure of the programmes and the support arrangements available, including project supervision.

48 Given the relatively small numbers of students transferring to Plymouth, it was difficult for the audit team to gain an overall impression from their individual experiences of the information and support they received. The students appeared to have been well enough informed about what to expect, and most had received help in making their application to Plymouth either from IMI or Plymouth staff. However, they were agreed that it would have been beneficial to have known more in advance about requirements of the degree programme in the area of composite material. While not being fully aware of the University regulations applying to their degree programmes, the students knew where to access further information if required.

Publicity and marketing

49 The articulation agreements permit both Plymouth and IMI to make reference to the link in their respective marketing, subject to each institution gaining prior approval from the other party. The mechanism employed by Plymouth is that promotional materials produced by IMI that refer to the University, or specifically to the articulation arrangements, are shown in advance to the International Office, whose approval must be obtained before publication. The audit team noted that both the IMI website and publicity brochure gave due prominence to the link with Plymouth and to Plymouth's status as the awarding institution for the degrees. The team concluded that Plymouth had sound procedures for overseeing the completeness and accuracy of the information published by IMI in respect of the collaboration.

Student progression to the UK

50 As indicated in the Briefing Paper, student transfer to the UK is organised by Plymouth centrally. Enrolment details are sent out via an admissions unit which also provides advice on visa applications. Students from IMI are guaranteed a place in either a student residence or in University-approved private accommodation. On arrival at Plymouth they attend a compulsory extended induction programme for all international students and a bridging course, which includes formative assessment related to their chosen project. In the case of the BSc (Hons) Materials and Composites Technology, students are given special targeted support, which is supplemented as necessary, throughout the year. International students may obtain English language support from a central unit; this is provided on an individual basis in the context of the student's work. There is also an international student tutor in the Faculty of Science, part of whose role is to pick up on problems at an early stage.

51 The audit team met students at both IMI and Plymouth. All commented favourably on their contact with the University prior to transfer, and those at Plymouth were positive about the induction programme and support arrangements. An added dimension is the way the student cohort at Plymouth maintains contact with IMI and, particularly, with the cohort of students due to arrive in Plymouth the following year. It was also evident that IMI staff continued to take a keen interest in the progress of their former students in the UK. The team found the arrangements for student progression to the UK to be well conceived and effective and they are identified as a positive feature of the partnership.

Conclusion

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

- the guidance for faculties on quality assurance arrangements developed against the background of a well-constructed typology of collaborative provision (paragraph 17)
- the effective arrangements for student progression to the UK (paragraph 51).

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

- the scope for reviewing the alignment between the HND and the degree programme in the area of composite materials (paragraph 25)
- strengthening the mechanisms for reporting the development of articulation arrangements by its faculties through the committee structure (paragraph 27)
- promoting greater consistency in the way the University uses annual programme monitoring to track the progress of students transferring to Plymouth through articulation arrangements (paragraph 36).

54 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.

55 The Briefing Paper provided a useful introduction to the quality assurance processes for articulation arrangements. The findings of the audit are that in most respects the courses at IMI are operating in accordance with the relevant procedures, as described in the Briefing Paper and supplementary documentation. Given that the link is representative of Plymouth's general approach to articulation arrangements overseas, the audit would support a conclusion of confidence in the University's management of this type of collaboration, including its processes for granting advanced standing and its arrangements for supporting students' transition to complete their studies in the UK.

Appendix A

The University of Plymouth's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with the International Maritime Institute (IMI), Greater Noida, Delhi

The University welcomes the constructive report on the collaborative arrangements with IMI, in particular the positive features identified by the audit team. It is pleasing that the audit team further concluded that the admissions process was working well, with clear lines of responsibility and communication between Plymouth and IMI.

The University is grateful to the audit team for their helpful comments and will be examining how it will be able to address the points highlighted for consideration.

Appendix B

Student applications for 2009-10

HND Marine Engineering to BSc (Hons) Marine and Composites Technology - 4

HND Nautical Studies to BSc (Hons) Marine Studies - 0

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
www.qaa.ac.uk

RG 438 05/09