



Audit of overseas provision

**University of Sunderland and the
Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi), Malaysia**

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Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of Sunderland and the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi), Malaysia.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

1 The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in United Kingdom (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.

2 Many universities and colleges in the UK offer their higher education programmes to students wishing to study outside this country. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that almost 100,000 students were studying for UK higher education awards entirely outside the UK in the 2007-08 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. We conduct Audit of overseas provision country by country. In 2009-10 we conducted an audit in Malaysia. 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 Malaysia. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report.

The Audit of overseas provision process

3 In April 2009, QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information about their provision in Malaysia. On the basis of the information returned, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with provision in that country. These institutions produced a briefing paper describing the way in which their provision (or a sub-set of their provision) in Malaysia 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)*, published by QAA in 2004.

4 Audit teams visited each of the 10 UK institutions to discuss their provision in Malaysia between November 2009 and February 2010. The same teams visited Malaysia in March 2010 to meet some of the staff responsible for managing and delivering the provision, and to meet students. The audit of the University of Sunderland was coordinated for QAA by Mr Alan Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor David Airey and Emeritus Professor Sue Frost (auditors), with Mr Alan Bradshaw acting as audit secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and, where applicable, to their partners in Malaysia for the willing cooperation that they provided to the team.

Higher education in Malaysia

5 According to UNESCO's Global Education Digest, there were about 750,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions in Malaysia in 2009. The institutions can be broadly divided into two types: public and private. Public institutions, which comprise 20 public universities, 27 polytechnics and 57 community colleges, are government-funded; private institutions, which include universities, university colleges and colleges, receive no public funding. The UNESCO Digest states that two-thirds of students in Malaysia are enrolled in public institutions.

6 Executive responsibility for higher education in Malaysia resides with the Ministry of Higher Education, which was separated from the Ministry of Education and established as a full ministry under a Federal Government Minister in 2004. Among the various departments and agencies under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education is the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). The MQA is the single higher education quality assurance agency in the country, whose scope covers both public and private higher education providers. The MQA is responsible for accrediting higher education programmes and for maintaining a definitive list of accredited programmes - the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR) - which includes programmes provided in collaboration between Malaysian and overseas partners and programmes delivered at overseas campuses in Malaysia. Students studying unaccredited programmes are ineligible for student loans and institutions providing unaccredited programmes are not allowed to recruit overseas students to them.

7 In addition, the MQA is responsible for maintaining the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, an instrument that develops and classifies all Malaysian higher education qualifications from certificates to doctorates. The Act which created the MQA also provides for the conferment of a self-accrediting status to 'mature' institutions that have well established quality assurance mechanisms. To achieve self-accrediting status, the institution must undergo an institutional audit. If it is successful, all qualifications it offers are automatically recorded on the MQR. At the time of the audit, the MQA was conducting the first round of institutional audits.

Section 1: The background to the collaborative link

Nature of the link

8 The link between the University of Sunderland (the University) and the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi) started in 2005 when the University first formed partnerships with colleges in Malaysia. Four of these were in the engineering provision offered by the Department of Computing, Engineering and Technology (CET) in the Faculty of Applied Science (FAS). The University decided not to progress some programmes arranged with some of these colleges. This report considers the BEng (Hons) Electronic and Electrical Engineering and the BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering operated at SEGi University College, Kota Damansara and at SEGi College, Subang Jaya.

9 In 2007, a number of Sunderland's programmes were approved by the University to operate at SEGi including the BEng (Hons) in Electronic and Electrical Engineering and the BEng (Hons) in Mechanical Engineering. Both of these programmes are operated at SEGi University College, Kota Damansara, and at SEGi College, Subang Jaya. SEGi College in Subang Jaya had previously, from 2005, been approved to offer Stage 3 BEng (Hons) Electronic and Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. A third college, SEGi College Penang, had also been approved in 2005 to offer Stage 3 BEng (Hons) Electronic Engineering, but in 2008, having failed to achieve a viable cohort size, this centre recruited its last intake. A fourth college in Kuala Lumpur has been approved but has not recruited. In 2009-10 the University had more than 500 undergraduate engineering students in its partnership with SEGi.

10 SEGi is a private education provider which is approved by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia to make certificate, diploma and degree awards. It was established in 1977 as the Systematic Group, with its college in Kuala Lumpur offering programmes leading to professional business qualifications. Subsequently, it expanded its range of programmes, and set up and acquired additional colleges. A total of 14 major colleges and some schools and education centres came together to form the new SEGi group in 2002, and in 2006 it started operating under a single brand name SEGi College. The consolidated SEGi College group today comprises six campuses located in major Malaysian cities. Currently, SEGi provides industry-relevant programmes from pre-university to doctorate degrees, as well as professional qualifications. Programmes include business studies, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, engineering, media, art and

design, hotel and tourism, computing and early childhood education. It has links with five universities in the UK as well as with universities in Australia, Denmark, India and the USA. Currently the student population is 20,000 of which about 5,000 are following programmes of higher education.

11 Sunderland's collaborative provision overseas dates from 1993, and the current academic strategy includes the aim of working at home and abroad with partners which share the University's core values. The University views international collaboration within the context of its widening participation and campus internationalisation strategies. The University has a high proportion of its students recruited from the North East of England. The University also sees its overseas collaborative provision as extending its experience and broadening its reputation beyond its hinterland. The audit team learnt that the University believed that it had initially been very inclusive in the number of partnership agreements made, but that it was now aiming to operate with fewer partners, with more links per partner. This University strategy is reflected at faculty and departmental levels in moves to phase out smaller partnerships and focus on those with a wider range of links and student numbers. The Register of Collaborative Provision for 2008-09 lists more than 80 links of which more than 40 are with institutions overseas, in 20 different countries. SEGi students in Malaysia are the largest single group, being 1,200 out of a total of 2,800 on the University's collaborative programmes overseas. Including those studying in the UK, the University has a total of 6,000 students studying for its awards at partner institutions. This represents about one-third of its student population.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

12 Partly in response to the findings of the 2006 QAA Audit of collaborative provision and the 2008 QAA Audit of overseas provision, the University has reviewed its quality assurance and enhancement processes. New collaborative processes have been phased in from 2009. A summary implementation plan for the new processes is provided in the Academic Quality Handbook. This includes revisions to the arrangements for partner approval, due diligence scrutiny, periodic and annual review, as well as other aspects such as the role of the centre leader and staff development. The new arrangements that are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook are very fully documented and supported with templates. The changes aim to formalise and streamline the processes, to improve institutional oversight, and to strengthen arrangements for due diligence and external scrutiny.

13 The University has established a clear system of classification for collaborative provision. In this system, there are six models; each represents a different degree of devolution. The models range from pure validation (model A), where the University devolves responsibility for the delivery and assessment to the partner, to a 'flying faculty' model (model F), where the University manages almost all aspects of delivery. Model B is referred to as a franchise; in this the programme is designed by the University with all or part delivered by the partner. Model C is Joint Programme Design and Delivery. Model D is tutor-supported delivery, in which the University collaborates with a partner providing resources, tutor and administrative support, with the University providing the learning materials and the setting, marking and moderating assessments. Model E refers to independent learning.

14 For each of the six models of collaboration, the University's Academic Quality Handbook sets out the respective responsibilities of the University and the collaborative partner for standards and academic quality. In each case, the descriptors show that the University is always responsible for the award, for approval and oversight of local arrangements and for the admission of students, for the appointment of external examiners, and for holding and chairing assessment boards. For programme planning and design, assessment, programme management, programme monitoring and review and student support the precise location of responsibility varies according to the model. But, in each model, the University stipulates involvement that will allow it to maintain oversight of the quality of learning. The annexes to the Memorandum of Agreement with SEGi indicate responsibilities are clearly delineated in accord with the defined models.

15 The University considers the programmes shared with SEGi to be broadly representative of its collaborative provision, both because most such provision is in either the Faculty of Applied Science or the Faculty of Business and Law, and because, as with most of the partnerships, they are based on models B and D. The model B link with SEGi is the only model B arrangement currently operating with an overseas partner.

16 The programmes with SEGi College, Subang Jaya, currently include full-time and part-time degree programmes in Electronic and Electrical Engineering and in Mechanical Engineering, offered under Model D, first approved in 2005 and 2006 and reviewed in 2009; and a '3+0' degree in the same subjects under Model B, first approved in 2008 and reviewed in 2009. The Model D provision is a one-year progression degree which articulates with a two-year diploma programme operated by the College. In line with Malaysian Government policy, at the time of the audit, this Model D arrangement was being phased out, to be replaced by the three-year Model B arrangements. At SEGi University College, Kota Damansara, the BEng programmes in Electronic and Electrical Engineering and in Mechanical Engineering are offered under Model B, and were first approved in 2008 and reviewed in 2009.

17 The University has established regional managers based overseas, and members of the South East Asia Office of the University. These are members of the University staff. Currently, four are in post, including one in Malaysia; they assist with recruitment and marketing and also work closely with the partners. The Regional Office in Malaysia has five staff members, all very experienced in the country. The regional manager provides support for marketing, recruitment and admissions, as well as for student orientation and induction, and for activities such as visits by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. The office also informs SEGi of developments at the University. This support is very warmly welcomed by the staff at SEGi, who particularly stressed the importance of the regional office in ensuring the speedy processing of applications.

18 The audit team recognised the considerable work that had been carried out by the University since the QAA Collaborative provision audit of 2006, and the extent to which this had strengthened the arrangements. The approach adopted by the University to overseas collaboration, and specifically with SEGi, is consistent with its overall strategy, and is securely based. The University's documentation indicates that partnership arrangements are full and effective, and provide a basis for ensuring consistent and effective practice in the assurance of quality and the maintenance of standards. The Regional Office located in the South East Asia Office in Kuala Lumpur provides an essential point of liaison to ensure that the University continues to understand local needs and is sensitive to the differences in culture.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

19 The University's arrangements for selecting and approving partner organisations have been updated in line with the overall revisions to collaborative provision procedures. The institutional selection and approval processes are based on the recognition that collaborative provision carries a higher level of risk than home-campus provision, and the approval processes are designed to ensure clear institutional oversight, financial diligence and academic scrutiny. The revised arrangements are set out in a flow chart in the Academic Quality Handbook, and are supported by full guidance on each stage of the process. A distinction is made between the business and the academic case for a partnership. Scrutiny involves representatives from different parts of the University and includes a member of the Partnership Development and Approval Panel (PDAP). Recommendations are considered through the processes described below, with final approval being given by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) (Academic) on behalf of Academic Board.

20 The approval process involves four separate stages. Before the first stage, an initial view of a potential new partnership is provided by the relevant Associate Dean for Recruitment and Development, (for academic faculties), or Director (for services), This initial report is considered by the Director of Student Recruitment and Business Partnerships (SRBP) who provides an early view as to whether the collaboration is in line with strategic plans. Subsequently, the DVC (Academic) has responsibility for deciding whether to progress the proposal. If the decision is positive, the first stage is consideration by a Due Diligence Panel which meets twice each term. The panel is chaired by the DVC (Academic) and its membership includes; the directors of student recruitment and business partnerships; Academic Services, and Planning and Finance, as well as a legal adviser, and representation from the academic staff. The responsibilities of the Panel are clearly documented and include a consideration of strategic fit, the legal basis of the proposed partner, its conformity with national requirements of the country, its mission and values, its experience and reputation, and financial stability. The Director of Student Recruitment and Business Partnerships is responsible, in consultation with the proposing faculty, for preparing the documentation for the Panel.

21 At stage two, the outcome from the Due Diligence Panel is reported to the Academic Development Committee (ADC), chaired by a Dean on behalf of the DVC (Academic), who is responsible for giving approval for continuation to the third stage. The importance of the report to ADC at this stage is that it introduces the development to other parts of the University. The third stage involves consideration by the Partnership Development and Approval Panel (PDAP) which considers the appropriateness of the proposed collaboration, and quality and standards issues. This panel, chaired by a senior member of academic staff, nominated by the DVC (Academic) also meets twice each term. Its membership includes representatives of SRBP, Student Learning Services, and Academic Services as well as an external adviser who is appointed for a three-year term of office. Following clearly documented procedures, and basing its work on a desk enquiry and a site visit involving at least three members of the Panel (including the external member), the Panel makes a recommendation. A positive recommendation includes an indication of which model of collaboration should be followed. The Panel's consideration includes the adequacy of learning resources, the management of quality and standards, processes for quality enhancement, student support as well as market analysis and likely employment opportunities for graduates. The Panel is also responsible for producing the risk analysis. A final business plan is developed and requires approval by the DVC (Resources). If the programme is new and requires validation, this follows the normal University process. At the final stage, the report from the PDAP is considered by the DVC (Academic) who makes a decision on behalf of Executive and the Academic Board. This decision is also reported to ADC. The Memorandum of Agreement is signed by the Vice-Chancellor or one of the DVCs. The Quality Management Sub-Committee (QMSC) has responsibility for following up any recommendations of the report.

22 These are complex processes which ensure that each stage of the initial approval of a new partnership is scrutinised by all of the relevant University departments and services, as well as being overseen by the DVC. Additional programmes may be added to a resulting partnership, provided that they are at the same or lower academic level, and at the same or lower model of devolved operation, and provided that a visit report has been made and any conditions have been met.

23 The partner approval arrangements relating to SEGi were carried out before these new arrangements were implemented. Hence the documentation reviewed by the audit team was written under the previous procedures. The thoroughness of the procedures completed for the assessment of risk and for due diligence, as well as scrutiny at different levels in the University's deliberative processes indicate that the procedures were soundly constructed.

24 Arrangements for approving the partner organisation are thorough and comprehensive. They make a clear distinction between the business case and the academic case, and in each aspect pay attention to due diligence and risk; they engage a range of expertise, and are considered fully within the University's deliberative structures including the Academic Board.

Programme approval

Arrangements for programme approval, including development of programme specifications and use of external reference points

25 The University has developed clear, comprehensive and systematic procedures for the approval of new collaborative programmes. These are nested within the processes used to scrutinise home-campus programmes. Guidance, templates and exemplars are available electronically for staff at SEGi. This resource is well-designed. SEGi staff who met the audit team confirmed their ease of access to the procedures for programme approval and re-approval through their access to the staff intranet at Sunderland. They also confirmed that these documents were useful and clear.

26 In collaborative arrangements, programme approval, if required, is undertaken in parallel with the assessment of risk for a new partnership arrangement. The Academic Quality Handbook outlines the processes for programme approval and review for collaborative arrangements, and requires evidence that the partner institution and University colleagues are able to work in a 'positive spirit' to assure and enhance quality. After initial outline approval is confirmed by the ADC, the programme leader takes responsibility for developing the full programme proposal in partnership with the team responsible for delivering the programme.

27 Model B programmes are subject to formal programme approval processes that include a panel event through which the full programme proposal is scrutinised. These processes include an external subject specialist. Approval of SEGi to deliver the programmes was undertaken with the inclusion of a visit that enabled the Panel to meet staff and students at SEGi, and be assured of the level of local facilities that supported the programme. Recommendations were made that supported the development of the new initiative, and took into account the context and needs of the team at SEGi. Additionally, recommendations were made for the faculty, University and for SEGi. The tone and style of the event supported and respected the needs of both partners. Formerly, the University did not require external members on the Panel, as is now the case. There is evidence that the process followed with SEGi was effective in making recommendations that formed the basis for subsequent action which was monitored in the annual monitoring process.

Programme specification and other recognition

28 As part of the programme approval process, a programme specification was developed for each programme of study. The programme specification follows a uniform template, and refers to external academic reference points. These include the *Code of practice, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements. Programme specifications are detailed. With more practical detail of programme arrangements and timetables, information from the programme specification is then integrated into the student handbook in a form that is easily accessed by students on- and off-campus. SEGi staff who met the audit team in Malaysia confirmed that the key information in the programme specification is also presented in the Programme Output document that is used for quality assurance purposes with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency.

29 Sunderland campus cohort sizes have increased to levels high enough to meet the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET, formerly the IEE) professional body requirements. At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of applying for IET recognition for its home-campus programmes. Once this has been achieved, further recognition for overseas provision will be sought. Staff and students at SEGi understand the programme's position regarding UK professional body recognition. The Board of Engineers Malaysia (BEM) recognises the SEGi programmes as contributing towards a route to the M.Eng degree that affords automatic application for membership of BEM. Malaysian students, while valuing the possibility of international recognition through IET, are most concerned to secure Malaysian (BEM) recognition to support their career development.

Consideration of approval reports by the UK institution, including procedures for following up on conditional approval

30 QMSC reports to AEC and thence to Academic Board, but the Board also receives a separate list of programme and partner approvals. Approval reports for SEGi were considered and approved at the Quality Assurance Board that has been superseded by the QMSC. The Quality Assurance Board reported to Academic Board which retains responsibility for the final approval. Any programme specific regulations, for example those that might be required by the partner organisation, are submitted to the DVC for consideration and approval on behalf of the Academic Board.

31 The programme approval panel may give approval subject to recommendations that must be completed before the programme can commence. These require a response from the faculty identifying what action has been taken. This procedure was evidenced in the documentation of the SEGi approval seen by the audit team. Actions are well-documented, and it is possible to see a discussion of the actions taken in response to recommendations from the approval Panel as part of the Quality Assurance Board (now QMSC) oversight of the approval process.

Procedures for programme amendments and re-approval

32 The University has undertaken continued development of its processes. The process for amendments has been developed considerably to support local decision-making that is overseen by the faculty and reported in the annual review. There is a comprehensive system that supports a range of amendments that can be made to collaborative programmes following discussion and recommendation from staff and student feedback. The process includes a range of sub-procedures, ranging from a process for minor amendments to a request for termination or suspension of a programme.

33 The Academic Development Committee oversees and approves these amendments once the faculty quality committee and the programme board have indicated their support for the amendment. The processes and templates are clear and easily accessed by staff at the University and partner.

Effectiveness of programme approval procedures as applied to this partnership

34 Procedures and processes for programme approval are thorough, rigorous and efficient. The new system has been designed to take into account the learning gained by Sunderland through its considerable experience of approving overseas partnerships. There is evidence of good oversight of partner approvals. The University has a reflective approach that has substantially strengthened the oversight of collaborative programmes.

Written agreement with the partner organisation

35 The formal written contract is the Memorandum of Agreement. The template for the Memorandum of Agreement is documented in the Academic Quality Handbook. The Memorandum and its annexes set out clearly the responsibilities of the University and the partner institution based on the model of collaboration specified in the document. These include arrangements to protect the interests of the students in the event of termination. The memorandum also expressly prohibits subcontracting and serial validation. The Memorandum of Agreement with SEGi, signed in May 2009, follows the requirements set out in the Handbook.

36 The Memorandum is supported by operations manuals. These manuals are outlined in the Academic Quality Handbook. They are designed to promote common understanding about the respective roles and responsibilities of partner organisations and University staff involved in the delivery, management, quality assurance and coordination of the University's collaborative programmes. The operations manuals provide guidance on the contents for a Collaborative Student Handbook, and on operating a programme from the stage of student admissions, through teaching

and assessment, to annual monitoring. For each, they set out the respective responsibilities as well as explanations, and provide a comprehensive contact list and glossary of terms.

37 The centre leader and others brief the staff at SEGi on the manuals. The audit team learned that, with the recent inclusion of flow diagrams, the staff at the University find the manuals' helpfulness increased. Staff in Malaysia also confirmed the general high level of utility of the documents.

38 The audit team came to the view that the written agreements and supporting documentation were well-developed and provided a sound basis for the partnership which operates in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 2*.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

39 The University and SEGi each have a senior manager designated as the Headquarter Coordinator. Within each faculty involved there are University Subject Coordinators who oversee programmes at SEGi. These subject coordinators may act in the role of centre leader, or for more complex programmes, have a number of centre leaders accountable to them.

40 Centre leaders are members of academic or senior administrative staff with responsibility for the management of the relationship with a given collaborative partner for a subject area and programmes within it. They work closely with the programme leader, who is responsible for the delivery of the programme on all sites. This includes ensuring comparability of the academic experience. The role of the centre leader is documented in the Academic Quality Handbook. Apart from acting as the main faculty contact point for the partner, the role includes supporting the induction of students, liaising with the programme leader, acting as representative at boards of studies and assessment boards, providing or arranging staff development, ensuring that formal feedback is received from the students, monitoring and checking students' handbooks and marketing material, and reviewing annual reports. They are expected to make at least two visits to the partner each year, and to report on the visits. The audit team saw completed visit reports, annual reports and action plans.

41 The role of centre leader is pivotal in managing the University's oversight of the operation of programmes, and the role is recognised in the management of staff workload; centre leaders have a weight of responsibility broadly comparable with that of a programme leader. The duties are included in the University's work-load model with an allowance of up to 25 per cent of time.

42 SEGi staff who met the audit team in Malaysia emphasised the key role of the centre leader. This role provides a practical point of contact that ensures good communication, and also offers key support in the day-to-day management of quality and standards. The centre leader provides information from University committees that supports the SEGi team members in their management of the student experience. This information includes staff development workshops and detailed action planning between the centre leader and the SEGi team.

43 Students who met the audit team also saw the centre leader as a key contact with Sunderland. Students confirmed that the centre leader met them, and they were able to give examples of help and support that had been offered. Additionally, the centre leader and head of school were seen by students as key sources of information in managing the decisions that they needed to make concerning progression to the University campus for further studies.

44 Programme study boards include responsibility for the collaborative programmes at SEGi, and are chaired by the programme leader. This ensures that there is a close working relationship with the subject leadership and avoids SEGi staff being isolated from the wider teaching team for the programme. The programme leader also works with SEGi to ensure the operation and development of the programmes in adapting to the local context.

45 The University has a developmental forum, the Collaborative Practitioners' Group, which deals with practical issues relating to collaborative provision, and the SEGi Steering Group that establishes work plans to support the development of the partnership. This is an important forum, since much operational information is considered along with student performance data. The Group meets regularly, has a clear overview and keeps careful records to track progress of actions taken.

Student support

46 SEGi provides student support on-campus in Malaysia. The University has oversight of the learning environment and has confirmed through its campus visit report the provision of a purpose-built campus containing, amongst other elements, library and computing support that contribute to a sound learning environment. Students have programme and module documents that ensure that they know what is expected of them. The student handbook includes information for students studying at SEGi as well as those on the Sunderland campus.

47 The University and SEGi have designated administrative staff to support the programme and provide contact with the partner. The University's administration is efficient and effective. The administrators play a particularly important part in the management of the assessment process, and also offer support and advice to students on the timetables and other arrangements. For example, students had previously raised concerns about the ease of enrolment in their returning years. The administrative staff worked closely with University services to speed the registration so that students have a more efficient enrolment system and access to facilities. At the time of the audit, work was continuing in order to improve this. It would be prudent for the University to monitor closely the enrolment time for students studying in partnership arrangements.

Liaison arrangements between offices/groups in the UK institution and the partner organisation

48 The University has established a programme of visits to SEGi that support quality assurance, and provide an opportunity for strategic development. Faculty staff visit SEGi at least twice each year, and a senior university manager visits annually, normally in conjunction with degree ceremonies. Additionally, staff from University services visit periodically to ensure that learning resources are sufficient. There is an agreed schedule for visits, and guidance on the purpose and structure of visits is outlined to SEGi. Staff who met the audit team confirmed that they have regular visits from Sunderland staff, and that these are complemented by monthly video-conference meetings in addition to frequent email contact. It was clear to the team that there are effective channels of communication that support effective management of the programme.

Management of student records, student data on progression and achievement

49 The University maintains the admissions and enrolment record for students; it is the responsibility of SEGi to manage student records and notify the University of changes. The University has a clear system of student tracking, and is able to identify SEGi students for the purpose of intercampus comparison and quality management. The University manages all matters concerned with certificates and transcripts for awards.

50 Student achievement and progression are monitored formally in the annual monitoring review, and external examiners comment specifically on the performance of students studying at SEGi (see below). There have been some cohorts with small numbers. The University and SEGi have worked together to close programmes that have poor recruitment and, in other cases, to ensure that numbers have increased to viability. The progression and retention data indicate that where there is an occasional, lower achievement profile at SEGi the programme board of studies investigates, and actions are included in annual monitoring. Resulting actions are normally managed through the head of school in partnership with the centre leader. SEGi staff have access to the results of their own students, but do not have a full list of results that enable them to

compare the performance of students at SEGi with those studying in the UK. The centre leader provides an overview of the performance of students in Malaysia, but it might be helpful for SEGi to have data that enable staff to analyse student performance and compare local performance with that of Sunderland-campus students by module. This would enhance a system that is working very well through the centre leader.

Student support arrangements

51 The language of tuition and assessment is English. For admission, students are required to demonstrate abilities at IELTS 6.0 or the equivalent. SEGi has support facilities to meet the needs of students in English. These include specialist English summer modules and the provision of formative English assessments for students who might have greater difficulty with academic writing in English. SEGi created these arrangements to complement the IELTS and Malaysian University English Test to ensure that students who enter the Sunderland course can benefit from their programme of study.

52 SEGi students have a different personal tutor arrangement from those studying at Sunderland. In part, this is due to a different approach to student support at SEGi, where personal matters are supported through a tutor counselling service. While there is not an academic supervisor/tutor role at SEGi, there is a system of individual academic tutorials which are held by appointment every week. Students are encouraged to approach any of their module tutors for support, as required. This fits with the tradition of support from the whole teaching team at SEGi. Students commented very favourably on the individual support that they received from their tutors, and were clear about the services that offered pastoral support.

53 Students have a library on their SEGi site, and staff confirmed the adequacy of the resources. Additionally, students can access the Sunderland University Library Service, and can obtain books through the inter-library loan service and from a collection of online resources. There is no charge for these services, so that students at SEGi have ready access to the materials that they need. There is a University librarian with responsibility for aiding students studying off-campus.

54 Students and staff commented very positively on the Sunderland resources that they used online. Both saw this as a key link to the University, and as essential to support their studies. They considered the virtual learning environment to be easy to access, and problems with passwords have been quickly resolved by the Sunderland help desk. The virtual learning environment is more than a repository of materials: for students studying overseas it appears to be the 'face' of the University giving access to a wide range of services and support. The University ensures that access to the virtual learning environment is effective, and continues to update the service. In addition, SEGi students and staff use social networking sites to make contact with colleagues and students at Sunderland. This creates a more personal network.

55 The Memorandum of Agreement requires SEGi to provide a range of services including a careers guidance service and support for students with disabilities. SEGi students also have access to the University's services through email and the website. In practice, students tend to use the services at SEGi; they report that, overall, they are highly satisfied with the facilities and services that support their studies.

Mechanisms for student representation and feedback and for informing students of resultant actions

56 The University has a commitment to obtaining student feedback. The formal mechanism for student feedback is the use of module evaluation questionnaires. Sunderland staff recognise that there are challenges in securing feedback from students in Malaysia, as students may not be comfortable with providing critical comment on teaching. The response rate is generally low. Online questionnaires have not proved more successful in gaining feedback from SEGi students. The most productive feedback is believed to have been obtained through direct meetings

between students and the centre leader. These have helped to identify recurring issues, that have then been included in the centre leader's report and in the annual monitoring report. SEGi students reported that they give feedback to the centre leader, and confirmed that they participate in evaluation surveys.

57 The University is developing a new approach to student feedback on the Sunderland campus that involves new biennial questionnaires and focus group meetings. This was implemented on-campus in 2008-09 and the feedback on the new approach was very positive. The Faculty of Applied Sciences is intending to pilot this approach with SEGi students to continue to improve student feedback.

58 The annual monitoring review described below oversees the action plan and outcomes raised through student feedback. There is evidence that student views are taken seriously, and the students who met the audit team confirmed that actions are taken in response to their concerns. Staff also confirmed that feedback is considered carefully with the centre leader, and gave the team examples such as the balance between coursework and examinations which was adjusted following feedback from SEGi staff. Concerns about the time taken to return assessment results have been acted upon, and students indicated that they largely receive back work on schedule.

59 The University has mechanisms that ensure effective day-to-day management of the partnership. The centre leader is pivotal point of liaison and communication, and makes a significant impact on its effectiveness. The audit team believes that the development of the centre leader role is a feature of good practice in this partnership, ensuring a single point of communication and strengthens the University's oversight.

60 The audit team also noted the considerable development of the management systems in this partnership. The University is encouraged to continue to develop its mechanisms for effective SEGi student feedback to ensure that students develop their skills in critical comment and understand its importance to the University.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual monitoring

61 Annual monitoring is undertaken within a University framework that is underpinned by a set of principles laid out in operational guidelines for staff. The contributions from SEGi are invited through the meeting with the centre leader and feedback from students. SEGi also prepares an annual report on programme delivery and the management of the partnership. SEGi is used to preparing detailed annual reports for its accreditation in Malaysia, and the audit team saw evidence of a constructive and self-critical commentary that indicates that the University supports SEGi in making a contribution to the reflective processes and development of the partnership programmes.

62 The report from SEGi is an appendix to the University's main annual monitoring report, and any major themes are introduced into the faculty process from the SEGi report. Data on student achievement and progression appear in the annual monitoring report. Through the meetings with the centre leader, SEGi receives feedback from the committees that consider its annual report. Managers at SEGi confirmed to the audit team that the annual monitoring is useful and supports course development at SEGi.

63 At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of developing its collaborative reporting to establish a clearer distinction between the annual review of the programme (undertaken by the centre leader and the programme leader) and the annual review of the partnership, which tends to be a broader executive review.

64 The annual monitoring report is considered in detail by the Programme Board Annual Monitoring Panel. These reports include detail about provision delivered beyond the Sunderland campus. The reports from the programme boards are then overseen by the faculty Quality Management Sub-Committee (QMSC), and a faculty summary report is submitted to the QMSC. The audit team followed themes raised by students through these processes, and identified where action was taken. Staff at SEGi confirmed that they make a contribution to the annual monitoring report, and receive feedback on the faculty process through the centre leader.

65 The University has a 'reporter' system whereby a member of the faculty panel represents the Quality Assurance Board and provides a report on the reliability of the Faculty Board processes in annual monitoring and review. The template for annual reports is extensive and includes: a commentary on assessment, teaching and learning issues; analysis of student admissions data; student achievement and progression; and an analysis of student feedback. A recurring theme in student feedback is the delay in receiving feedback on assessment outcomes. This theme has been identified for action at the faculty level. Students who met the audit team in Malaysia reported that the return time of results has improved considerably, and now generally matches the schedule that they have been given.

66 The University identifies features of good practice from reports, and disseminates these through QMSC into staff development programmes. Sunderland staff confirmed that there is some leading practice at SEGi that will be detailed in future reports as the partnership progresses.

67 The process for annual monitoring of the programme as delivered at SEGi is the same as that for that for the home campus, with the addition of centre leader's reports and oversight by the University officers responsible for business partnerships and overseas development. Actions are identified and implemented, and systems continue to be refined in the light of the learning from annual monitoring. The process is effective in offering the University academic oversight of the programmes at SEGi.

Periodic review

68 Partnerships are reviewed on a six-year cycle. There is a midpoint check by the Due Diligence Panel to ensure that no important matters have changed. The midpoint report and the periodic review are reported to the Academic Development Committee. The current system of periodic review is relatively new, and has been implemented since the programmes at SEGi gained approval. Periodic review takes place 12 months prior to the completion of the duration of the Memorandum of Agreement. Further due diligence is undertaken, and a desk-based review leads to a risk assessment which informs a review panel visit with membership external to the University. This visit produces a detailed report on the facilities and resources. The report of the reapproval panel with an updated risk analysis is considered by the DVC on behalf of the Academic Board. The faculty also submits a business plan to the DVC for the operation of the partnership. QMSC oversees follow-up of any recommendations. When the process has been completed, the new Memorandum and Annexes are signed by the DVC and Director of Student Recruitment and Business Partnerships.

69 The SEGi programmes are also reviewed on a six-yearly cycle as part of the subject cluster. The QMSC oversees the curriculum review which takes responsibility for confirming that academic recommendations have been completed and recorded. It is a pre-requisite for the partnership review that the programmes which a partner is allowed to offer have been revalidated this way.

70 The audit team came to the view that the management of periodic review has been developed to provide an effective system for assuring the University of the continued strength of the partnership, and to provide a basis for the following six years.

Staffing and staff development

71 Staff are appointed by SEGi to teach Sunderland programmes. The University retains the authority to approve staff to teach on its courses, and staff curricula vitae (CVs) are routinely submitted to the University. New staff submit their CVs at the point where they are assigned to teach on Sunderland programmes. If the CV is not adequate then an alternative tutor is requested; examples of this were given to the audit team. SEGi staff must attend an induction programme on appointment and continue to participate in staff development events.

72 SEGi recognises the value of staff who have considerable professional experience and expertise. Some staff have been appointed because of their considerable experience as professional engineers. This policy is supported by Sunderland. Some staff teach on courses awarded by other non-Malaysian universities. Sunderland ensures that staff at SEGi understand the differing needs of students undertaking different programmes and that they are not taught together. Additionally, the University ensures that SEGi staff are clear about the operating differences between the different awarding universities in partnership with SEGi.

73 The University provides professional development opportunities for SEGi colleagues. There is a comprehensive staff development strategy providing locally-based study days, workshops and conference activity. In addition, the University provides an update on its quality assurance and academic management systems, and additional academic development on cross-subject themes such as research methods. Staff at SEGi have access to the University's staff intranet that provides a considerable resource to support their development.

74 The University has an institution-wide policy on overseas visiting that has been developed to ensure regular visits at key points. The audit team learned that staff at faculty and University levels visit annually. These visits are in addition to those made by the centre leader who visits two or three times each year. Email communication is well-established, and there is regular exchange between course administrative staff, especially during assessment periods. Staff and students at SEGi value the regular visits from the University staff. They also indicated to the audit team that an opportunity for staff and student exchange would be highly appreciated, albeit recognising the challenges of the costs involved. It may be useful for both partners to explore what, if any, support might be available to help with some exchange possibilities.

75 The audit team came to the conclusion that the University has well-developed arrangements for overseas visiting that ensure regular contact with SEGi. Staff development provided by SEGi is complemented by the input from Sunderland to ensure that the University processes are clearly communicated. The University plays a key part in the appointment of staff who teach on its programmes in Malaysia. Staff development is well-supported: the University makes a contribution through its workshops and conference activity in Malaysia.

Student admissions

76 The entry requirements for programmes are laid out in the programme specification, and presented in the University prospectus and in the SEGi website and prospectus. Students must meet the academic English language requirements of the University. The University takes responsibility for all admissions decisions, and where a prior qualification is not listed in the National Academic Recognition Information Centres index of equivalent foreign qualifications, an individual assessment of the student's achievement is undertaken by the course tutor. SEGi is responsible for administering the application forms and communicating with the University regarding approval of non-standard applications. The University makes conditional and unconditional offers to students, and approves or declines non-standard entry.

77 The University is also responsible for ensuring that students are enrolled at the start of their course. As indicated above, reports on feedback from students recognise that students experienced some delays in this process. The University has sought to address the difficulty. The Sunderland Regional Office plays a key part in managing all of the applications and

admissions to SEGi. The process is effective, and students who met the audit team reported that their enrolment was very efficient, giving rapid access to the University's virtual learning environment.

78 The Model D programmes operate as a one-year programme based on an articulation arrangement with the corresponding SEGi diploma programme. The articulation was approved as part of the formal agreement since this was for a progression award. The detail of the mapping is approved and kept up-to-date at faculty level. The proposal for an agreement mapped the outcomes of the SEGi programmes against those of the University's degree to ensure that the SEGi Diploma was an appropriate programme for accredited entry to the third year of the degree. The process followed the procedures approved by Academic Board prior to the most recent system change approved in 2010. Consideration of the SEGi programmes will in future follow the University process known as 'Recognition of Award'.

79 There is continued development of the admissions procedures, and the University maintains its responsibility through for the integrity of the admissions decisions made to its courses. The role of the Regional Office is important in ensuring a smooth and efficient system of recruitment and admission to the University's programmes. Entry of students with advanced standing is well-regulated.

Assessment requirements

80 The University is responsible for arranging programme assessment boards, all of which take place at Sunderland. Separate from these, SEGi staff also meet to review the performance of the students. Assessment boards receive all results and consider comparability between partner and Sunderland campus performances. Module leaders are provided with a breakdown of marks by partner for each assessment cycle. Staff from partner institutions are invited to assessment boards but, in practice, overseas partner staff are rarely able to attend. The centre leader is, however, expected to be present.

81 SEGi is responsible for notifying students of the assessment arrangements, and for conducting assessment in accordance with the programme regulations. The SEGi staff met by the audit team confirmed that the briefing that they received about assessment was very good, and that they were familiar with the assessment arrangements. The staff also explained that they were aware of the relationship of assessment criteria to the learning outcomes, and that the criteria had been discussed with the centre leader. Students similarly confirmed that their lecturers had informed them about the assessment arrangements, and that they were aware of what they needed to do to perform well in assessments. The academic staff expressed the view that in the past, for students studying in Malaysia, too much weight had been placed on coursework in the overall assessment and that Sunderland had now changed this.

82 In Model D collaborative arrangements, the University is responsible for setting, marking and moderating assessments. These are identical to those offered at Sunderland. Under this model, examinations take place at the same time, and scripts are sent to Sunderland for marking and moderation. Discussions with staff confirmed the synchronicity of the examination timetable. In Model B, the partner sets and marks the assessments, with all examinations at SEGi sat at the same time as those held in Sunderland. The University approves the assessment briefs prior to them being issued to the students. The University moderates the assessments marked by the partner, and can request to see all scripts. In the case of SEGi, this has happened on occasions. The audit team learned that the University, through the Academic Development team, provides training to the partners in assessment, and that module leaders also contribute to the experience of the partners in setting assignments. They do this in approving assessment briefs against expected learning outcomes.

83 Arrangements for assessment are effective in providing consistency of process for the students studying at SEGi and those studying at Sunderland. The University has effective procedures for ensuring that staff are briefed about assessment arrangements, and, in turn, the students are informed about how to perform well. The University has responded well to the challenge of providing timely feedback on assessment.

External examining

84 External examiners are appointed at module and programme levels, and both consider home-campus and collaborative provision. The University is responsible for appointing external examiners, and for issuing external examiner reports to the partner. The briefing that forms a part of the induction for new external examiners may include coverage of collaborative partners. Since 2005, the University has asked external examiners to make specific comments on the level of challenge and student performance across campuses, and at assessment boards results are reported by cohort. Previously, the University had an expectation that external examiners should make visits to partners' campuses, but this is now being phased out, and such visits are not now made to SEGi.

85 The external examiner module report form requests information about collaborative partners, including consistency of student performance, the effectiveness of University links, areas for enhancement, and good practice. The audit team saw an example of an external examiner report for SEGi that raised concerns about poor student performance on some modules, and of the actions taken with SEGi to address these.

86 The audit team saw evidence of an extensive overview report of the individual reports of external examiners with responsibility for collaborative provision. This set out external examiners' comments on standards, assessment procedures, module content, learning and teaching strategies, and the effectiveness of collaborative links, with each section highlighting good practice and recommendations. The reports are considered at QMSC.

87 The University's arrangements for external examining are consistent between the home campus and SEGi. The arrangements adequately allow themes in collaborative provision to be identified, reported and addressed.

Certificates and transcripts

88 The University is responsible for issuing award certificates and transcripts. The certificate indicates that it is issued in conjunction with a transcript of modules and results that states the name and location of the partner institution and the language of instruction.

89 The staff at SEGi are uncertain about which awards may be issued to students who leave their programme early for illness or other circumstance. At the time of the audit, there had been no such cases. Nevertheless, in the interests of training and preparation, it would be helpful for the University to brief the staff of SEGi about the exit awards that it offers for those taking a three-year programme leading to an honours degree.

90 The view of the audit team is that the award certificates and transcripts are clear and provide useful information. It would be helpful for the University to ensure that the staff at SEGi are aware of the exit awards that are available for students who terminate their programme early for whatever reason.

Section 4: Information

Student information

91 Information about the programmes is provided on the SEGi website. This sets out clearly the link with the University as well as details about the content of the programme. Registered students are provided with a Programme Handbook. This includes information on contacts, structure of the programme, learning and assessment, programme regulations, student support and guidance, and plagiarism. More general information, including on complaints and assessment appeals, is provided in the Student Handbook issued by the University. The students confirmed that they received the handbooks during their orientation programme at the start of the course. The Student Handbook explains that, for services provided by a partner college, the student must first exhaust the internal complaints procedure of the local institution before taking up a complaint with the University. The students met by the audit team were familiar with the arrangements for assessment appeals and complaints.

92 In line with the outline job description for centre leaders, the leader for SEGi undertakes the task of checking that the handbooks provided for students at the partner are accurate and comprehensive.

93 The audit team concluded that information provided to students is adequate for them to be able to make decisions about their studies.

Publicity and marketing

94 The Memorandum of Agreement sets out the responsibility of the partner to publicise locally the availability of the programme. The University reserves the right to publicise collaborative programmes in its own publicity material, and in other material agreed with the partner. The Agreement also specifies that all publicity requires prior approval by the University. The centre leader's responsibilities include checking the partner's marketing and publicity materials, including the website, to ensure that no inappropriate material is displayed. The students who met the audit team confirmed that the publicity material which they had seen provided an accurate description of their experience at SEGi, with which they were very satisfied.

95 The arrangements for checking the publicity materials were considered by the audit team to be effective.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

96 Although there is no formal expectation of progression to the University's campus, the students met by the audit team were aware that it is possible for them to progress to the UK for further study. The University's regional office can provide assistance and information in this. The students recognised that the difficulty of finance would act as a barrier. The students were also aware of the possibility of continuing their studies after graduation to a master's degree in Malaysia or elsewhere, and that this could provide the basis for recognition by the Malaysian or UK professional body.

97 Students are aware that opportunities for further study in the UK exist. The audit team recognises the financial difficulties associated with progression to the UK.

Conclusion

98 In this partnership, the University follows the precepts and advice of the *Code of practice*, especially, *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

99 The audit team identified the following positive features in the partnership:

- the University has undertaken a thorough review of its operating procedures and quality assurance processes. This has been supported by discussions with partners. New processes have been explained and supported as they are implemented through partner organisations (paragraphs 12, 18)
- there is mutual respect between the partners. This has been fostered through joint working that is supported by the Regional Office of the University which employs experienced local staff in Malaysia to offer support and guidance to the partners (paragraphs 17, 18)
- the role of the centre leader provides a key point of liaison that supports the oversight of the University and ensuring effective channels of communication for colleagues at SEGi (paragraphs 40 to 43, 59)
- students value the opportunity to study in Malaysia for a UK degree. This makes the programme accessible and affordable for them. They are supported by well-qualified staff in Malaysia who offer guidance on the local engineering context (paragraphs 44, 71 to 75, 97).

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

- monitor closely the enrolment time for students (paragraph 47)
- disseminate to SEGi joint data sets that support cross-comparison of UK and Malaysian student performance (paragraph 50)
- develop further its mechanisms for effective SEGi student feedback to ensure that students develop their skills in critical comment and understand its importance to the University (paragraph 60)
- explore the possible provision of financial support for staff or student exchange (paragraph 74)
- ensure that the staff at the College are aware of the exit awards that are available for students who terminate their programme early for whatever reason (paragraphs 89, 90).

101 The evidence indicates that the University of Sunderland's view of the link as set out in its briefing paper provides an accurate account of the way in which the link has been developed, is managed and is operating.

102 The audit team came to the view that the partnership between the University and SEGi is working effectively. This mutually supportive partnership is based on respect and a willingness to support a critical and open relationship that faces up to any problems and reflects on the outcomes of the deliberative processes. There are well-developed arrangements that provide a good learning experience.

103 As an example of its policies and procedures for collaborative provision, the audit team's findings support a conclusion of confidence in the University's management of academic standards and systems for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students studying under its collaborative arrangements overseas.

Appendix A

University of Sunderland's response to the Overseas audit of Malaysia 2010

The University of Sunderland welcomes the QAA report on its collaborative provision with SEGi in Malaysia. This is a major collaborative partner for the University and was the first to be developed as an institution-wide agreement. Since the audit we have been working with SEGi on the introduction of further programmes from the Faculty of Arts, Design & Media.

The report endorses our approach which combines genuine partnership with robust management of quality and standards. We are particularly pleased that the hard work we have invested in our recent review of our collaborative approval and review processes has been recognised, as this is strengthening the management of all our collaborative partnerships, not just that with SEGi.

The report will be considered through our Academic Board committee structure which will monitor follow-up actions. The recommendations which the audit team has made will further support the development and enhancement of our provision at SEGi and, where applicable, elsewhere.

Appendix B

Student numbers registered at 1 July 2010

Site	Programme	Model of delivery	Number of registered students
Subang Jaya	BEng Mechanical Engineering	D	82
Subang Jaya	BEng Electronic & Electrical Engineering	D	76
Subang Jaya	BEng Mechanical Engineering	Model B, 3+0	125
Subang Jaya	BEng Electronic & Electrical Engineering	Model B, 3+0	38
Penang	BEng Electronic & Electrical Engineering	D	19
Kota Damansara	BEng Mechanical Engineering	Model B, 3+0	197
Kota Damansara	BEng Electronic & Electrical Engineering	Model B, 3+0	129

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