



Audit of overseas provision

**University of the West of England, Bristol
and Brickfields Asia College, Malaysia**

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Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of the West of England, Bristol and Brickfields Asia College, 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 run directly 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 of overseas provision 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 subset 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.

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 the West of England, Bristol (UWE), was coordinated for QAA by Mr Will Naylor, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor John Baldock and Professor Mark Davies (auditors), with Mr Will Naylor acting as audit secretary. There was no visit to Brickfield Asia College (BAC) owing to the dissolution of the partnership in late 2009.

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 the West England, Bristol (UWE) and Brickfields Asia College, Malaysia (BAC) was formally established in October 2007 and dissolved in September 2009. It provided for the delivery by BAC of the first two years of UWE's LLB in Law at BAC's premises in Kuala Lumpur and, thereafter, the transfer of students to UWE in Bristol to complete the third and final year.

9 The programme had three student intakes per academic year in September, January and April. By the end of the partnership, 12 students had completed the first two years in Malaysia and transferred to UWE.

10 BAC, formerly known as Brickfields College and part of the Brickfields Education Group, is a private higher education provider established in the early 1990s. It offers courses at several levels from A-Levels to master's degrees in subjects including law, business and computer studies. Immediately before the creation of the link, BAC's law provision included A-Levels, the University of London External LLB, and a UK Transfer Degree Programme (UKTDP) offering progression to the third year of LLB programmes at a number of institutions in the UK, including UWE.

11 When the link was established with BAC, it was UWE's third overseas collaborative venture and its second in Malaysia. UWE's overseas collaborative provision has since grown to 10 different partnerships (not including BAC) including three in Malaysia. UWE's briefing paper indicated that the link with BAC was designed, approved and established in accordance with UWE's Academic Regulations and Procedures governing collaborative provision.

12 The link was terminated at a meeting at UWE in Bristol. The minutes of this meeting indicate that UWE will continue to accept BAC students who successfully complete the UKTDP into the final year of its LLB on an individual basis, reverting to the position before this link was established.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

13 UWE operates several types of collaborative provision, including credit recognition agreements, dual awards and franchised delivery. To promote parity of standards, home and collaborative provision follow the same arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review, admissions, module and programme leadership, the production of module handbooks, assessment, external examining and certificates and transcripts. UWE's standard partnership agreement document is called a Memorandum of Agreement and makes plain that the ultimate responsibility for the University's awards is vested in Academic Board. This is echoed by the award and programme approval handbook.

14 In 2007, UWE's International Group published an Internationalisation Strategy describing the University's ambition to integrate its international operations into its other activities, and a 'Strategy for South East Asia - Malaysia', emphasising its determination to grow collaborative provision in the country.

15 When the link with BAC was established, oversight of collaborative provision was largely delegated to faculties and schools. By the time of the audit, however, the University was in the process of centralising executive and deliberative oversight of collaborative provision in response to the recommendations of the 2009 QAA Institutional audit report. Responsibility for international admissions and recruitment had moved to the Admissions and International Development Service, within the purview of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Internationalisation and Recruitment). In addition, the collaborative provision team within Academic Registry had begun developing a single framework for the management of collaborative provision, manifesting in a new Collaborative Provision Handbook that consolidates UWE's procedures for the creation, approval and ongoing management of collaborative links. Within this new structure, faculties retain operational responsibility for student administration and records, and the management and enhancement of academic standards and quality. Thus, faculty deans are responsible for ensuring that the University's policies and procedures are implemented.

16 The deliberative bodies with responsibility for collaborative provision are Academic Board which approves international partner institutions as affiliated institutions (external organisations must first become affiliated institutions before being permitted to deliver programmes leading to UWE awards); and the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), which maintains oversight of all collaborative partnerships by advising Academic Board on proposals for new links, coordinating partnership reviews, and identifying effective practice and priorities for enhancement. Responsibility for the development and implementation of UWE's Internationalisation Strategy resides with the Internationalisation Strategy Group which reports to Academic Board. To allow the group to focus on strategic matters, it has a Partnership Approvals and Review Sub-Group. However, all approvals and reviews relating to overseas collaborative provision are presented to both QSC and the Internationalisation Strategy Group.

17 At the time of the audit UWE's new, more centralised approach to the management of collaborative activities was not mature enough for the audit team to take a view about its efficacy. Nonetheless, it was apparent that the University was taking the recommendations of the 2009 Institutional audit seriously and making good progress in its response.

18 At the time of the audit UWE was planning to publish information about its international collaborative links on its website, and had already made some material available to staff as part of the centralisation of the management of collaborative provision. This material included the Memoranda of Agreement, the Internationalisation Strategy, a description of the various models of international partnerships, and various forms and templates involved in their creation and management. Within the context of the problems which UWE encountered in its link with BAC, the audit team regarded this new resource as an important step in promoting a shared understanding among staff of the University's aspirations and expectations. The team noted that shortly after the audit visit, UWE published an authoritative record of its collaborative partnerships, reflecting the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2*.

19 UWE regards engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies as fundamental to its strategic aims and seeks their recognition where appropriate, including that for collaborative provision. It achieved validation from the Joint Academic Stage Board of the Bar Standards Board and the Solicitors Regulation Authority for the link with BAC in September 2007.

20 UWE also intended to have the programme accredited by the MQA. MQA required BAC to make the application for accreditation but, by mid-2009, UWE became concerned that BAC had not done so. This was one of the issues which led to the review, and subsequent dissolution, of the link in 2009. The audit team concluded that UWE will wish to exercise greater oversight of local accreditation procedures in its other overseas activities.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation and programme approval

21 Against the backdrop of its strategy to increase collaborative activity in Malaysia, UWE's decision to pursue a link with BAC was based on existing, informal links between the two institutions (UWE had been accepting BAC students onto its business and law undergraduate programmes for several years); BAC's reputation as a provider of Malaysian law programmes; its experience of delivering the University of London External LLB; and the opportunities the link would provide for progression from the undergraduate programme to higher studies.

22 UWE's procedures for selecting and approving a partner organisation comprise three successive stages, each requiring more detailed information and a higher level of deliberative approval than the last, and culminating in an Institutional Meeting at the prospective partner's premises to determine if it can be recommended by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) to Academic Board for designation as an affiliated institution. Programme approval is a separate process specified by the University's Award and Programme Approval Handbook.

23 The creation of the link with BAC, however, predated these arrangements and followed a different and shorter procedure. Stages one and two of the current procedures were conflated and the recommendation for BAC's designation as an affiliated institution was presented directly to Academic Board because QSC was not in existence. The Institutional Meeting and the programme approval event were also combined and held on the same day in April 2007, led by a panel comprising the dean of a faculty not involved in the link, the Faculty of Law librarian and an external member who was also acting for the Joint Academic Stage Board.

24 The panel's report recommended approval of BAC as an affiliated institution and supported the delivery of the LLB from September 2007 subject to a routine review in 2009-10 and five conditions. The five conditions that the panel recommended should be met by 1 July 2007 were: the production of a project plan to enhance the library; production of a plan fully articulating intentions for staff development, support, guidance, roles and responsibilities; production of a student handbook; provision of a project plan describing responsibilities for the development of the programme until September 2007; and the agreement, in consultation with the University's Academic registry, of a format and process for an Annual Operating Agreement.

25 The panel's report was considered by Academic Board in June 2007. The Board agreed to designate BAC as an affiliated institution and the programme admitted its first students in September 2007.

26 In November 2007, Academic Registry wrote to the School of Law and to BAC indicating that the conditions relating to the enhancement of the library, the staffing plan and the project plan had been met, but those regarding the student handbook and the Annual Operating Agreement had not. Thus, the programme had begun with two of the conditions of its approval outstanding.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

27 The Memorandum of Agreement with BAC was signed in October 2007 and covers a period of five years from the date of signature. Thus, the programme began in September 2007 in the absence of a formal written agreement between the partners. The audit team encourages UWE to ensure that all collaborative operations are underpinned by a signed agreement by the time the associated programmes begin.

28 The Memorandum of Agreement is based on a standard template and specifies aspects of quality assurance including programme approval, monitoring, review, day-to-day management, learning resources, recruitment and assessment. The main body of the Memorandum is largely generic; the details of the link lie in a series of attached schedules dealing with the programmes covered, an operational plan for delivery, an action plan for programme and partnership development, a staffing plan, a library plan, a statement of financial arrangement, details of marketing and publicity procedures, the admissions process, entry requirements, arrangements for extenuating circumstances, a matrix clearly indicating the responsibilities of each partner, and programme management, identifying the staff involved in the partnership against their roles. The audit team noted that in the last schedule several of the people identified, including UWE's institutional partnership manager and BAC's programme leader, had question marks against their names and the BAC Administrator was referred to by his given name only, and three roles at BAC were not assigned to anyone at all. UWE staff acknowledged that the failure to identify or confirm some of the key staff involved in the link at the outset may have contributed to its subsequent difficulties. Moreover, the team noted that the sheer number of different people involved in different aspects of the link militated against clear and consistent communication and promoted confusion about precisely who was responsible for what.

29 It was UWE's intention to update the Memorandum's schedules annually, but staff whom the audit team met confirmed that this did not occur.

30 The audit team concluded that UWE's standard Memorandum of Agreement provides a strong foundation for collaborative provision, and the annual updates of the schedules is a valuable mechanism for sustaining it. The agreement with BAC, however, was weakened by the failures both to confirm the identities of all the staff involved in the management of the link and update the schedules as planned. The team encourages UWE to ensure that its procedures for Memoranda are implemented consistently across all of its collaborative provision.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

31 Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the link was devolved to the Faculty (initially the Faculty of Law, then, following restructuring, the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities), reflecting UWE's then preference for what it described in the briefing paper as 'accountable/managed diversity'. However, the Faculty found it difficult to communicate with BAC, prompting UWE to send a group of staff, including the Assistant Vice-Chancellor, to BAC in November 2007 with the aim of strengthening communication and expediting the fulfilment of the two outstanding conditions of programme approval. UWE's report of the visit indicated that BAC staff and students had difficulty accessing the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). The partners agreed to strengthen communications and the UWE panel encouraged its School of Law to send a party to BAC in early 2008 to this end. The audit team found no evidence that a second visit took place, and UWE's briefing paper indicated that, despite the agreement reached in November, it was not possible for the University to establish the lines of communication necessary to support the BAC staff to deliver the programme.

32 UWE's briefing paper explained that faculties are responsible for creating and maintaining student records and students on collaborative programmes are required to be registered with the University from the commencement of their studies. In the case of BAC, however, the Faculty failed to keep a systematic record in either 2007-08 or 2008-09. In consequence, the exact number of students on the programme was unknown to the University.

33 UWE explained to the audit team that it had entered the partnership on the understanding that BAC would cease delivery of its UKTDP, with the result that all third-year students would transfer to UWE in Bristol. The team noted that this was implicit in the Memorandum of Agreement which stated that BAC was in the process of applying to the Malaysian National Accreditation Board (LAN, the forerunner to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)) to change the title of the UK Transfer Degree Programme (UKTDP) to the UWE LLB (Hons), and in the meantime would market the programme as the 'UWE UKTDP solely run by UWE'.

34 The report of the November 2007 visit to BAC confirmed that the UWE programme was being delivered. In 2008, however, UWE received from BAC a batch of examination scripts marked 'UKTDP', and BAC altered the timing of the assessments (thereby missing the deadline for UWE's examinations boards), prompting concerns that BAC was continuing to provide the generic UKTDP. These concerns were amplified in early 2009 when UWE staff noticed that BAC continued to advertise the UKTDP, and then further in June 2009 when UWE received examination scripts for moderation from 70 students, about 50 more than it thought were enrolled. Later that year BAC informed UWE that the MQA had refused to accredit an exclusive arrangement between the two institutions and, during the final meeting between the partners in late 2009, BAC informed the University that it had never been BAC's intention to abandon the UKTDP.

35 The experiences of the students whom the audit team met compounded the uncertainty about the nature of the programmes taught at BAC. They had attended the same lectures as London External students for some modules, despite the report of the Institutional Meeting stating that the UWE programme, 'would be taught separately from the University of London degree', and had sat the same examinations as students whom they understood were enrolled on different programmes. The team was, therefore, unable to confirm if the UWE programme had been running at BAC in 2008-09.

36 UWE's regulations require programme management committees (or their equivalent) to be set up for each scheme or award, and indicate minimum terms of reference and composition, details of which are approved as part of validation. The Memorandum of Agreement for the BAC link indicated that BAC was responsible for convening the programme management committee, but did not specify its composition or terms of reference. Students whom the audit team met were not aware of the existence of a programme management committee or equivalent (and indicated that they did not give feedback in any other way) and UWE acknowledged that it had no evidence to suggest a committee had ever been established. The team concluded that UWE must ensure that its requirements for student representation and feedback at collaborative partners are fully and consistently implemented.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

37 Responsibility for annual monitoring lies with faculties and each faculty dean reports summarily to QSC on outcomes and actions planned. The process requires faculties to identify issues related to collaborative provision, and to provide a programme report for each programme delivered via a partner. Annual monitoring reports for overseas collaborations are considered by the Internationalisation Strategy Group, which reports to QSC.

38 The Memorandum of Agreement with BAC made BAC responsible for providing an annual monitoring and evaluation report following UWE's template and timetable. However, UWE did not receive any such report from BAC and had no evidence to suggest that any annual monitoring occurred. BAC's failure to provide a report was formally recorded by the

School of Law and its parent Faculty in October 2008 in their Annual Monitoring and Evaluation (Taught Provision) Summary Reports for 2007-8 (though this was curiously in the sections on good practice), and the International Strategy Group began discussing the problem in November. QSC did not discuss the lack of annual monitoring by BAC until November 2009.

39 As a result of a lack of annual monitoring information UWE confirmed in its briefing paper that it had no evidence of the collection of feedback from students and no data on entry profiles, progression or any other indicators of student performance. Moreover, UWE explained that it could not identify its students at BAC in the University's student record system and, therefore, it was impossible to analyse their performance.

Staffing and staff development

40 It was BAC's responsibility to deliver the programme, using lecturers approved by UWE. The audit team enquired about the approvals process, but the evidence provided - a series of email correspondence from November 2007 - only indicated the names of the BAC teaching staff. The team noted that the Institutional Meeting scrutinised the curricula vitae of teaching staff, but could not determine if these were the same group of staff named in the November correspondence. Staff confirmed that in many cases UWE had only the names of the BAC lecturers involved and, therefore, was unable to verify their qualifications and experience. The team considered it crucial that for future collaborative links UWE is able to satisfy itself about the credentials of those who teach its students.

41 The Memorandum of Agreement delegated responsibility for staff development to BAC, with UWE having a monitoring role. Staff whom the audit team met indicated that an induction event run by UWE staff and including pedagogical techniques, assessment, and programme management, was held over two days at BAC in June 2007. According to the Memorandum, this event was to be followed by a reciprocal visit in autumn 2007, to include classroom observation by BAC lecturers. The team learnt that only the BAC programme director visited Bristol for training and did not observe teaching.

Student admissions

42 The Memorandum of Agreement delegated responsibility for the admission of applicants satisfying standard academic and English language entry requirements to BAC (UWE retained responsibility for admitting applicants who could not satisfy the standard requirements). The Memorandum also delegated responsibility for the completion of UWE registration forms and the collection of fees. However, this process broke down, leaving UWE unable to determine precisely how many students had enrolled in either 2007-08 or 2008-09. The proceedings of the task group which UWE established to investigate the link indicated that the University could not establish if it had any students at all in 2008-09, despite having issued, at BAC's request, usernames and passwords to 59 students for access to UWE's VLE. UWE acknowledged that the absence of a reliable student record raised serious risks for assessment and the maintenance of academic standards.

43 During a visit to BAC in April 2009, UWE staff heard that 12 students wished to complete the LLB in Bristol. By comparing the names of these students against the admissions data for 2007-08 and examination transcripts provided by BAC, UWE was able to compile a full set of marks for the students involved, enabling them to progress to the third year, albeit without their marks being formally confirmed until February 2010 (see Assessment requirements below). The audit team noted the considerable efforts which UWE had made to facilitate the students' progression.

44 At the time of the audit, UWE understood that none of its students remained at the College.

Assessment requirements

45 The Memorandum of Agreement states that UWE is responsible for the approval of assessment before it is given to students and for moderation of assessed work; BAC is responsible for marking, including second-marking where appropriate. Assessment design is a joint responsibility, although staff explained that, in practice, coursework was set by BAC and UWE staff had scrutinised most, but not all of it before it was issued to students.

46 UWE operates a two-tier examining board structure for its LLB programme: the Law Undergraduate Field Board considers and approves module marks and awards credit; the Law Undergraduate Scheme Award Board decides the eligibility of students for the award and considers extenuating circumstances. Both Field and Award Boards are convened by, and take place at, UWE, and consider marks for home students alongside those of students studying with collaborative partners.

47 BAC provided marks sporadically and in a format which sometimes made it impossible to allocate them to particular students, forcing UWE to convene a series of extraordinary Field Boards for the BAC students and thereby defeating its intention to compare the performance of students at all delivery sites in the same meeting. It also led to deficiencies in the application of UWE's assessment procedures, including the apparent failure of a Field Board to consider and approve first-year module marks for the BAC cohort commencing in September 2007; the failure to moderate, or externally examine, the first-year marks of students beginning in January 2008; the moderation of almost 300 examination scripts from approximately 70 students in summer 2009 (despite the fact that incomplete student records suggested that only 20 students were enrolled on the UWE programme); and the occurrence of a Field Board and an Award Board in February 2010, immediately before the audit visit, to consider the second-year marks for students who were already about half-way through their third year in Bristol. The February 2010 Boards noted that BAC had recently provided the University with marks for the students concerned, but that these were sometimes at odds with marks recorded on BAC's transcripts. Where there was any confusion or conflict, students were credited with the higher mark.

48 The audit team further noted that only three members were present at the special Field Board convened in June 2009 to consider the BAC students. UWE's regulations state that a quorum comprises two-thirds of the membership, which is the Dean or nominee, the field leader, module leaders or nominees and the external examiner. Thus, the meeting was quorate only if the module leaders had all nominated the same individual. Even had this been the case, the team concluded that such a small attendance reduced the Board's capacity to give full consideration to students' performance.

49 The students whom the audit team met indicated they had received feedback from BAC staff on their assessed work and that this feedback was useful and timely. However, they also indicated they had never received any assessment criteria.

External examining

50 UWE's procedures for external examining are laid out in its academic regulations and procedures. The briefing paper stated that, 'the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities would have made individual responses to each external examiner's report'. The audit team asked the University to provide a copy of these responses but received copies of email correspondence among staff regarding the outcomes of an assessment board. The team was, therefore, unable to determine if the University had made any response.

51 The external examiner reports for 2008-09 made no mention of the provision at BAC. The audit team considered this was because so little work from BAC had been presented, or because the report in use at that time did not require external examiners to make specific comments on collaborative provision. In this connection, the team was encouraged to note that UWE had revised the report template during 2009-10 to require specific comments on the collaborative provision for which the external examiner is responsible.

52 External examiner reports were not shared with student representatives at BAC, and BAC apparently had no mechanism for doing so.

Certificates and transcripts

53 UWE is responsible for producing and issuing award certificates and certificates of credit. Normally, if the award has been achieved at a partner institution, the partner is named on both documents. However, at the time when the Memorandum of Agreement with BAC was signed, UWE understood that LAN forbade the naming of the partner on the award certificate and the certificate of credit. BAC is not, therefore, mentioned on either document.

Section 4: Information

Student information (oversight by UK institution)

54 The provision of a handbook for students was a condition of the approval of the programme. Although a draft UK version of the 2007-08 student handbook was sent to BAC in July 2007, both staff and students whom the audit team met confirmed that it was never issued. The report of UWE's November 2007 visit to BAC indicated that BAC had returned a draft BAC version to the School of Law for approval but that no response had been received.

55 In the absence of a student handbook, students were not given a programme specification or information on complaints and appeals.

56 The students whom the audit team met confirmed the information they received as applicants was accurate and comprehensive. They also indicated that they considered themselves UWE students from the outset and always intended to transfer to Bristol to complete their degrees. Nevertheless, the report of the November 2007 visit to BAC indicates that, at that time, many students were not aware they were undertaking a UWE programme.

Publicity and marketing

57 Editorial control of prospectuses resides with the University's Marketing and Communications service which solicits input from faculties. Faculties are responsible for the accuracy and completeness of their websites.

58 Schedule 4 of the Memorandum of Agreement with BAC sets out the responsibilities of each partner with respect to marketing and publicity, and indicates that publicity material must be approved in advance by submission to the University's Deputy Director, Admissions and International Recruitment. However, staff met by the audit team were largely unaware of this arrangement. UWE provided the team with an example of where BAC submitted publicity material to the University for approval. The team noted that the response to BAC was handled appropriately by the faculty administrator.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

59 UWE provides a dedicated website for international students which gives information about living and studying in the UK. Although it is not targeted specifically at students transferring from collaborative partners, the audit team regarded this website as a useful resource.

60 The students whom the audit team met indicated that they took advantage of induction events arranged for international students and rated the events highly. They noted positively that the final year of study represented a greater intellectual challenge than their experience at BAC. They also valued the interaction with staff at the University and appreciated its self-directed style of learning.

Conclusion

61 The link between UWE and BAC was clearly problematic and departed from the University's requirements in a number of key areas, including the fulfilment of conditions of programme approval, student records, student information, programme monitoring, and the approval of teaching staff and assessment. Staff whom the audit team met were open and frank about the difficulties they had encountered; they explained they had perceived many of the problems, particularly in early stages of the partnership, as teething problems which they expected would abate as the partners became more familiar with one another. This made them reluctant to activate the safeguards built in to the Memorandum of Agreement to deal with situations where either party failed to discharge its obligations.

62 The audit team recognised the sensitivity required in building new collaborative links and acknowledged the efforts which UWE staff had made to resolve many of the problems described in this report. It concluded, however, that UWE should have acted more quickly to address the obvious risks manifest, in particular, in the almost complete lack of management information on student enrolment, progression and achievement. The failure to act on these risks led to problems accumulating and escalating to the point where UWE's oversight of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities was compromised.

63 Against this backdrop, the audit team was encouraged to learn about UWE's new, more centralised approach to the management of collaborative provision, which should help to prevent difficulties like those manifest in the link with BAC, lingering at school or faculty levels and thereby being allowed to develop into more serious problems. The team echoes the sentiments expressed in UWE's briefing paper that the experience of the link with BAC provides further evidence to support the importance of institutional oversight and of making clear the accountability of faculty-based staff in managing high risk collaborative activities.

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

- the progress that UWE has made in addressing those recommendations of the 2009 QAA Institutional audit report that relate to collaborative provision
- the ability to update schedules to Memoranda of Agreement annually (paragraphs 28, 29)
- UWE's efforts to identify and secure the interests of its students, once it became clear that the partnership had foundered (paragraph 43).

65 The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by UWE as it develops its collaborative provision:

- exercise greater oversight of local accreditation procedures (paragraph 20)
- ensure conditions of programme approval are fulfilled before programmes begin (paragraph 26)
- ensure that all collaborative operations are covered by a valid agreement before the associated programme begins (paragraph 27)
- consider a new process for communication between the University and its collaborative partners emphasising clarity and consistency (paragraph 28)
- ensure that schedules to Memoranda of Agreement are reviewed and, if necessary, updated annually (paragraph 29)
- ensure that data on registered students, including numbers and entry qualifications, are reported to UWE without delay (paragraph 32)

- maintain an accurate and comprehensive central record of all students studying at affiliated institutions (paragraph 32)
- ensure that all students are able to feed back on their experiences and contribute to quality management processes (paragraph 36)
- ensure that annual monitoring takes place according to the University's regulations (paragraph 38)
- satisfy itself about the credentials of all those who teach its students and that those staff are properly identified, trained and reviewed in accordance with the *Code of practice* (paragraph 40)
- strengthen its oversight of assessment (paragraph 47)
- ensure that partner institutions implement the University's policy on sharing external examiner reports with student representatives (paragraph 52)
- ensure that students are given comprehensive and accurate information about their programmes of study (paragraphs 54, 55)
- expedite its planned review of the application, admissions and registration process for international collaborative provision.

Appendix

University of the West of the England, Bristol's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with Brickfields Asia College, Malaysia

The University welcomes the report on its collaborative arrangements with Brickfields Asia College, Malaysia, and welcomes those positive features identified by the audit team, particularly the University's 'efforts to identify and secure the interests of its students, once it became clear that the partnership had foundered'. The partnership was terminated by mutual consent with effect from September 2009 and the remaining cohort of students from Brickfields Asia College transferred to UWE.

The audit contributed to the University's ongoing reflection on the development and management of the partnership, the strengths and weakness of its approach to collaborative partnerships and supported the institution's own identification of areas that require enhancement.

The University is pleased that the audit team identified as a positive feature: 'The progress that UWE has made in addressing those recommendations of the 2009 QAA Institutional audit report that relate to collaborative provision'.

The University is grateful to the audit team for its constructive comments and is already addressing the points identified. The Academic Board will monitor progress on the institutional action plan arising from audit.

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