QAA

Audit of
overseas provision

Heriot-Watt University and
Imperia Institute of Technology, Malaysia

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Introduction

This report considers the collaborative arrangement between Heriot-Watt University and Imperia Institute of Technology, Malaysia.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

1   The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in United Kingdom (UK) higher education rests with individual universities and colleges. 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 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 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 2009 to meet some of the staff responsible for managing and delivering the provision, and to meet students. The audit of Heriot-Watt University was coordinated for QAA by Alan Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Professor David Airey and Emeritus Professor Sue Frost (auditors), with 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 Heriot-Watt University (the University) and Imperia Institute of Technology (the Institute) was established in 2002, when the University appointed the Institute as a centre for delivery of a postgraduate programme by distance learning offered by the University's School of the Built Environment (SBE). The agreement has been renewed twice since 2002. The agreement now includes four undergraduate programmes: Construction Project Management, Facilities Management, Quantity Surveying and Real Estate Management, all leading to Scottish Ordinary degree awards, and four MSc/Postgraduate Diploma programmes: Construction Project Management, Facilities Management, Quantity Surveying and Real Estate Management. In 2009-10 there were 135 undergraduate students and 30 students following postgraduate programmes.

9   The Institute is a private institution of higher education located in Kuala Lumpur and approved by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia to offer certificates and diplomas. It was founded in 1995 and currently has a total student population of about 500, which includes some 200 students taking a local diploma programme. The Institute is part of a large Malaysian company involved in construction and property development. It has academic collaboration and institutional links with universities in the UK, the United States of America and Australia. Apart from its status as an institution of higher education, the Institute is accredited as an approved training provider and approved training centre by the Human Resource Development Council and the National Vocational Training Council of the Ministry of Human Resource in Malaysia.

10   The University currently has more than 70 partnerships with other institutions in the UK and overseas. Off-campus development has been a significant activity since the mid-1990s; there are more than 12,000 students studying other than on the Edinburgh campus, including those on its campus in Dubai. The off-campus provision now represents about one-half of the University's student population, and 50 per cent of Scotland's off-campus student population. In an otherwise relatively small university with about 4,900 publicly-funded undergraduate places, this development has been part of a strategy to widen the student base. Apart from provision offered with partners, referred to as Approved Learning Partners (ALPs), other off-campus provision includes independent learners, exchange agreements, and two validation agreements.

11   The link with the Institute is representative of the links that the University maintains with its ALPs. The University is responsible for the development of the curriculum, the preparation of the teaching and learning materials, summative assessment, admission, progression and awards, and the virtual learning environment. The partner recruits the students, and provides teaching support and formative assessment as well as general student support and facilities.

12   The Institute's undergraduate programme with the SBE is a one-year progression degree that articulates with the Institute's diploma programmes. There are opportunities for students to progress to an honours degree at the University. The development of the link with the Institute is part of a larger development by the SBE which now has a network of ALPs in Singapore, Athens, Cyprus, Trinidad, Hong Kong, Bahrain and Kirkcaldy. At the time of the audit, the University was examining the possibility of extending the link with the Institute to other of its schools.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

13   The University regards overseas collaborative provision as part of its core business, and as strategically important for its future. The development of provision for students in more than 70 centres, in all continents, is seen by the University to provide a degree of security. Its aim is to provide a British-style education through its ALPs, as far as possible replicating the experience of the students taking the equivalent courses on the Edinburgh campus. To help to achieve this, the curricula, learning materials, admissions, assessment and awards are all provided by staff on the Edinburgh campus. The partner looks after marketing, recruitment and local student support.

14   The University's procedures are based upon the premise that the provision of the programmes and the quality assurance arrangements, as far as possible, are the same irrespective of the location of delivery. Students take the same courses, provided with the same learning materials and taking the same summative assessment, where possible at the same times. The marking is carried out by the academic staff or approved markers in Edinburgh. The course approval, monitoring and review procedures are identical. Notwithstanding the attempts to secure the same treatment, the University recognises that the experience of the students will be different depending on the location.

15   The processes for approving and monitoring ALPs are explained in the ALP Approvals Procedures and Guidelines available on the Registry website. Regulations and procedures relating to standards are in the University Regulations. The ALP documents set out the respective responsibilities for academic standards and quality as well as the policies and procedures for the management of collaborative arrangements. They provide a robust process for approval, including a guide to the assessment of risk and guidelines on completing an ALP agreement that clearly details roles and responsibilities. There are procedures for quality assurance visits, and draft contract and agreement documents. The documentation is supported by full and helpful exemplars, and forms to be completed at each stage. The final schedule of approved programmes summarises the details, including the financial arrangements. Approved programmes are entered in the Register of ALP arrangements. The development of collaborative provision through the ALPs is also supported by the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

16   The University recognises that delivery through ALPs brings increased operational, financial and reputational risk compared with courses delivered on its campuses. The approval and monitoring process requires the completion of a detailed risk assessment report. This allows the University to distinguish between low and high risk activities. Where a high risk is identified, this is added to the University Risk Register. Risk reporting is part of annual monitoring, and all high risks are audited at least every three years.

17   Within the documentation the audit team saw clear lines of responsibility for the development and maintenance of links with the ALPs. Initial development and maintenance of links rest with the academic schools. Overall responsibility for ALP contracts, review and monitoring lies with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). Approval of partnerships is delegated from the Planning and Management Executive and Senate to the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the School Financial Controller, the Legal Manager, Head of School and the Secretary of the University. Academic matters are overseen by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee, with course approval by the University undergraduate and postgraduate studies committees, all reporting to Senate. The International Development Committee reporting to the Planning and Management Executive develops and coordinates the University's International Strategy.

18   All the postgraduate awards of the SBE offered through the Institute have the same recognition by the relevant UK professional body as the awards offered in Edinburgh. This is not the same for the University's undergraduate awards offered by the Institute, which are currently only available at ordinary degree level. Professional body recognition is limited to honours degrees. The students and academic staff met by the audit team in Malaysia were aware that their programmes did not carry formal professional recognition by UK bodies. Given the good employment prospects current at the time of the audit, the students were not concerned about this, although they were aware that it might limit their future prospects.

19   The programmes are developed at the Edinburgh campus, and are common across all centres. As such, they are not expected or required to consider country-specific issues. However, programmes at the ALPs are supported in-country by staff tutors. These have responsibility for tutorials, seminars, workshops and laboratories, as well as marking formative assignments. It is expected that they will provide the local context. From meetings with the teaching staff in Malaysia, the audit team learned that opportunities are taken to explore local examples and to contrast the Malaysian experience with that in the UK. Comments received by the team suggest that students and tutors find some of the work remote from Malaysian experience.

20   In summary, the audit team considers the approach adopted by the University to overseas collaboration through ALPs to be consistent with the overall strategy of the University and to be effective. This view was derived from the team's scrutiny of the documentation supporting the development and monitoring of ALPs and minutes of committees and was reinforced in its discussions with staff. The procedural documentation provides a full framework for ensuring the consistent assurance of quality and the maintenance of standards. In particular, the risk-based approach of the University is a positive feature of this partnership.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

21   Responsibility for establishing ALP links is devolved to schools. In the case of the School of the Built Environment (SBE), the Director of Transnational Education (DTE) has responsibility for setting up and maintaining collaborations, including that with the Institute. There are two stages in the approvals process. In the negotiation stage, the school and the Approved Learning Partners (ALP) work together to prepare a profile of the ALP, an overview of the partnership, a risk assessment, a financial case (signed by the Head of School and Financial Controller), a completed contract, a visit report, evidence of any necessary government approval, and a formal recommendation of the course leader. All of these elements are supported by clear documentation. It is expected that this stage will be completed within a year. In the second, 'approvals', stage the completed documents are submitted to an approvals team which includes the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), Secretary of the University, Head of School and Legal Services Manager. Approval depends on whether the agreement contributes to the University's strategic plan, the ALP is a fit organisation, the school can support the course, and

the contract. The partnership contract is for an initial period of three years. Subsequently reviews are on a three-year cycle. These reviews consider the same issues as approval.

22 The academic case for the collaboration is included in the documentation prepared for the approval. The documentation contains a profile of the ALP and sets out programme delivery and learning support arrangements. The audit team saw evidence of the considerable detail in the current contract and annexes for the undergraduate and postgraduate courses provided at the Institute. These set out the approved programmes; the roles and responsibilities of the two parties; programme delivery and learning support; and academic standards and quality assurance.

23 Evidence of any necessary government approval is included in the initial approval and review stages. The audit team learned that the undergraduate degrees were originally recognised by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) but that this has not been renewed because MQA does not offer recognition to programmes that are delivered by distance learning and assessed overseas. The diploma programmes offered by the Institute do have MQA approval.

24 The arrangements for selecting the partner organisation are effective and robust, with attention paid to the compatibility of the partner, to risk and to the respective responsibilities of the partners. The arrangements are supported by clear protocols and documentation.

Programme approval

25 Programme approval is undertaken in the context of the *Code of practice, The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements. Advice and points of reference are available to staff in the partner institution through the University website. Helpful, clear advice, with additional support materials for staff, have been developed through the Educational Development Unit and is also available on the University intranet. The programmes offered through the Institute are approved using the same specification as home-campus provision.

26 The programme specification information is not published separately, but is included within the student handbooks of the University and the Institute and appears on the University website. Annual programme monitoring and review (APMR) reports indicate that students may not always know where to access key information. It was clear to the audit team that Institute staff have limited opportunity to contribute to the continued development of the programme specification elements. The students have information located in a number of sources including the course handbooks. It would be beneficial for the University to consider whether a programme specification for each course might bring together the critical information in a way that is more accessible to students.

27 The language of tuition is English. The diversity of students' linguistic backgrounds has become more complex as numbers have grown, and more international students enrol on the Institute's programmes. Because students are expected to meet the criteria established by the University for entry to the programme, the University offers very little additional language support.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

28 The University's partnership arrangements are supported by a comprehensive and clear set of documents and guidelines. These distinguish clearly between institutional and programme themes. The contract with the Institute is for three years and, together with its attached schedule and annexes, it provides a clear outline of the details of the approved programmes and the roles and responsibilities of the partners. These include, for example, arrangements for quality assurance, intellectual property rights, programme management and operation and termination.

29 The written agreements with the Institute are well-developed, and provide a basis for the partnership which is in accord with the *Code of practice, Section 2.*

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

30   The arrangements for institutional oversight and assurance of academic standards and the management of quality are specified in the Approved Learning Partners (ALP) contract with the responsibilities of each partner laid out in the annex.

31   The University retains responsibility for the academic content of the programmes, setting and managing all assessment processes, maintaining student records, and issuing results and transcripts of performance. The University devolves to the Institute responsibility for the provision of facilities, premises, teaching and learning resources, English language support and delivery of teaching and learning support.

32   The ALP programmes are overseen at school level by the Director of Transnational Education (DTE) who is a member of the School Management Team and is a subject expert, currently contributing a small teaching input to the home-campus programmes. The course leader for the programme has responsibility for day-to-day management of the course, and works with the DTE in order to ensure integration into the programme of students of the Institute. The course leader retains responsibility for the management of the reporting cycle, and ensures that the annual programme monitoring and review (APMR) reports from the Institute enter the annual course reporting processes.

33   Following the requirements of the ALP contract, the Institute has a centre leader for the programmes and an administrator. The administrator liaises with the administrator in the school. The University takes these roles to be of significance, and this was demonstrated when there was a high turnover in administrative links noted in the review reports. The University became concerned, and carried out a special review overseen by the DTE.

34   The DTE, supported by the course leader, is responsible for liaison and oversight of matters concerning curriculum development, learning resources, staff and student support and problem resolution for the Institute. The liaison arrangements are specified within the annex to the contract, and require a programme of visits undertaken by the DTE and other academic staff. The audit team heard from the course team that there are at least two visits each year, often more. These visits support the quality assurance processes and also assist in forward planning as laid out in the partner contract. However, Institute staff and students feel isolated from the University, and, although the University arranges a schedule of visits, staff were not able to confirm to the audit team a regular programme of visits that included meetings with students or staff as outlined in the operating agreement for the partnership.

35   The management of student records and student data on progression and achievement is undertaken fully by the University. Students provide data that are held by the University in the information system used for all student records. The audit team learned of problems experienced in the University record systems in accommodating multiple student intake dates. Annual reports from the Institute indicate a continuing problem in ensuring that all students are properly registered with the University, and report that some students experience delay in gaining access to the virtual learning environment. The School Management Team recognises the problem and the team heard that the DTE continues to address these matters. It was acknowledged by staff who met the team that there is a reliance on students to return registration forms promptly. The system is being reviewed in 2010.

36   The University provides electronic and printed materials for each module, and students have access to the virtual learning environment that provides a wide range of learning support resources including general academic guidance as well as subject specific materials. Students commented very favourably about their experience of using the University's e-learning environment. This is perceived by teaching staff in Malaysia to be a crucial element for the

students, and was identified by students in Malaysia as the most significant feature that supports them in feeling that they are students of the University. The Institute also has an online learning support resource that is a repository for a wide range of trade and professional journals, research papers and case study material that contextualise the programme for Malaysia. Students at the Institute have an academic mentor, and this relationship provides a personal tutoring element to the programme. Students value highly the contribution of their local tutors who offer considerable support and guidance. This contribution is seen by students as making a significant contribution to their learning experience.

37 While the overall responsibility for student support is taken by the University, the Institute takes operational responsibility for a range of functions including dissertation supervision, mentoring, management of course transfers, information on examination arrangements, changes to modules, implementing new course procedures locally, and handling day-to-day problems. The students feel well-supported by the local staff.

38 There are mechanisms for student representation and feedback. Students have the opportunity to participate in the University's electronic student feedback scheme, although until it is possible to distinguish which responses are from the Institute, a local paper-based arrangement has been created by the University. Also, the Institute implements its own evaluation and feedback system.

39 Evidence was provided that, overall, the University's mechanisms for considering student feedback are partially effective in raising issues that are then included in the school APMR report and discussed with the DTE. Programme managers recognise the difficulty of securing feedback from students where they might be reluctant to make written criticisms. This difficulty is addressed through annual student meetings with the DTE. These meetings generate actions to support continuous enhancement of the student experience. For example, students have identified a need to have greater contact with module leaders, and, in response, the University has instituted further communication through the virtual learning environment. The students are not encouraged to contact module tutors directly, and students who met the audit team had the understanding that they were not permitted to make direct contact. The team learned that any students who make direct contact receive a reply, but in most cases, the questions relate to issues that are the responsibility of the partner and hence they are referred back to the ALP.

40 The audit team learned that when students respond to the University's e-questionnaire there is no feedback to Institute staff or students on student satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Institute staff do not have access to this information that could support the continued development of the local team and the learning experience, or give assurance that student views are taken seriously. The team encourages the University to explore ways of ensuring that effective feedback systems are maintained for Institute staff to have full feedback about the outcomes of student evaluation systems.

41 Students are members of boards of studies. The audit team learned that teaching staff and students do not regularly see the reports prepared for and by the centre leader and DTE. This means that there is little participation in what might be a regular flow of information that could enable the University to strengthen its oversight of the programme. There is no formal student representation and no student-staff liaison groups operating locally. Currently, the feedback system relies on individual reports from the DTE. This does not entirely replicate the systems of the Edinburgh campus for systematic overview and feedback. The University is urged to ensure that there is a more systematic approach that includes local staff and students in representation and feedback systems.

42 The audit team believes that, in the light of the significance placed by the University on ALP student feedback, the University should ensure that a more effective system of representation and feedback allows students to engage more in the University's evaluation systems. Opportunities for staff to be involved in the evaluation processes should also be strengthened.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

43   The University reviewed its APMR arrangements in 2004-05 and determined that a more flexible approach was needed. A new system was piloted and found effective. The process is more flexible in allowing schools to design and submit a summary of their monitoring and review processes to Registry for approval. The effectiveness of these internal processes is considered at the quinquennial review of the school.

44   There is regular review by both partners. The partner agreement requires an annual review visit that deals with operational matters and strategic planning. Additionally, there is a three-year review of the contract in which the University periodic review makes an important contribution. The periodic review is an academic review that directly contributes to the overall review of the contract. The period may be shortened if there are matters requiring further attention. The protocols and templates ensure consistency of overview for programme reapproval. Reapproval is undertaken as a rigorous review of the preceding period.

45   The University's risk assessment arrangements articulate with the ALP review process. Where matters of concern are raised, the partner agreement requires joint scrutiny and action, with either partner being able to use the review process to underpin actions taken under the contract agreement processes. The audit team was given the example of previous difficulties at the Institute, now solved, resulting in a one-year approval period being granted, subject to review. The foreshortened review was undertaken, and matters resolved.

Annual monitoring

46   The DTE undertakes the annual visit to the Institute. The report from this visit is sent to the Academic Registry for scrutiny. The outcomes and issues are also reported in the institutional monitoring report of ALPs. These reports are shared with the ALP. These meetings are valued highly by the senior management of the Institute. There is less access to the DTE at the operational level, particularly for students and part-time Institute staff.

47   The Institute is required to prepare a partner APMR report for each course that is approved. This report includes a summary of key issues raised by students. It is completed according to a standard template.

48   The partner APMR reports are considered at school level by the course leader, who prepares a response to the partner on matters that require feedback, action or further consideration, as indicated in the University procedures. The response report follows a template for monitoring ALPs. The partner APMR reports are scrutinised by the DTE, the School Quality and Standards Committee, the Dean and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) who sends the formal response to the partner. The Dean submits a summary of the key issues arising from all partner reports to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. The audit team saw examples of reports that included a statement of the need to offer further guidance to students, to adapt course schedules to accommodate the Institute, and that identified actions required at school and university levels. Some of the issues recurred over subsequent years, and the course team had made efforts to overcome difficulties. One of the recurring issues was the timeliness of the receipt from the University of assessment results and feedback. This theme is dealt with below.

49   The school prepares a summary of all of its partner APMRs, including those submitted by the ALPs. The main themes from the partner reports are included in the school APMR report. This school report is a key part of the deliberative mechanisms that inform the University's oversight of ALPs. The school's APMR summary reports are considered by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee of the University and key issues are reported to and discussed at the International Development Committee. Institution-wide actions are identified and followed up. The audit team saw evidence of the committee stages, and confirmed the effective operation of the processes described in the procedural documents. The staff at the

Institute do not have ease of access to the outcomes of discussions in committees other than through electronic access to minutes. This limits the ability of local staff to participate in quality enhancement through regular discussions. Additionally, it is more difficult for local staff to provide reports that are useful for both partners if they are not participating in ways that support their understanding of why and how monitoring information is collected and used. The team suggests that a briefing from the DTE could give rapid access to such discussions to support local staff in understanding how the University uses the reports that they submit.

Student feedback

50   The main written summary of feedback from students is presented in the ALP's APMR report. This feedback is used to address difficulties and is reported in the school APMR. Institutional-level actions are monitored by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee and a report of actions is considered at subsequent meetings. At course level, a response document is prepared by the course leader. These response documents include further guidance, action plans and clarification of points raised in the APMR report. While there are well-established processes within the University to review reports that are submitted, there is less evidence of effective feedback to the ALP of the outcomes as described above.

51   The audit team heard that the receipt of electronic feedback from students has presented a difficulty for the University in that the new online system makes it difficult to determine which responses are from students studying at the Institute. The University has asked the Institute to revert to the use of its former paper-based questionnaires as an interim measure to allow resolution of the problem.

Student achievement

52   The School of the Built Environment (SBE), through the DTE, scrutinises student performance and identifies patterns of achievement that are at variance with the achievements of home-campus students. This analysis is undertaken at the Assessment Board. Responsibility for undertaking further action in relation to student performance rests with the DTE and course leader. While much of the achievement at the Institute is similar to that of home-campus students, there is some evidence in the undergraduate courses of a slightly skewed distribution of Institute results indicating somewhat lower average achievement. Where there is variation, this is discussed at the annual monitoring visit meeting with the Institute to identify any further support needed for students. Staff at the Institute are particularly proud of their students' achievement, but have no data from the University to allow comparison with home-campus students. The audit team believes that the University's course team should ensure that effective information supports the Institute in making comparisons with Edinburgh-campus students that, in turn, enable continued enhancement of the delivery of the programme.

53   The audit team came to the conclusion that the University's monitoring and approval mechanisms are well-designed and clearly expressed. The reports provided by the Institute and at school level are important in the University oversight of this ALP. It would be useful for the University to consider whether the APMR reports from ALPs could be further enhanced to ensure that Institute staff receive feedback on actions that address the main concerns of students and local staff.

Periodic review

54   The Scottish Quality Enhancement System requires the University to conduct internal periodic reviews. The University has two cycles of reviews. The University undertakes an enhancement-led Internal Review on all activities on a five year cycle. In addition there is an assurance-led Internal Audit of high risk activities which includes all collaborative activities. Internal Audits of ALPs consist of scrutiny of annual reports, student achievement, staff feedback, student feedback and reports of visits to the partner institution. The University considers that, as there is no opportunity for off-campus students to be represented at University level, these formal procedures are vital in providing institutional oversight of the student experience in an ALP.

55   The periodic review reports (both Internal Review and Internal Audit) are scrutinised at school level by the DTE, the Director of Learning and Teaching and school committees. At university level the reports are scrutinised by the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. The Committee minutes indicate that review reports are considered in detail and follow-up actions are monitored. Where issues are raised, an action plan is designed and the review period may be shortened, as happened at the Institute when there were concerns about administrative arrangements. This enabled matters to be resolved quickly and the normal review processes to be resumed. Over the past three years, the University has sought to assist the Institute in understanding these processes through workshops held in Kuala Lumpur and in Edinburgh. The reports are considered by Senate and the Planning and Management Executive.

56   The audit team came to the view that the periodic review processes are systematic and thorough. There is evidence that action is taken where matters of concern are raised and that these actions are monitored at university level. From the evidence presented, the audit team concluded that that the periodic review processes support effective periodic monitoring of the provision.

Staffing and staff development

57   In addition to approving its own course team, the University has a framework for the approval of local staff in Malaysia. Teaching staff are appointed by the Institute within the Approved Teachers and Tutors Framework of the University. This is stipulated in the contract of agreement and monitored by the DTE on behalf of the Dean of School. Once appointed, local staff are designated as Approved Tutors. This appointment of staff operates in stages that are identified in the Approved Tutor Scheme document, and seeks to ensure that staff are qualified and have sufficient understanding of the UK style of higher education. Approved Tutors have responsibility for teaching and learning using the materials provided by the University. They also provide general academic support and guidance and act as mentors for students.

58   The University has ensured that there is an effective resource of Approved Tutors who are normally graduates and have suitable industrial experience. Many of the staff have an impressive range of qualifications representing experience in both the UK and Malaysia. Most have postgraduate academic qualifications, and some have extensive professional backgrounds.

59   The main route for staff communication is through the DTE, who has detailed knowledge of the course and understands the local environment. The DTE is supported by other members of the course team, and there have been workshops that provide more direct contact. Additionally, there are designated administrators in both Edinburgh and the Institute. These staff are crucial in the day-to-day operation of the programme and they work closely together. This enables many problems to be resolved quickly and effectively for students. It was clear to the audit team that the administrative support for this partnership is efficient and effective and contributes to student success. The students met by the audit team were highly satisfied with the organisation of their course locally.

60   The University maintains a register of all staff teaching on the programme, and has a profile of each individual. Staff development opportunities are available at the University for the Institute's staff through the staff e-learning environment. The University holds an occasional conference for ALP colleagues hosted by the Principal. The responsibility for staff development is devolved by the University to the Institute.

61   The Institute provides a range of opportunities for continuing professional development of Approved Tutors to support the most contemporary case studies and contextual analysis. Approved Tutors are supported by the Institute and the University in continuing their academic development.

62   While Institute staff have access to continuing professional development, they reported little contribution from the University. Staff are encouraged by the University to continue their academic development, and access to PhD and MSc programmes at a reduced fee is available to staff in ALPs. The staff at the Institute wanted more contact with tutors at the University.

The audit team believes that the University could enhance its contribution to staff development in ways that ensure that local staff feel more confident as members of the course team. The staff at the Institute also indicated a commitment to learn more through staff exchange and joint research while recognising that these are limited by the cost.

63   All staff at the University and the Institute have an annual review. At the Institute, general staff development needs identified in the appraisal system inform local staff development. The audit team learned that the University is in the process of developing a peer observation system that will be implemented on its Edinburgh campus. The University has protocols, however, for peer observation in its ALPs within its Approved Teacher and Approved Tutor Scheme document. The Institute operates a peer-observed teaching scheme that is required for its programmes approved by the MQA. This was reported by Institute management to be effective, and ensures feedback that contributes to staff appraisal. The audit team came to the view that it would be useful for the University to consider the Institute's established peer observation system in the development of the University's new system.

64   Institute staff have access to a wide range of learning support materials. The SBE provides additional tutor materials in the form of guidance on lesson plans for each module, and additional explanatory notes for those delivering the distance-learning materials. Additionally, the University has an Educational Development Unit website that is a considerable resource for teaching staff, and can be accessed by off-campus Approved Tutors. The website includes practical materials that assist understanding the Academic Infrastructure, and presentations and guidelines on a wide range of teaching themes. Institute staff can access the Edinburgh-campus Higher Education Teacher programme, but the University recognises the difficulties in this and is exploring whether it is feasible to offer this programme elsewhere. Staff at the Institute value highly the access to these materials, and regularly use the resources available to them online.

65   The processes for the appointment and support of Institute staff are systematic and effective. The audit team noted the range of expertise and professional experience of staff at the Institute appointed to the programme and the opportunities for staff development that are made available.

Student admissions

66   All admission decisions are made by the University and managed through the DTE. The courses are taught in English, and there is a minimum requirement of an IELTS score of 6.5 (postgraduate) and 6.0 (undergraduate) for entry to the degree year of the programmes awarded by the University. Other mechanisms for recognition of English are also operated, such as completion in English of an accredited course for entry. The Institute filters out candidates who are inappropriately qualified, but all admission decisions rest with the SBE. The audit team learned that there is little support given by the University to enhance the students' performance in English. Further the team learned that support offered to partners in the form of Academic English courses had been declined. Support for English language acquisition should be a matter for further discussion in the light of the variation in performance in assessed work and the view of Institute staff that this may contribute to some variation in examination performance.

67   The entry requirements for courses are clearly presented in the University prospectus which is available on the website. Students are made aware that students entering the University from the Institute will have undertaken an Institute diploma, and enter the third year of the University Ordinary degree programme.

68   Individual decisions about admission within the SBE are made by the DTE. The audit team learnt that this was a temporary arrangement and would be reviewed at the end of the academic year when a newly-appointed admissions tutor, currently with responsibility for Edinburgh-campus admissions, was fully operational. The DTE has specific expertise in the subject area, and teaches on the Edinburgh-delivered course.

69   The University has clear procedures for the assessment of prior learning. It recognises accredited prior learning (APL) using the guidance of the National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC) system. There is also a system for recognising accredited prior experiential learning (APEL). However, all Institute students enter the University's programme through the Institute's diploma, and APEL is not used for direct entry into the final year of the Ordinary degree programme.

70   The audit team came to the conclusion that the arrangements for the admission of students were effective and ensured that students who are admitted are likely to complete their studies successfully.

Assessment requirements

71   The regulatory framework for the assessment of students at the Institute is the same as for the students following the same programmes on the Edinburgh campus. General details about the examination and assessment arrangements are provided in the student handbook.

72   Guidance on assessment is provided on the virtual learning environment, and the students met by the audit team understood in general how they would be assessed; students and the staff had less information about assessment criteria.

73   The assessment tasks are set by the academic staff in Edinburgh; they are also responsible for marking the work. Assessment tasks are the same as for students studying on the Edinburgh campus. Examinations in Malaysia are arranged under a service-level agreement with Edinburgh Business School which provides this service across the University through its International Centre for Examinations. The service-level agreement is well-documented, and helpful instructions, including those relating to security, are provided for examination centres outside Edinburgh. In the case of the Institute, the examination arrangements are handled by the local British Council office which is responsible for the distribution of examination papers to the partner, and for the collection and return to Edinburgh of the completed scripts. The audit team learned that the examinations in Malaysia take place on the same day as those in Edinburgh, although not synchronously. The team also learned that, following the University's normal practice with ALPs, the teaching staff at the Institute do not contribute to the assessment tasks, and no members of the Institute see the examination papers before they are formally released on the day of the examination.

74   The marking and moderation of student work are carried out by module leaders in Edinburgh or by approved makers with moderation undertaken by the module leaders. This assessment process occupies as much as three months before results and feedback are provided to students taking the course. The length of response has been identified in the APMR reports as a weakness, and the University is seeking ways to speed the process. As a result, there has been some reduction in delay of feedback. The University is reluctant to rely on local tutors to carry out marking or to provide early provisional results or feedback. Staff at all levels in the Institute, together with the students met by the audit team, expressed their frustration about length of response times, not only in connection with the delay in receiving marks but also the lack of proper timing in formative feedback before the students prepare for the next set of assessments. With regard to the quality of feedback, the Institute's lecturers suggested that this is variable. In some cases only a mark is provided by the University, but the audit team learned from one lecturer that, in response to a request, his students were now receiving fuller and more helpful feedback. The audit team was informed that from the start of 2011, as for students on the Edinburgh campus, summary notes from the markers will be provided to ALP students for each examination question. The team believes that, to take fully into account the *Code of practice*, the University should take action to ensure that students receive formative feedback in ways that support their subsequent learning.

75   The assessment boards take place in Edinburgh. For the students following postgraduate programmes the boards deal with both on and off-campus students at the same time. For undergraduate awards, separate board meetings are held for those studying off-campus. To collect and assess work from centres around the world, and to accommodate consideration of the large number of such students, these board meetings are held after the corresponding meetings for students studying the same programmes on the Edinburgh campus. Coordination between board meetings held at different times but dealing with the same diet of examinations is provided by common board membership. Precedent regarding confirmation of marks, including decisions to raise marks as happened in 2009, is provided by the first board meeting to be held. This is the board meeting for Edinburgh-campus students.

76   The audit team concluded that assessment arrangements were effective in providing consistency between the outcomes for the students studying at the Institute and those studying the same programme at Edinburgh. However, the team noted a number of weaknesses in the assessment arrangements: the non-synchronous timing of common examination papers may present security problems (although some examination timing overlap is arranged); the delay in the receipt of marks and formative feedback is frustrating, particularly for the students; it does not help the students in their preparations for subsequent assessment; and detailed feedback is not provided to students consistently for all subjects. The University has been aware for several years that the arrangements for providing timely feedback to the students are not effective, and the team advises that steps be taken to address the problems.

External examining

77   The external examiners for the ALPs, including the Institute, are the same as those for the equivalent Edinburgh-campus programmes. With the growth in student numbers, consideration is being given to appointing separate examiners for the ALP provision. This would require special approval by the University. External examiners receive a common briefing and documentation; this includes a briefing about responsibilities for ALPs, but not in relation to specific countries. The role of the examiners is also the same as that for the Edinburgh-campus programmes including the practice of examiners' scrutiny of scripts being confined to those of candidates for honours degrees. The role of the examiners is also the same as that for the Edinburgh-campus programmes including the practice of examiners' scrutiny of scripts being confined to those of candidates for honours degrees, unless there are a significant number of students leaving with an Ordinary degree award at the end of year three of an honours degree course. This means that for candidates from the Institute, all of whom are taking Ordinary degrees, while the external examiners comment on draft examination papers and consider the results, they do not scrutinise their scripts.

78   The external examiner reporting arrangements are identical for on and off-campus students. These arrangements are detailed in the University's Quality Reference Manual and include stages for the receipt and scrutiny of the reports together with action forms which are ultimately received by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). For courses where there are students studying at ALPs, the report form asks external examiners to confirm that they have received and considered the analysis of students from the ALPs, and to comment on the quality of student work and the levels of achievement attained. The comments from external examiners are not included in the feedback to partners on their APMR reports.

79   The staff and student representatives in Malaysia indicated that they do not see the reports of the external examiners or learn about their comments.

80   The arrangements for external examining are consistent between the University and the Institute. However, because there is no honours degree provision at the Institute, the level of scrutiny of scripts by external examiners for this cohort is restricted. The University may wish to consider the adequacy of this arrangement. The University should review the arrangements for the staff and student representatives at this ALP to learn about the comments of the external examiners.

Certificates and transcripts

81   The students based at ALPs receive the same form of certificate as those studying in Edinburgh. The certificate gives the name of the award and the date of graduation. The accompanying transcript shows the modules passed and number of credits gained, including credits and level awarded for prior learning. The transcript shows the identity of the ALP.

82   Certificates and transcripts are clear and provide appropriate information. The audit team learned that these documents are not received by the students until about four months after they complete their studies. The main reason for the length of this period is the time taken in arriving at marks for the assessments undertaken in the final semester.

Section 4: Information

Student information (oversight by UK institution)

83   Prospective students have access to information from both the Institute and from the University. The Institute's website provides a link to the University which gives outline information about the programmes leading to University awards. Students are given information about entry to the programme, including the fact that it leads to an Ordinary degree of the University, during the final year of their diploma studies. The students are also advised that they may study on the Edinburgh campus if they wish to take the honours year of study.

84   Registered students are provided with student handbooks by the Institute and the University. The University handbook is specifically for ALP students of the School of the Built Environment (SBE), both undergraduate and postgraduate. It includes a brief section on ALPs and on transferring to the Edinburgh-campus versions of courses, details about the content of the programmes, as well as University information. The Institute's handbook for students taking the SBE programmes mainly deals with topics of registration, administration, fees and regulations. It provides little about academic, personal support, or learning resources, although it does also provide links to useful e-learning guides. The view of the students who met the audit team was that the information provided was adequate for them to pursue their programme of studies.

85   On joining the Institute the students have an induction day. The content of this is determined by the staff at the Institute. It includes an introduction to the virtual learning environment and to the student handbook as well as dealing with themes such as plagiarism. The students indicated that they found this induction a helpful preparation for their studies. They particularly noted the importance of the introduction to the electronic resources.

86   All ALP students have the right to raise complaints and appeals with the University. Procedures for student discipline are well-documented in the Institute's handbook. The University handbook gives a useful guide to plagiarism and summary information supported by web links to the University guidelines on appeals, academic conduct and student discipline. Notwithstanding this information, the students met by the audit team were generally unaware of the University's appeals and complaints procedures, although they did know that they could approach their tutors or the Institute's office if they were experiencing difficulties.

87   Communication between University staff and the ALP students is mainly provided through the virtual learning environment and routine visits by staff. As a part of these visits, it is normal to arrange meetings with students and staff at the ALP, but students and staff who met the audit team reported that they had not so far participated in any meetings with the DTE.

88   The audit team considered that the information provided to the students was adequate for them to be able to make informed decisions about their studies.

Publicity and marketing

89   The Institute has responsibility for marketing the programmes and, according to the partnership contract, an annual marketing plan is agreed with the University. This provides the University with the opportunity to carry out its role in controlling the accuracy and completeness of the information published by the Institute on behalf of the shared programmes. While the University has the mechanisms to control publicity it does not specify the minimum amount of information that should be made available. The students met by the audit team indicated that their experience of the programme matched the publicity material.

90   The University's arrangements for checking publicity and marketing materials were considered by the audit team to be effective.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

91   The University's agreement with the Institute recognises the possibility of undergraduates transferring to the Edinburgh campus, either during their degree programme or for the honours degree. Details of the academic arrangements and matters such as costs and accommodation are provided in the University's student handbook. The Director of Transnational Education (DTE) makes available a briefing to students during visits to Malaysia. Transfer to Edinburgh during the programme is possible provided students have passed a complete stage of their studies. In common with students on the Edinburgh campus, the Institute's students have a right of progression to the honours year in Edinburgh subject to fulfilment of the entry requirements. Very few students have progressed to the Edinburgh campus. The students met by the audit team were aware of the opportunity.

Conclusion

92   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)*.

93   The collaboration between the School of the Built Environment (SBE) of Heriot-Watt University and Imperia Institute of Technology is supported by well-developed, well-documented, coherent and clear procedures that take the risks of collaborative provision into account. The procedures have allowed the University to develop the partnership with a clear knowledge of the nature of the partner. They also clearly identify the respective responsibilities of the partners, identify clear lines of communication between them, and stipulate clear processes within the University to monitor performance. The monitoring, review and approval mechanisms are well-designed, systematic and clearly identified in the protocols developed by the University. The reports provided by the Institute and by the University's SBE are important in underpinning the University oversight of this partner.

94   The University has been successful in recruiting a good cadre of local staff, and there is a good quality of student intake who generally perform well on their programmes. The partnership is well supported by the University's virtual learning environment, which is considered by both the students and the staff at the Institute to be highly effective; it is very well used. The website of the Educational Development Unit is also regarded as very helpful by the staff at the Institute. The regular visits by the Director of Transnational Education, particularly, in liaising with the management of the Institute, are a positive feature of the partnership, and the administrative arrangements between the two partners are effective. While the arrangements for review and monitoring are well organised, University feedback to the Institute's staff and students is often thin, and issues are not always dealt with promptly by the University with effective action plans.

95   Students can express their views through online evaluation of the programme and in meetings with University representatives, but the University has not ensured that students have an opportunity to express their views through a staff-student forum or through membership of the board of studies so as to assure a student experience comparable with that of Edinburgh-campus students. Institute staff are not fully involved by the University in the

regular visits from the University. Comments from external examiners are not made easily available to students and most staff. This weakness in feedback by the University to the Institute limits the involvement and understanding of staff and students in deliberative processes, and in the opportunity of Institute staff to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and to take action to enhance learning opportunities.

96   One important difficulty remains the University's delays of up to three months in providing assessment marks and evaluative feedback on student work. These delays result at the end of the programme in delays in successful students receiving certificates and transcripts. This difficulty has been noted in successive years' monitoring reports. The University is aware of the problem but has had little success in solving it. The delays create frustration for staff and students. The late return of evaluative feedback on assessed work is detrimental to the students' further learning opportunities as they embark on the next assessments. This problem with the delays in feedback to students on their assessed work is compounded by the variability of volume of the University's feedback.

97   For the most part the University's arrangements for this partnership follow the *Code of practice*. However, the delays in providing feedback to students on assessed work are at variance with precept 9 of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*.

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

● the well-documented procedures that take the risks of collaborative provision into account (paragraphs 20, 24)

● the arrangements for selecting the partner organisation which pay appropriate attention to compatibility (paragraphs 21-24)

● well-designed and clearly expressed programme approval, monitoring and review mechanisms that provide the University with effective oversight (paragraphs 28, 29, 56)

● the University's virtual learning environment, which is considered by both the students and the staff at the Institute to be highly effective; it is very well used (paragraph 36)

● the assessment arrangements that are generally effective in providing consistency between the outcomes of students studying at the Institute and those studying the same programme in Edinburgh (paragraphs 52, 71, 72, 75)

● the effective arrangements for the admission of students (paragraphs 66-70)

● the recruitment of a good cadre of local staff (paragraph 94).

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

● provide a programme specification for each course in order to make the information more accessible to students (paragraph 26)

● discuss further the support for English language acquisition in the light of the variation in examination performance (paragraphs 27, 66)

● enhance the contribution to staff development in ways that ensure that local staff feel more confident as members of the course team (paragraphs 34, 62)

● ensure that Institute staff have full feedback about the outcomes of student evaluation (paragraph 40)

● involve local staff and students more systematically in representation systems and ensure that they receive feedback reports from the University (paragraphs 41, 42)

- provide a briefing to local staff about the issues raised in the annual programme monitoring and review reports and the ways in which the University uses these reports (paragraphs 49, 52, 53)

- explore whether the Institute's established peer observation system might contribute to the development of the University's new system (paragraph 63)

- consider full synchronicity in the holding of examinations (paragraphs 73, 76)

- ensure that all students receive helpful and timely formative feedback that supports their subsequent learning (paragraphs 74, 76)

- review the arrangements for the staff and students at this Approved Learning Partner to learn about the comments of the external examiners (paragraphs 79, 80)

- review the adequacy of the involvement by the external examiners in the scrutiny of the examination scripts for this cohort of students, all of whom are taking non-honours degrees (paragraph 80).

100   In arrangements for setting up, operating and managing the partnership the audit team generally confirmed the University's view of the partnership as set out in its Briefing Paper.

101   This is a well-developed partnership for which the University has effective procedures that ensure a good oversight of its operation. The University provides support to ensure that the students are able to perform well. Opportunities to involve local staff and students in the deliberative processes are limited, however.

102   The University is aware of the delays in providing assessment marks and feedback to students on their written work, but this remains a problem. While there is much good practice and commitment in this relationship there are some significant areas for further work by the University, notably in this area of the management and support of assessment feedback and also in ensuring that monitoring is effective in providing the Institute with effective feedback to support the continued development of the course in Malaysia.

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

Update from Heriot-watt University on Approved Learning Partner operations with Imperia Institute of Technology, Malaysia - 30 June 2010

1   Organisational changes

An academic board of studies will be established effective September 2010 to improve the quality of the interaction between the University and Institute staff. This will have an impact on staff and student feedback.

2   Improvements in communications

At the partner conference held from 20-23 June 2010 it was agreed to establish an ALP portal on the University website to encourage greater interaction between academic staff at the Institute and the University.

A now format of student handbook will be issued prior to the start of the 2010/11 academic year to ensure the information provided to students is more clearly understood and is programme specific.

3   Marketing

All ALPs have been issued with a new marketing tool kit for use in all of their marketing activities. A closer relationship between University Corporate Communications and ALPs will be encouraged.

A review of Institute activities was carried in March and again in June. A clear marketing strategy has been agreed with the Institute.

4   Local accreditation

The University has started the process of obtaining accreditation by the Quantity Surveying Board Malaysia of the BSc in Quantity Surveying.

Appendix B

Student numbers

There are at present 388 active students studying with the support of Imperia Institute of Technology. Of these, 40 postgraduate and 111 undergraduate students were recruited during the 2009/10 academic year. At the June graduation ceremony 100 of the Institute supported students graduated, primarily from the BSc programmes. It is anticipated that a similar number will graduate in November of this year.