Review of UK Transnational Education in the Caribbean: University of Greenwich and the School of Business and Computer Science Ltd

November 2014

Executive summary

The University of Greenwich (the University) and the School of Business and Computer Science Ltd (SBCS) first established a link in 1999 when SBCS became an approved learner support centre. SBCS now delivers eight University programmes at three of its four campuses. The partnership covers two types of delivery: a franchised delivery with SBCS providing teaching, educational resources and student support; and a franchised distance-learning delivery where SBCS provides tutoring and administrative services in support of the materials, and University staff deliver week-long intensive study schools twice a year.

The link has developed into a multi-faculty partnership, in part as a response to the University's Collaborative Strategy (2010) that identified the institutional aim of building on current successful networks and partnerships. Three of the University's four faculties (previously schools) now work with SBCS which has a clear focus on working with local industries and employers to provide graduates that address their needs.

The University is recognised as a Foreign Awarding Institution by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT). The application of the University's quality assurance procedures is generally sound in its partnership with SBCS. The procedures and their implementation meet the Expectation of *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

The review team noted the usefulness of the comprehensive guide to the respective responsibilities of the two institutions provided by the 2013 Memorandum of Agreement between the University and SBCS. The team also noted the contribution of University academic staff, particularly link tutors, in inducting, teaching and networking with students based at SBCS, and the commitment to continuing staff development on the part of SBCS and the University.

Introduction

1   The University of Greenwich (the University) obtained its University status in 1992 but can trace its origins to 1890. It has three campuses, the Old Royal Navy College in Greenwich, the Avery Hill Campus in Eltham in south-east London, and Medway, a campus which it shares with the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University. In 2013-14, the University had 59 collaborative partners with just over 13,000 students studying overseas. Of these, around 1,000 students follow franchised distance-learning programmes.

2   The University's provision in Trinidad is delivered by the School of Business and Computer Science Ltd (SBCS). A link was established in 1999 when SBCS was approved as a learner support centre. In 2000-01 the BSc (Hons) Computing one year top-up was introduced and delivered to students who had completed the Institute for the Management of Information Systems (IMIS) Higher Diploma at SBCS. In 2012-13 the BSc Computing and Information Systems replaced the BSc Computing. In 2004, SBCS approached the University to explore the possibility of offering programmes in the area of Health and Safety. The partnership has now extended to a multi-faculty partnership, in part as a response to the University's Collaborative Strategy (2010) that identified the institutional aim of building on current successful networks and multi-school partners, within geographical 'nodes'. Three of the University's four faculties now work with SBCS. These are the Faculty of Architecture, Computing and Humanities, the Faculty of Engineering and Science, and the Faculty of Business.

3   SBCS was established in 1987 and has four sites. The University delivers programmes at three of these: Champs Fleurs, Port of Spain, and San Fernando. The main campus in Champs Fleurs was built in 1990 and is the administrative hub for SBCS, with the majority of the University's programmes delivered or supported from this site. SBCS opened its second campus on the outskirts of Port of Spain in May 2003. A third campus was opened in San Fernando in 2006. In its first year of operation, SBCS registered 50 students and now has 6,000 students studying on its programmes.

4   The SBCS partnership consists of two modes of delivery: a franchised delivery with the partner providing teaching, educational resources and student support; and a franchised distance-learning delivery with the partner providing tutoring and administrative services in support of the educational materials provided by the University, and University staff delivering week-long intensive study schools twice a year.

5   The University offers five undergraduate and three postgraduate programmes at SBCS. Undergraduate programmes include BSc (Hons) Occupational Safety, Health and Environment; BSc (Hons) Computing and Information Systems; BSc (Hons) Media and Communications; BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering; and the BA (Hons) Human Resource Management. Postgraduate programmes include MSc Safety, Health and Environment; MSc Occupational Hygiene; and MSc/PGCert Information Systems Management.

6   Provision of the BA (Hons) Human and Resource Management in Kuala Lumpur is listed on the University's 2014 Collaborative Provision Register, but provision at SBCS is not. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures the accuracy of the information provided via its Collaborative Provision Register.

7   In January 2014 there were around 500 students studying University programmes at SBCS. Just under half of these were following a suite of three occupational health/hygiene/safety programmes: BSc (Hons) Occupational Safety, Health and

Environment; MSc Occupational Hygiene; and MSc Safety, Health and the Environment. A third were following information/computing programmes: MSc/PGCert Information Systems Management; BSc (Hons) Computing and Information Systems. The remainder were on two programmes: BA (Hons) Human Resource Management and BA (Hons) Media and Communications. In September 2014 around 30 students were recruited to BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology.

8   The three occupational health/hygiene/safety programmes are delivered through a franchise distance-learning model that combines two intensive study schools each year, run by staff from the University, complemented by tutor support provided by SBCS throughout the year. University staff provide induction sessions that introduce the modules offered each semester. The distance-learning students confirmed the importance of these visits in preparing them for their studies, and in getting to know University staff and being taught by them. Students reported that they could request one-to-one meetings with visiting tutors if needed. The distance-learning students attend SBCS one day per week for tutorial support from SBCS staff. This weekly attendance satisfies the requirements for receipt of Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) funding.

9   Both the link tutor reports and the annual institutional reports raise concerns about the impact of possible changes to the accessibility of GATE funding on future recruitment.

Developing, agreeing and managing arrangements for setting up and operating the link

10   SBCS works with a number of UK higher education institutions and is familiar with the standards and ethos of UK higher education. It has a policy of identifying programmes that are best suited to the local market and identifying appropriate UK universities to deliver them.

11   As part of the process of considering a new overseas partner, the University reviews the partner's financial sustainability, its ability to provide the necessary level of resources, its commitment to quality assurance including appropriate mechanisms for student representation and its existing links with other higher education institutions. A formal site visit by senior University staff is undertaken.

12   The University's five-year International Strategy, Global Greenwich, published in November 2014, aims to integrate and harness international activities in the sustainable development and promotion of the University as a global university of choice for students, staff and partners. The University intends to review its partnership recruitment annually to ensure adequate resourcing for larger student cohorts and to scrutinise the performance of partners with declining enrolments with a view to identifying remedial action or discontinuing the relationship. The University plans to reduce the number of TNE partnerships by 25 per cent (from 59 to 45) by 2018-19.

13   An institutional Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the University and SBCS was signed in December 2013, for a five year period (to August 2018). Annex A of the MoA contains a comprehensive listing of the quality assurance and programme management responsibilities of the University and SBCS for the two delivery modes (see paragraph 4). The MoA details the timelines for review and renewal of the partnership and includes a detailed summary of the division of responsibilities between the University and SBCS. SBCS completes regular reports to the University, including programme monitoring reports that are sent to the link tutor, who in turn presents them to the Faculty Academic Quality and Standards Committees. As SBCS delivers more than one University programme,

the Executive Director submits an annual institutional report reviewing the totality of the higher education provision.

14   The clear and comprehensive guide to the respective responsibilities of the two institutions provided by the 2013 MoA between the University and SBCS is a **positive feature**.

15   The franchised distance-learning mode places additional requirements on SBCS and the University. SBCS is required to appoint a programme manager, as opposed to a programme leader, and the University has additional responsibilities in areas such as standard entry admission decisions, involvement in student induction and the management of student examinations.

16   Each faculty at the University appoints a link tutor who remains in close contact with the relevant personnel at SBCS. The link tutor reports to the Faculty Director of Partnerships and International Affairs and liaises with other key members of faculty staff, such as the Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching, and the appropriate heads of department.

17   The pivotal role of the link tutor is to support the collaborative partner and to maintain regular contact with the programme leaders and managers. SBCS senior staff, administrative and academic staff, and students all confirmed regular and productive contact with the link tutor, as well as with academic and administrative staff more generally at the University.

18   The University and SBCS submit a Recognised Awarding Body Annual Report to the ACTT summarising centre approvals; admission requirements for each programme; module attainment; staffing and policy changes in the previous 12 month period; responses to external feedback; and plans for future provision in Trinidad and Tobago. Part 1 is completed by the awarding body (the University) and Part 2 by the partner institution (SBCS).

19   In December 2013 ACTT extended its recognition of the University as a Foreign Awarding Institution until December 2016 and in January 2014 granted approval for SBCS to offer the BEng (Hons) in Electrical and Electronic Engineering in collaboration with the University. During the approval process ACTT had taken advice from the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago (APETT) and the Board of Engineering of Trinidad and Tobago (BOETT) regarding professional recognition of the programme.

20   The University has procedures in place to assure itself of the continuing suitability of partnerships to deliver its programmes. The Partner Scrutiny Panel, a sub-committee of the University's Academic Planning Committee appraises all new prospective partners and reviews all existing partnerships on a cyclical basis.

21   The minutes from the February 2011 Partner Scrutiny Panel meeting demonstrate careful scrutiny of the review documents submitted to the Panel. The minutes note that the annual institutional reports from the partner were of a good standard and that student recruitment and income were strong, but that the Panel expressed anxiety about the variation in achievement across subject areas. This was particularly acute in the programmes offered by the School of Computing and Mathematical Science where a high proportion of students achieved a third class award. The Panel agreed that the partnership with SBCS should continue for a five-year period and made this recommendation to the Academic Planning Committee.

Quality assurance

Academic standards and the quality of programmes

22   Quality assurance processes are detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The Academic Quality Unit supports the University's oversight of its quality assurance systems and procedures.

23   Academic Council is accountable for the quality and standards of academic provision within the University operating through the medium of its committees, in particular the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The latter maintains oversight of quality assurance policy and procedures for internal and collaborative provision. The Academic Planning Committee approves proposals for new internal and collaborative programmes, authorising faculties to proceed to academic development and programme approval.

24   The Academic Planning Committee is advised in its deliberations by the Partnership Scrutiny Panel, chaired by the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), which appraises new partners and periodically reappraises existing partners. The two-stage approval process via the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and the Academic Planning Committee ensures a clear distinction between approval of programmes and approval of partners. Approved partners are kept under review by the Partnership Scrutiny Panel and are subject to reappraisal with a view to renewal or discontinuation. In addition if, after two years, a new programme has failed to recruit, it is withdrawn by Academic Planning Committee.

25   The Academic Quality Unit schedules panel events for both the approval and re-approval of programmes. These are chaired by a senior member of staff from outside the home faculty and include academic staff from outside the University who, in the case of collaborative provision, have no links to the partner. Where collaborative and/or distance-learning provision is considered, the panel includes an external academic panel member with experience of management of collaborative provision and/or experience in the design and delivery of online programmes.

26   The BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology is the most recent University programme to be introduced to SBCS. The programme approval meeting took place in Trinidad in April 2013 and was chaired by the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The rationale for the new programme followed on from the delivery by SBCS of short courses in electrical and electronic engineering, a Technician Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Applied Electrical and Electronic Engineering in collaboration with City and Guilds. Following receipt of the approval panel's report and the programme team's responses, the Approval and Review Group, a sub-committee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, recommended approval and the first cohort was recruited in September 2014.

27   Programme specifications act as the definitive record of study and include reference to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and, where appropriate, professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements. While there is evidence of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) being used in the development of awards and memoranda of agreement, reference to it is not explicit in all programme specifications. Learning outcomes are mapped to levels, but it is not clear in specifications that these align with the nationally-agreed framework. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures that programme specifications include explicit reference to the FHEQ.

28   Annual programme monitoring processes are defined within the Quality Assurance Handbook. Once programmes have been approved and have recruited students, a number of documents and reports provide monitoring information. This annual reporting enables programme, faculty and institutional themes to be considered and to provide assurance of the standards of the programmes. The University has detailed the role and key responsibilities of the link tutor in contributing to this process.

29   Programmes are subject to a finite period of approval of no more than five years and the distance-learning programmes offered in partnership with SBCS were reviewed in 2010. The review panel set two conditions relating to clarifying the nature and role of the local tutor and to the provision of distinctive BSc and MSc specifications in student handbooks, to make students aware of the different challenges and opportunities of autonomous learning. The panel also noted the high percentage of students interrupting studies and the impact of this on student retention. Other approval panel events have recommended more detailed guidance on mapping learning outcomes to assessment tasks, staff developing research skills and undertaking research, and the need for staff to monitor cheat sites and to warn students about the potential consequences of using them to source coursework and projects.

30   The link tutor has a dual role, providing assistance to staff in the partner institution and providing reassurance to the University that the partnership is operating appropriately. Link tutors maintain oversight of the programmes delivered at SBCS and prepare programme monitoring reports summarising their operation. Link tutor reports in turn feed into faculty annual reporting and planning documents enabling the University to consider cross-institutional themes.

31   The MoA confirmed that all programmes must submit a programme monitoring report. In addition, for franchised distance-learning programmes, both SBCS and the University should submit an annual report. For the franchised programmes, the monitoring reports are authored by the administrative programme leader at SBCS. However, for the three distance-learning programmes, a report, authored by the University link tutor and covering all partnerships offering the three distance-learning occupational health programmes is produced. Though the programme team at SBCS had contributed to the monitoring reports for the distance-learning programmes, the extent of their involvement and awareness of issues relevant to the programme was at times unclear. The review team **recommends** that the University fully engages SBCS academic staff in annual monitoring processes.

32   Partners offering multidisciplinary provision are required to report annually on the totality of their higher education provision through an annual institutional report. The template was updated in 2011 to include more targeted questions and to extend the report to those partner organisations working with more than one faculty. The annual report is written by the partner and provides a critical overview of the support the partner provides across the totality of its higher education provision. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee reports on the receipt of reports from each partner. An overview report of the annual institutional reports is compiled for consideration at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. A number of overarching themes are drawn out, as well as specific points for each partner. Following submission of the annual institutional report and its consideration by faculty and University deliberative committees, the Executive Director of SBCS receives a written response from the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), confirming receipt of the report and outlining how issues raised will be taken forward.

33   The annual institutional reports summarise improvements and enhancements made to resources; projected future enrolment patterns; changes to the national higher education environment; how the partnership could be more productive; the sufficiency of support from

the University; and features of good practice. The reports from 2011 and 2012 highlight variability in the quality of administrative support provided by faculties and the University's support services more generally. Suggestions as to how the partnership could be improved have included the standardisation of documents and processes across faculties and the provision of updates on faculty organisational structures, post holders and portfolios to ensure swift resolution of issues that affect the operation of the programmes at SBCS.

34   Administrative staff at SBCS confirmed that there was regular and productive contact with colleagues at the University and significant improvements had been implemented since the 2011 and 2012 annual institutional reports had been submitted. Administrative communications had improved and were now on a more productive footing.

35   Annual institutional reports are circulated to the University's Partnership Division, the Academic Quality Unit and the relevant faculty Directors of Partnerships. An overview report for all partners is produced and considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The report draws together common themes, issues and good practice. The SBCS institutional reports that the review team examined provided a detailed overview of the operation of the programmes and useful proposals to enhance the procedures for monitoring and review. The reports were prepared by senior administrative staff and the engagement of academic staff in their production was unclear. The overview report, prepared by the Academic Quality Unit, summarises overarching themes. A number of these themes resonated with the review team's discussions with staff and students and included: the positive impact of good link tutors on the experiences of staff and students; the smooth operation of the link; the positive impact of link tutors delivering teaching sessions during visits; the use of video-conferencing in the intervening periods; the need for a more consistent approach to communications and operating systems across different parts of the University; and a desire to have a single point of contact.

36   The review team saw evidence of strong student engagement and comprehensive and innovative ways of collecting student feedback. Students are routinely surveyed twice each semester using a proforma developed by SBCS that enables students to provide both qualitative and quantitative feedback on the standard of lecturing received, administrative support, availability of study materials and classroom/lab facilities. SBCS staff review these reports and inform students of the actions taken in response to issues raised. The minutes of programme committee meetings confirmed a productive and inclusive approach to listening to students and providing feedback through a range of general and bespoke programme level surveys. Link tutor reports observe that student feedback is generally very positive, with the few issues arising being resolved promptly.

Assessment

37   The Assessment and Feedback Policy defines the University protocols for the conduct of assessment, providing the fundamental principles and requirements of assessment. Oversight and responsibility for the Policy rests with the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The Policy includes details of assessment criteria, procedures for students with specific needs, the amount and timing of assessment and marking and grading, sampling, and feedback to students.

38   In conjunction with the regulatory framework for assessment outlined in the Academic Regulations and the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the Assessment and Feedback Policy highlights the importance of balancing formative and summative assessments, the importance of assessment tasks themselves in enabling active learning to take place and the development of approaches to feedback that impact positively upon learning and deliver improvements to student outcomes.

39   The University sets coursework assignments and examination papers, providing classification marking schemes and model answers. SBCS staff mark and internally moderate coursework and examinations. Link tutors organise moderation of assessment and liaise with the external examiners for their programme.

40   The MSc Information Systems Management annual monitoring report for 2011-12 and the link tutor report for Computing and Mathematical Sciences (2012-13) noted requests from SBCS lecturers that they be provided with additional guidance on the level of complexity and detail expected in the assessments of some modules. Actions from the link tutor report confirmed that this request was shared with Computing and Mathematical Sciences staff and those actions to provide such guidance were being implemented.

41   Assessments are sent to the University for external moderation and are made available to the external examiners. SBCS administrative staff described the procedures in place to ensure the security of assessments. They were conversant with the mechanisms for internal moderation, the sampling of marked work and its delivery to the University for further moderation, and the arrangements for Progression and Award Board meetings.

42   The Academic Regulations set out rules and regulations for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award. They require the relevant University Progression and Award Board meetings to make assessments of student performance and progression at appropriate points in the delivery of the programme of study. SBCS staff are encouraged to attend Progression and Award Board meetings. Staff confirmed that they had attended these meetings but had also asked the University to explore the possibility of facilitating their attendance via video conferencing.

43   External examiners confirmed that the decision making process for assessments was considered to be fair and consistent and the paperwork and process to be well managed and organised. Progression issues are noted in the 2012-13 external examiner report for Occupational Health programmes and in an earlier programme review meeting. The 2011-12 programme monitoring report for Occupational Health programmes expressed concerns about poor academic performance and an unacceptably high failure rate across the partners. The 2012-13 monitoring report similarly notes that the programmes have significant potential in the future provided the issues of poor academic performance and the high failure rate can be properly addressed. Poor academic performance and high failure rates are discussed but they are not included in the action plan for either monitoring report. Similarly, there is no evidence of an action plan at Departmental, Faculty or University level designed to address these performance outcomes explicitly. The review team **recommends** that the University addresses problems with student retention and achievement on distance-learning programmes in its action planning.

44   Student handbooks varied in the details provided about when marks would be available. For example, the BSc and MSc Occupational Safety, Health and the Environment student handbooks state that results are published after the Progression and Award Boards at the University have made their decisions. Information provided to students state that marked coursework will normally be available for review through Moodle two weeks after submission. Students whom the review team met stated that they expected to receive feedback within a month of submission and were concerned that on occasion feedback was received up to six weeks after submission. The receipt of this feedback was often after the submission deadline for the next piece of work and students were unable to act on the feedback received. Staff confirmed that feedback could take place within a two week period but that practice in releasing the marks varied, with some students receiving a provisional mark, but others not receiving marks until they had been ratified by the examination board. Ensuring that information in student handbooks regarding the return of marks and feedback

is consistent between handbooks and with assessment policies contributes to the recommendation in paragraph 67.

45   At the periodic review of SBCS (2010) to continue to deliver the occupational health programmes the review panel noted the high percentage of students interrupting studies and expressed concern about student retention. It was explained that the majority of students are mature and have many other commitments including work which can necessitate an interruption of study.

46   There was some confusion regarding the term 'external examiner' which SBCS academic staff and students understood to be the relevant University module leader, rather than subject experts external to the University. While the review team was told that external examiner reports are made available via the student portal on its virtual learning environment, student handbooks state that students wishing to access external examiners' reports must request them from the University's Academic Quality Unit. Neither the teaching staff nor the students who met the review team were conversant with external examiner reports, but the review team learned of the University's intention to ensure that external examiner reports are sent to their collaborative partners and made available to academic staff and students directly from the University's portal.

47   There is variation in the extent to which external examiner reports cover the performance of individual teaching centres. Where external examiner reports include comments on students based in the Caribbean, they are generally supportive of the achievement of SBCS students, noting that overall the standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes in other UK and EU institutions and with equivalent modules taught at the University.

48   A summary of progression results across the programmes delivered at SBCS between 2010 and 2012 highlighted substantial failure rates for students following some franchised distance-learning programmes, particularly the BSc (Hons) Occupational Safety, Health and the Environment. While the external examiner, in considering the entirety of the results for this programme across all centres, commented that the part-time and distance-learning nature of the course gave rise to some complications in progression, he did not believe that the levels of resit, repeat or drop out were different to what might be expected. As noted earlier, students following the distance-learning programmes attend SBCS on a weekly basis for tutor support and this contact should assist in ameliorating some of the common causes for drop out in distance-learning programmes such as isolation, insufficient release from work commitments, and lack of cohort identity.

49   The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy approved by Academic Council in 2012 outlines the targets to be achieved by 2017. These include an increase in the number of students graduating with good honours degrees (greater than 65 per cent for undergraduates), improvement in retention rates (93 per cent) and the development of a curriculum to enhance employment outcomes. Measuring progress against these outcomes forms part of the annual monitoring process for faculties but not explicitly for partner institutions, with the faculties considering these for all University provision.

Quality of learning opportunities

50   Intake targets are jointly determined and confirmed as part of the Financial Memorandum. Students apply directly to SBCS and the admission and registration of students is undertaken by administrative staff. SBCS has guidance documents on the accreditation of prior experiential learning for both staff and students to assist non-standard entry to programmes of study. Many of the students who met the review team were already

in employment and had made strategic decisions about their programme of study. They confirmed the importance of the status and recognition of a UK degree in the global workplace, and those studying on programmes with professional accreditation verified the importance of this in securing employer support to study on the programme.

51   Standard entry requirements are specified within the MoA and more specific programme entry requirements recorded in approval documents. Entry tariffs may be discussed at programme review meetings. For example, the panel that reviewed the BA (Hons) Human Resource Management in 2010 enquired about the range of qualifications that were specified in the documentation produced by SBCS and were reassured that entry criteria were appropriate for Level 6 entry to the programme.

52   In general, students applying to join top-up programmes will have completed a relevant Level 5 award such as an associate degree, or a higher national or advanced diploma, and may be in employment. Students applying for the BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology programme are likely to progress directly from secondary education for Level 4 entry. Students applying for postgraduate programmes must have an honours degree or equivalent in a relevant subject area. Those who apply for the franchised distance-learning mode must have work experience, including two years of professional practice experience within the sector.

53   For franchised programmes, SBCS staff evaluate applications and make standard admissions decisions following the entry protocol outlined within the MoA. Applicants who do not meet these requirements are referred to the link tutor for decision. All applicants who wish to follow distance-learning programmes and who meet the entry criteria are referred to the University for an admissions decision. These programmes require evidence of experience in addition to academic qualifications and the University has retained responsibility for judging their suitability for entry. SBCS offer a 40-credit bridging course for students who do not meet the entry tariffs; the review team met a number of students who had completed this bridging course and had found it useful in helping them return to study.

54   An online registration process was introduced in 2012-13, enabling students to complete registration and access teaching and learning support materials more quickly than before. Students are well supported by SBCS and confirmed that the orientation sessions delivered by SBCS administrative staff were useful and helped them to settle into their programme. Students who met the review team confirmed that they had met the link tutor during induction and that a number of link tutors had delivered lectures during their visit. Students following franchised distance-learning programmes benefit from additional contact with University staff who run two week-long intensive study schools each academic year. Students confirmed that this was a strong feature of the programme, enabling them to improve their subject knowledge and get to know staff from the University. The role played by University academic staff, particularly link tutors, in inducting, teaching and networking with students based at SBCS is a **positive feature**.

55   While most students confirmed that the learning resources were excellent, students following the distance-learning programme raised concerns about the cost of renting specialist equipment, such as safety management equipment and noise meters to undertake certain types of project work. The staff at SBCS stated that students did not have to choose projects that required the rental of specialist equipment and could instead undertake other types of project work. The University may wish to review with SBCS how many students require specialist equipment and how they are made aware of the additional costs of renting it for project work they may wish to undertake.

56   In programmes such as the BA (Hons) Media and Communications learning both in and out of the classroom has been enhanced through the use of guest lecturers and

specialist consultants to support students in the Working in Media and Creative Industries and the Alternative Publishing and Project modules. The link tutor's annual report for 2012-13 observes that the successful localisation of such modules provides a good basis for building further employability into the programme.

57   The students who met the team confirmed that they received excellent support from SBCS in meeting with future employers and in securing placements. A number of students the team met were following part-time programmes and they confirmed that being able to base assignments and projects on relevant workplace issues was important in both deepening their understanding of the subject and in providing useful information to their employers.

58   The MoA details the procedures for the appointment of staff teaching on SBCS programmes. Proposed changes to core staff along with CVs are sent in advance to the relevant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor for approval. The continuing suitability of staffing is considered as part of the annual and periodic review processes. Many of the part-time staff who teach on the programmes work in industry and students found this to be an important part of their learning experience as it introduced contextualisation within their programme. The MoA encourages SBCS and faculties to develop agreed local customisation of curriculum and assessment wherever appropriate, subject to University approval. Staff at SBCS regularly discuss this contextualisation with the tutors from the University to ensure its suitability and relevance. The shared approach of the University and SBCS to the contextualisation of the curriculum in relevant local contexts is a **positive feature**.

59   In addition to the routine staff updates and training that take place during the link tutor visits, 20 lecturers from SBCS are undertaking the PGCert HE offered by the University. This is a 60-credit Level 7 programme accredited by the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) and facilitated by the University's Educational Development Unit (EDU). The programme is mandatory for all new teaching staff at the University and SBCS's commitment to developing its own staff is exemplified by its provision of financial support to those taking the programme. Staff at SBCS are selected on the basis of years of service, with long-serving staff having the fees for the programme covered fully by SBCS. The cohort commenced their studies in September 2014 and in addition to online materials, there have been two visits by staff from the EDU to SBCS to deliver face-to-face sessions. Staff have participated in synchronous teaching sessions and discussion forums. The commitment to continuing staff development on the part of SBCS and the University is a **positive feature**.

60   While this agreement is scheduled to be in place for one year, senior staff from SBCS confirmed that this was likely to become a rolling programme of activity. SBCS is responsible for the recruitment of participants and those with more than 10 years of service are fully subsidised by SBSC to register for the programme.

61   Responsibility for student welfare lies with SBCS whose academic and administrative staff provide pastoral care and mentoring for students. Students following the distance-learning programmes confirmed that during link tutor visits they were able to request one-to-one meetings. Student handbooks vary in the information they provide to students in how to seek support. While students are generally content with the support they receive, only one of the six handbooks that the review team examined referenced the welfare support available at SBCS. Ensuring consistency in student handbooks with regard to the coverage of locally provided student welfare support contributes to the recommendation in paragraph 67.

62   Students at SBCS have access to two Moodle platforms; one is local to SBCS and the other is the University platform. Some issues have been identified in relation to the latter such as attaching students to programmes in a timely way. Link tutor reports confirm

awareness of this and outline the improvements being made. With regard to library services academic staff confirmed that there were disparities in access to journals and that SBCS students had to pay for access to some journals not stocked by the University library. The University may wish to review with SBCS how many students are affected by these access issues and how they can best be addressed.

Information on higher education provision

63   The MoA outlines responsibilities in developing publicity materials and the use of the University logo. SBCS develops local publicity and marketing and ensures the accuracy of this material. Prior to publication, SBCS obtains permission from the International Partnerships Office to use University logos and both the International Office and the link tutors monitor compliance. Senior staff at the University confirmed that their central marketing department monitors publicity materials produced by SBCS and noted the key role that the link tutor played in monitoring publicity materials. Both the University and SBCS observed that this was a mature partnership and SBCS had its own marketing department that was well versed in the guidelines relating to publicity and marketing material.

64   Students who met the review team confirmed the usefulness of the information provided by SBCS in selecting their programmes of study and their decision to study a University of Greenwich degree at SBCS. Students had accessed University webpages and confirmed that the information was useful in helping them choose their course.

65   The University is responsible for issuing certificates to students eligible for an award. These follow the same format as those awarded to students studying at the University's home campus.

66   The Recognised Awarding Body Annual Reports provide information on student appeals. The review team saw evidence that the appeal system was working effectively.

67   Students studying at SBCS are issued with an SBCS student orientation handbook and a University programme handbook, which provides links to the University's regulations, policies and procedures. There were inconsistencies in the level of detail provided in these handbooks with reference to: the role of the external examiner; the provision of marks and feedback for assessed work; the mechanisms for student feedback; the procedures for making a complaint; and the role and contact details of personal and link tutors. While students confirmed that the academic and administrative staff were available to help with queries and issues, the review team **recommends** that the University ensures the completeness and consistency of information provided in student handbooks.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the clear and comprehensive guide to the respective responsibilities of the two institutions provided by the Memorandum of Agreement between the University and SBCS (paragraph 14)
- the role played by University academic staff, particularly link tutors, in inducting, teaching and networking with students based at SBCS (paragraph 54)
- the shared approach of the University and SBCS to the contextualisation of the curriculum in relevant local contexts (paragraph 58)

- the commitment to continuing staff development on the part of SBCS and the University (paragraph 59).

Recommendations

The University of Greenwich is recommended to take the following action:

- ensure the accuracy of the information provided via its Collaborative Provision Register (paragraph 6)
- ensure that programme specifications include explicit reference to the FHEQ (paragraph 27)
- fully engage SBCS academic staff in annual monitoring processes (paragraph 31)
- address problems with student retention and achievement on distance-learning programmes in its action planning (paragraph 43)
- ensure the completeness and consistency of information provided in student handbooks (paragraph 67).

University of Greenwich's response to the review report

The University welcomes QAA's report on its TNE provision in Trinidad, and in particular, the very useful recommendations it offers for enhancing the quality of the student experience at SBCS and further developing the University's relationship with its partner. We are also very pleased to note the many positive features of the provision noted by QAA, which are a testament to the strength of the relationships between the University and its partners.