QAA

Audit of overseas provision

Coventry University and Auston Institute of Management, Singapore

January 2011

Introduction

1   This report considers the collaborative arrangement between Coventry University and Auston Institute of Management, Singapore.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

2   The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in UK higher education rests with individual universities and colleges. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) checks how well they meet their responsibilities, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. QAA also publishes guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems to ensure students have high-quality experiences.

3   Many universities and colleges in the UK offer their higher education programmes to students wishing to study outside the UK. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that over 408,000 students were studying for UK higher education awards entirely outside the UK in the 2009-10 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. Audits are conducted country by country, and in 2010-11 we conducted an Audit of overseas provision in Singapore. 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 Singapore. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

4   In November 2009 QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information about their provision in Singapore. On the basis of the information returned, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with provision in that country.
These institutions produced briefing papers describing the way in which their provision (or subsets of their provision) in Singapore 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)*, originally published by QAA in 2004. An 'amplified' version of Section 2 was published by QAA in October 2010.

5   Audit teams visited each of the 10 UK institutions between September and November 2010 to discuss their provision in Singapore. The same teams visited Singapore in January 2011 to meet some of the staff responsible for managing and delivering the provision, and to meet students. The audit of Coventry University was coordinated for QAA by Ms M A McLaughlin, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Dr N Casey and Professor A Cobb (auditors), with Ms M A McLaughlin acting as audit secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Singapore for the willing cooperation that they provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in Singapore

6   In Singapore, responsibility for higher education resides with the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education. The Higher Education Division oversees the provision of tertiary and technical education as well as registration of private schools, including foreign providers. The Singapore higher education landscape currently comprises four publicly-funded autonomous universities, a private institution offering publicly-subsidised part-time degree programmes, five polytechnics, an institute of technical education, an institute of technology, two arts institutions, several foreign universities' branch campuses, and a number of private education institutions.

7   In September 2009 the Singapore parliament passed the Private Education Act to strengthen the regulatory framework for the private education sector. Under this Act, the Ministry of Education has established an independent statutory board, the Council for Private Education, with the legislative power to implement and enforce the new regulatory framework. The new regulatory regime overseen by the Council for Private Education includes a strengthened registration framework called the Enhanced Registration Framework, and a quality certification scheme called EduTrust.

8   The Enhanced Registration Framework spells out the strengthened legal requirements in the areas of corporate governance, provision of quality services, student protection and information transparency that all private education institutions operating in or from Singapore must meet. While private education institutions were previously required to obtain one-time registration with the Ministry of Education and could be de-registered only under extreme circumstances, the Private Education Act has introduced a renewable validity period for registration with the Council for Private Education, which can range from one year up to six years, and has provided the Council with the powers to impose a range of graduated penalties on errant private education institutions, including suspension, nonrenewal or revocation of registration or EduTrust certification.

9   EduTrust is a voluntary certification scheme which provides a trust mark of quality. It replaces the previous CaseTrust for Education scheme, which was mainly focused on protection of fees paid by students, adding a number of student welfare and academic standards for all students, whether local or overseas, as well as soundness of finances and school administration requirements. As with CaseTrust, EduTrust is mandatory for private education institutions wishing to enrol overseas students. EduTrust certification is one of the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority's prerequisites for the issue of a Student's Pass. Further information on higher education in Singapore is contained in the overview report.

Section 1: The background to the collaborative link

Nature of the link

10   The link between Coventry University (the University) and the Auston Institute of Management Ptd Ltd in Singapore (Auston; the Institute) started in 2000, when the University approved Auston as a centre for the delivery of the final stage of its BSc (Hons) Computing and BA (Hons) Business Information Technology degrees by 'external study'. From 2001-02 this developed into a 'Supported Validation Framework', an arrangement involving closer monitoring of the partnership by the University. The link was then supplemented with the BEng (Hons) Computers, Networking and Communications Technology in 2002. Auston Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas (equivalent to the first two levels of undergraduate study) were recognised for guaranteed entry to the honours year of specified University business programmes in April 2003 (BAs in Business Administration, Business Management, Business and Marketing, Business and Human Resource Management). In 2004, a third top-up programme, the BSc (Hons) Network Computing was approved to run from March 2005. Through a periodic review of the programme and partnership in 2005, the University approved a BSc (Hons) Engineering Business Management. In 2007, the University approved additional top-up programmes leading to BA awards in Business Systems, Business Systems and Tourism, Logistics, and Resort Management, and a BEng in Electrical and Electronic Engineering, as well as MBAs in Engineering Management and International Business. The University also recognised Auston's Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Resort Management, again equivalent to the first two levels of undergraduate study. In 2008 the University approved BAs in Business and Retail Management, and Business and Enterprise Management, with the BA Business and Resort Management being renamed BA Resort Management, and MBAs in Logistics and Supply Chain Management, and Information Technology Management.

11   Auston provision spans the Faculty of Engineering and Computing (FEC) and the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society (FBES). For the purposes of this audit, the team focused on those programmes located in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing. The total number of students enrolled on the six top-ups within FEC has 'grown steadily' since 2001 and exceeded 200 across the four entry points in 2009-10. Numbers on individual cohorts are quite low, but the team heard that module sharing across programmes allows the University to take a holistic view of the viability of the provision. Despite this, the University is aware that smaller numbers may have an adverse impact on the student experience, and the audit team noted from the FEC International Strategy that 'questions exist over...business effectiveness'. Accordingly, student recruitment is kept under regular review. All teaching and assessment on the Auston programmes is carried out in English.

12   In June 2010, following an Institutional Approval event, the University approved Auston's proposal to open a branch campus in Sri Lanka to operate four top-up programmes from July 2010. The audit team was told that, while local staff would be responsible for the delivery of teaching, the programmes were to be scheduled alongside their counterpart programmes in Auston Singapore; the same course materials would be used and assessment timings would be synchronised.

13   Auston, founded in 1996, is a private Singapore-based education provider listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange. The audit team learnt from staff at Auston that in 2007 there had been a change of ownership and management of the Institute, which had resulted in the removal of 400 students and a number of staff members. However, this development had not been mentioned in the University's Briefing Paper. Auston is now fully licensed by the Singapore Ministry of Education. In accordance with the Singapore Private Education Act (2009), Auston has been undergoing the Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF) and

EduTrust processes operated by the Council for Private Education (CPE) under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. When visiting the University, staff had assured the audit team that Auston was not anticipating any problems in meeting the criteria set by the CPE. However, in the autumn of 2010 Auston was awarded one year's registration status. At the time of the audit team's visit, Auston was planning to submit its application for renewal in March 2011 in advance of the expiry of registration in August 2011. Given the centrality of EduTrust status to the recruitment of international students in Singapore and therefore to the viability of the partnership, the audit team encourages the University to demonstrate a deeper and more supportive interest in the process as it is undertaken by Auston.

14   The University has a range of international partnerships, including in Hong Kong, India and Malaysia, but the relationship with Auston constitutes its only link in Singapore. Similarly, the link with Coventry University constitutes Auston's only link with a UK higher education institution. While the audit team heard that the University's continuing aim was to focus on a single institution partnership arrangement, the FEC International Strategy for 2009-10 to 2012-13 notes that collaboration in Singapore will be reviewed with a view to establishing better and more robust business arrangements with collaborating institutions in order to secure further expansion.

15   The University states that the link with Auston is representative of its policies and procedures relating to collaborative provision, and has built upon the University's models of good practice developed through other overseas collaborative initiatives.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

16   The University states that its strategic and operational approach to overseas collaborative provision is determined by the Corporate Plan and the Internationalisation Policy. This is, in turn, reflected in faculty business plans and international strategies. The FEC International Strategy, which covers 2009-10 to 2012-3, lists Singapore as one of the main geographical markets for faculty international work, and more specifically collaborative work. It also sets targets which include both assessing the viability of the Auston collaboration and 'tak(ing) appropriate action' in response by introducing postgraduate programmes at Auston.

17   In the FEC, responsibility for overseas collaborative provision lies with a Faculty International Development Group (IDG), which is led by the Manager of International Activities. IDG's remit embraces promoting the development of new opportunities, overseeing approval of initiatives, managing collaborative relationships to ensure quality and standards, and evaluating overall academic and financial efficiency. It reports to the Faculty Collaborative Provision Committee (FCPC) with respect to academic matters and to the Dean regarding business issues.

18   The University's stated position on respective responsibilities for academic standards and the equivalence of the quality of students' learning opportunities is set out in a number of documents. The Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement booklet provides a general overview of the University's procedures, but the main corpus of documentation is stored on the internal staff intranet. The Quality & Academic Standards Handbook is organised to reflect the sections of the *Code of practice* published by QAA, and contains a chapter on 'Collaborative Provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)'. This in turn has sub-sections covering strategic management, types of collaborative provision, institutional approval, and course/partnership development, approval and operational practices. This document and the University's approach to continuing alignment with the *Code of practice*, including *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, is regularly monitored by the Quality

Enhancement Unit (QEU) and the Quality Assurance Committee. The audit team confirmed that the University pays fruitful and scrupulous attention to the *Code of practice* in its approach to the management of collaborative provision.

19   The 'Support and Maintenance of Collaborative Arrangements' document not only defines the types of collaborative provision operated by the University, but also sets out the varying responsibilities associated with different arrangements. The FEC provision at Auston includes recognition of Advanced Diplomas, which guarantee progression to University awards; and validation of programmes and autonomous franchises, where greater responsibility for quality assurance, teaching and learning, and assessment than would apply for 'normal' franchised arrangements is devolved to the partner.

20   The Standing Advisory Group on Collaborative Provision (SAGCP) is responsible on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee for the central monitoring of the academic standards and quality assurance (including approval and review) of the University's collaborative provision, both within the UK and overseas. As well as advising on policy and practice relating to collaborative provision, SAGCP receives and considers reports of Institutional Approvals, Partnership Approval and Review Panels, and Course Approval and Review Panels (CARPs). Each faculty is represented on SAGCP with a view to promoting the exchange of experience and good practice in collaborative activity. Quality assurance for collaborative provision is coordinated and managed by the QEU, a sub-section of the Registry. Each faculty is assigned a QEU advisor to support them in managing quality and standards across their provision. The audit team was able to confirm that the QEU, in the context of its representation on key committees and its links to faculties, plays an important role in promoting a consistent institutional approach to the management of collaborative provision.

21   At faculty level, and as noted in the report of the 2009 QAA Audit of collaborative provision, responsibility for the oversight of collaborative provision varies depending on the volume of collaborative provision in the faculty, with more senior managers taking responsibility for larger portfolios. However, each faculty or School Board is required to establish a committee to maintain an overview of all collaborative provision within the faculty. FEC's FCPC, which has link tutors as members, reports annually to the Faculty Quality, Teaching and Learning Committee on the operation of the collaborative provision within the faculty's remit.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

22   Although the audit team could not find any explicit University criteria regarding the selection of partner organisations, FEC does provide guidance in its Operation of International Collaborative Provision document which covers each phase of collaboration. Additionally, in terms of institutional approval procedures, the QEU publishes clear guidance as well as key documents including terms of reference for Institutional Approval Panels, a checklist for partner library provision and a standardised pro forma for those proposing developments. This is augmented by the faculty-specific guidance. The team was advised that, while the University does not currently use recruitment agents, this might be reconsidered in the context of a more strategic approach to overseas marketing and recruitment.

23   In FEC, initial proposals are considered by IDG. If a project is judged to be viable, a member of IDG prepares a proposal (incorporating costings) for discussion with the Dean

and the Faculty Management Group. If this is approved by the Faculty, the proposal is forwarded to the University International Development Committee (IDC) for consideration.

24   The IDC has executive responsibility at institutional level for considering proposed overseas developments against overall strategy and marketing policies prior to the initiation of any formal approval processes. It is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International), and reports to the Vice-Chancellor's Group. To ensure university-wide awareness of development opportunities, IDC has faculty representation. The committee is also responsible for considering evidence from reports on costing of projects, due diligence enquiries (undertaken by Legal Services) and approaches made by the QEU to other UK higher education institutions for references in relation to former or current partnerships. IDC's approval then triggers the QEU to establish a formal institutional approval event.

25   The approval process is coordinated and managed by QEU, which organises an Institutional Approval event at the proposed collaborating institution. On the basis of the QEU guidance (which includes providing the partner with the *Code of practice, Section 2*), the partner is required to supply documentation covering the institutional background and context, quality assurance and enhancement, the student experience, staffing and staff development policy, and administrative arrangements. Reports of Institutional Approval Panels are considered and, where it is felt that there is consonance between the missions of the two institutions, approved by SAGCP on behalf of QAC.

26   The audit team heard that the initiation of the link with Auston owed much to personal contacts in the late 1990s between a member of the University's computing staff and a member of staff at a previous Singapore partner institution who had moved to Auston. This culminated in an Institutional Approval event in 2000 which, in investigating Auston's approach to various issues including strategic planning, quality assurance and enhancement, assessment and learning resources, was conducted in accordance with the University's documented procedures.

27   Since that time, review of the partnership has been undertaken via periodic and interim review of programmes (see Section 3). This included extending the delegated responsibility of Auston to deliver more, and different levels of, provision. The one exception to this relates to the Institutional Approval of Auston's Sri Lanka branch campus in June 2010, an initiative borne of Auston's business decision to expand into markets with less mature higher education systems. The first intake was originally scheduled for July 2010, but this had been delayed until November 2010. The audit team heard that the University, reflecting a cautious institutional approach to risk, had responded carefully to Auston's initial ambition to expand into Sri Lanka but, in the words of Auston, had since become a 'cautious but supportive partner'. The venture received formal approval when a risk analysis was undertaken which adjudged that the risk of operating the provision at a distance and in, for the University, relatively unknown territory was reduced by expanding with a known and long-established partner.

28   The audit team also heard that the expansion into Sri Lanka had necessitated a separate approval event, and the establishment of a separate partnership agreement between the University and Auston (Sri Lanka) to meet Sri Lankan government requirements. To mitigate the risks involved in Auston delivering University awards in Sri Lanka, the team was informed that termly exam boards would be conducted in Singapore and with direct involvement of University staff. Teaching staff would be recruited from Sri Lanka but trained in Singapore (and supplemented by Singapore staff). Coventry would hold staff development activities around exam boards, and visits to Singapore would include a stop off in Sri Lanka. The team ascertained from its discussions with staff that the University and its partner were aware of the risks involved with the Sri Lankan initiative, but also concluded that plans for the management of the quality and standards of the branch campus

were not always comprehensively documented and, in that light, needed to be further developed.

29　From its consideration of documentation and evidence from meetings, the audit team formed the view that the University's development and management of the Auston partnership was broadly in line with its policies and procedures. However, it also concluded that there was a clear need to monitor closely the development and operation of Auston's new site in Sri Lanka to ensure that there is documented clarity regarding partnership responsibilities and procedures for the management of quality and standards in the relationships between the University, Auston in Singapore and Auston in Sri Lanka.

Programme approval

30　Initial programme proposals are generated by the sponsoring faculty or school. In FEC a project manager draws together documentation including a programme specification, module syllabi, a collaborative framework document and the relevant academic regulations. This is then reviewed by a Reading Group with a membership drawn from FCPC. The formal means of programme approval for collaborative provision varies depending on the type of programme and the partnership arrangement. Where a partner will deliver a course already approved by the University as franchised provision, approval is undertaken by Partnership Approval and Review Panels. For new (or significantly revised) validated provision, approval of the course is undertaken by Course Approval and Review Panels (CARPs), which may also conduct periodic reviews. Given that the bulk of Auston provision is validated, approval and review since 2000 has, in the main, been conducted by CARPs. CARPs have delegated authority to make decisions on approval, which are then received by SAGCP. Once conditions for approval have been met the formal agreement is signed by the head of the partner institution and a senior member of the University's Executive.

31　The University noted that the separation of institutional and course approvals had been a 'matter of some debate' which, for financial and practical reasons, had culminated in the events taking place at the same time, but with a clear expectation that programmes may not run unless the partnership has already been approved at institutional level. Examination of a selection of CARP reports on Auston provision indicates that University procedures are correctly and rigorously followed. Panels have external representation, meet with students and staff and are conducted in line with QEU guidance. The audit team saw examples (including a comprehensive initial report in 2000) which revealed discussion of various aspects of the quality of learning opportunities and the standards of awards, including the management of Auston, curriculum and programme specifications, admissions, student feedback, learning resources, student information, learning and teaching strategies, and assessment.

32　The Link Tutor has the responsibility to keep the currency of the programme under review and advise on changes, suggestions for which may come from Auston staff. Revision may be undertaken as part of annual monitoring or at any time using a University proforma. Minor changes such as changes to modules may be agreed within the faculty/school by FCPC, while more major changes require approval by the Chair of QAC or the convening of a new CARP. The audit team noted examples of the former, although it was not clear that minor amendments were addressed in CARPs.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

33   The University has a template for agreements between the University and the partner. The audit team was able to confirm that, in dealing with matters including institutional responsibilities, termination of the partnership, publicity and applicable law, the template encompassed the areas identified in the relevant precept of the *Code of practice, Section 2*. Annexes provide further information on financial arrangements, promotional and advertising guidelines, and the respective responsibilities of the parties. In addition, programme specifications for each course covered by the agreement are appended.

34   The audit team confirmed that the 2008 Programme Approval Agreement with Auston fully adheres to University guidance. The inclusion of programme specifications for all courses encompassed by the partnership adds to the comprehensiveness of the written agreements. The Agreement also specifies that it is the responsibility of Auston to secure any local authorisation, and this has the capacity to underpin responsibility for Auston's application to acquire and maintain ERF and EduTrust status.

35   The audit team was not provided with partnership agreements relating to the opening of the branch campus in Sri Lanka. However, with this exception, the audit team, from consideration of the contracts pertaining to the Singapore-based partnership, was able to conclude that written agreements are effective in establishing the clear responsibilities of the University and Auston.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

36   General guidance on the operational management of partnerships is set out in a faculty-based (FEC) overview document entitled the Operation of International Collaborative Provision. This document lists functions such as checking admissions, preparation of assessments and approval of staff, and the officer responsible. In addition, a Collaboration Framework document is prepared for each partnership. The audit team found that the Auston example provides a clear and thorough explication of responsibilities for general monitoring and support procedures, as well as information on the management of standards, specifically with respect to marking, examination boards and external examiners, and annual monitoring.

37   The overall responsibility for the partnership lies with the Collaboration Manager, a member of IDG. In addition, each course or group of courses has a Link Tutor, who is described as 'the main point of day-to-day contact for the collaborating institution's academic staff, to offer advice and support'. In practice the Link Tutor is the operational manager, responsible for various facets of the arrangement including communicating with the Head of Academics at Auston, general quality assurance, advising on student admissions, induction and enrolment, checking staff and providing staff development, ensuring a correct approach to assessment, monitoring of marketing materials, and visiting the partner. The audit team heard that link tutors receive induction and training for the role and that mentoring was also offered in the handover to an incumbent.

38   With regard to liaison visits, the Briefing Paper states that precise requirements for communication and coordination are stipulated in the Agreement. The Auston Agreement states that the minimum requirements will be agreed at CARPs, but the audit team found that not all reports of CARPs mentioned communication and liaison arrangements between

the University and its partner. The team heard that in 2008-09 there had been 10 visits to Auston by the Link Tutor and other key members of staff, rather than the requisite two. This was representative of a comprehensive programme of visits around programme approvals, reapprovals and reviews, examination boards, and graduation. Visits include staff development sessions, meetings with students and, where relevant, transmission of learning and teaching materials. Auston's adoption of the University's academic structure, with Academic Board and sub-committees, and the employment of the University's 'module box system' at Auston, whereby relevant documentation for each module is maintained in a designated folder, provide examples of the effectiveness of the liaison in operation but also a sense of capacity building at the partner. Auston staff commented on the value of academic support from a dedicated Link Tutor and noted recent structural improvements to the nature of the link. There was now a more streamlined and institutionally-focused element to the liaison where previously a Link Tutor had been appointed to each course, which had made communication more complex. The Annual Quality Monitoring (AQM) template has introduced a section for the Link Tutor to discuss outcomes of visits, and this has the capacity to identify and disseminate good practice. The audit team confirmed the University's view that the frequency and focus of visits had contributed to an understanding of students' views and a positive working relationship with Auston staff.

39   The close liaison between the Link Tutor and Auston academic staff has been mirrored by the promotion of links between administrative staff with the University, providing training in the application of regulations, the operation of examination boards, and use of the student record system. The Briefing Paper explained that the University and its partner had originally operated separate student record systems, with information being exported from Auston to the University. From 2005 Auston had been given limited access to UNIVERSE, the University's student record system. The audit team was told that, despite the University providing relevant training for Auston staff, there had been difficulties in implementing the more integrated system, and this had been addressed via careful manual checking of data. It was also anticipated that improvements to the system might emerge as by-product of a HEFCE-funded project to update and improve the University's student record system. The audit team acknowledged the positive commitment to integrating Auston student records with the University's system, with its potential to promote a more accurate record of students' admission, progression and achievement.

40   The University's sources of guidance on its collaborative partnerships are comparatively silent with respect to the expectations of student support at the partner. Nevertheless, the original approval report and more recent CARP reports reveal attention to the provision of academic and pastoral advice at the partner. Auston's Student Handbook lists student support services and there is evidence of Auston reviewing its practices in annual reports. In meetings with students, the audit team heard that teaching staff are readily accessible via email and for meetings. Pastoral advice is available from the Head of Student Support. Thus, while the audit team found no immediate issues about the support currently available to students, it reached the view that the University might wish to extend its guidance, and hence oversight, of student support on collaborative partnerships.

41   Similarly, the University's generic advice on student representation and feedback for its collaborative provision is comparatively less developed, and staff at Auston lacked awareness of University expectations. However, the audit team found evidence of Auston's approach in this area being considered in the original approval documentation and subsequent CARP reports. Moreover, each programme specification lists the various means by which students may provide feedback on their course. Students at Auston confirmed that they complete end-of-module evaluations and that staff readily respond to student concerns. Managers and teaching staff at Auston explained that the module evaluations feed directly into quantitative performance-related evaluations of staff which may, as a consequence, affect whether or not staff are retained. There was less awareness among students, all of

whom are in employment and studying part-time, about the nature and purpose of the Student Consultative Committee, but they were nevertheless confident that their voice is heard and responded to. Meetings between University staff and students at the time of exam boards provide another arena for student feedback.

42 Consideration of documentation and meetings with staff at the University and Auston allowed the audit team to witness an effective network of liaison with, and support for, the partnership, with the Link Tutor and a schedule of visits at the centre of these arrangements. While meetings with Auston students confirmed the adequacy of student support and of opportunities for students to provide feedback, the team encourages the University to extend its guidance to cover arrangements for students at partner organisations on both student support and guidance, and student representation and feedback.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual monitoring

43 The University, centrally and in FEC, produces comprehensive guidance on annual monitoring, with one document, the FEC Operation of International Collaborative Provision, mapping advice to the precepts within the *Code of practice, Section 2*. Fundamental reporting requirements are also set out in the Agreement. Programme leaders at Auston prepare an AQM report covering all the programmes in the partnership. The two examples provided by Auston adopted varying formats (reflecting a recent change to relevant templates) and did not provide information against all of the headings in the guidance; however, they did review the previous year's action points, provide commentary on external examiner reports, summarise student feedback and review recruitment, progression and achievement data. In one case, there was an assiduous consideration and record of a reorientation of Auston modules, a consequence of the University's migration from 15 to 20-credit modules on its undergraduate provision.

44 AQM reports are supplemented by an Annual Statement on the Operation of the Collaboration produced by the Link Tutor. The Auston reports are inclusive and clear, and follow University guidance in providing an overview of the operation which includes an evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment (including feedback from students); an account of external examiners' reports; a summary of staff development provided by the University; a review of approval events and changes to the curriculum; and an action plan for the next year. In the faculty (FEC), link tutors also consider information produced by the faculty subject advisers who provide reports on the operation of the assessment process. The audit team saw evidence that AQM reports are conscientiously discussed at the FEC FCPC before being forwarded to SAGCP to help make up the Summary Report on Overseas Collaborative Provision. This both identifies the headlines associated with the Auston partnership and discusses generic points emerging from the University's various international collaborations and requiring action or, in the case of good practice, dissemination. The team found that the University's annual reporting system for this partnership is comprehensive, well managed and integrated.

45 From its consideration of reports, minutes of meetings, and other documentation, the audit team confirmed that annual reporting on the Auston partnership adheres to University and faculty guidance and, in so doing, contributes to rigorous quality assurance of the provision.

Periodic review

46   QEU documentation sets out requirements for periodic review which, as with any University provision, is scheduled to take place every six years. Interim review mirrors the methodology for periodic review but focuses on new collaborative arrangements after two years of delivery to confirm that 'the operation of the course meets the requirements of the original approval.' Events occur within the milieu of CARPs, which may cover the approval of programmes and credit recognition, interim reviews and periodic reviews. Reports are thorough and align with University guidance in noting strategic development at Auston, reporting on a tour of the facilities and meetings with staff and students, evaluating the curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment, assessing learning resources, and summarising the approach to student support and guidance. The University states that reports are received by QAC, but the audit team did not see a reference in the minutes to a consideration of the most recent Auston periodic review.

47   Consideration of CARP reports allowed the audit team to confirm that review processes were operating in line with University guidance. The team also noted the value of interim review visits as a means of monitoring the progress of the partnership.

Staffing and staff development

48   Auston's staffing policies, including those regarding qualifications, appraisal and staff development, were approved at the inception of the partnership. The University explained that the original intention had been for Auston to employ part-time staff located in Singapore but that a high turnover of staff had necessitated a shift over the last three years to employing a small establishment of full-time staff plus some part-time.

49   Auston, as recorded in the Agreement, is responsible for appointing and keeping records of staff, but the University, in the person of the Link Tutor, scrutinises CVs and the allocation of staff to modules. The audit team could not find a formal record of this in AQMs or Annual Statements on the Operation of the Collaboration but was provided with examples of CVs at Auston and assured that the Link Tutor checked each example. CVs for Sri Lanka staff had been sent directly to the University for approval. The Annual Statements list the various staff development events. It was evident that University staff offer a range of staff support and development on various topics such as marking and moderation, plagiarism, and specific learning and teaching materials. These are scheduled around examination boards and other liaison visits. The team heard that the impetus for the schedule for events may emerge from outcomes of external examiner and Link Tutor reports, from University initiatives around the introduction of new procedures, or from Auston requests. Auston staff were appreciative in commending the value of the University's provision of staff development. University staff explained that this approach was being extended to staff at the Sri Lanka campus.

50   From their scrutiny of documentation and discussions with University and Auston staff, the audit team was able to establish that the University exercises prudent oversight of staffing and provides comprehensive staff development at Auston.

Student admissions

51   Admissions procedures were addressed in the original approval of Auston and the Agreement makes it clear that Auston has responsibility for the admission of students. CARPs consider admission requirements, and programme specifications outline general criteria for admission including evidence of attainment in English-language equivalent professional experience gained in work settings.

52   University guidance sets out the Link Tutor's responsibility for checking entry qualifications and notifying the Faculty IDG Office of admissions. The audit team heard that at each visit the Link Tutor will check for non-standard applicants, take advice from the Faculty and finally advise Auston as appropriate. While support for the development of English is available, students with a Singapore Diploma are assumed to have an appropriate level of English language competence.

53   Overall, the audit team concluded that the admissions requirements for the Auston programmes are appropriate and clear, that the respective responsibilities of both partners are unambiguous and well understood, and that the University maintains effective oversight of the admissions process.

Assessment requirements

54   The University's generic guidance on assessment arrangements for collaborative provision is comprehensive and clear, specifying the respective responsibilities of the University and its partners. The initial approval event investigated Auston's approach to assessment, and CARPs have consistently considered assessment on individual programmes. An appendix to the partnership Agreement summarises the responsibilities of the University and Auston, while each programme specification covers exam board arrangements, assessment regulations and the assessment strategy for the programme.

55   The Academic Registrar approves partners' academic regulations, and their development is monitored in interim reviews and CARPs. Auston's regulations have followed the University's, with some minor amendments 'where an aspect of the provision at Coventry is not relevant to Auston'. While the audit team confirmed that Auston's regulations appeared to align with the University's, it found limited discussion of regulatory systems in reports of monitoring and review. Accordingly, the team encourages the University to consider strengthening its arrangements for the oversight of academic regulations for validated provision.

56   The Collaboration Framework document lays out detailed guidance on roles, responsibilities and timelines. Auston has responsibility for the setting of examination papers, coursework and projects; arranging examinations; first and second marking; the recording of marks; and the management of exam boards. A panel of University subject advisers comment on draft exam papers, and moderate a sample of marked exams, coursework assignments and projects. The panel must include the Collaboration Manager and the Link Tutor, the latter of whom has a specific responsibility for providing advice on the comparability of standards between the University and Auston.

57   Auston students met by the audit team expressed their satisfaction with the quality of assessment feedback but voiced a preference for swifter and clearer communication of results. The Link Tutor's Annual Statement on the Operation of the Collaboration for 2010 and the Action Plan emerging following assessment boards both note a concern to improve the quality of feedback. Some students felt that feedback on exam performance could be helpful.

58   A senior member of Auston staff chairs the exam boards in Singapore, which take place three times a year. From the University, the Link Tutor and the Collaboration Manager are required to attend, as are external examiner(s), who under University requirements must attend for provision at levels 5 and 6.

59   At Auston the audit team was provided with minutes of internal moderation meetings and 'external' exam boards, which combine consideration of FEC students with those on Auston's programmes linked to FBES. The minutes are detailed and thorough, and confirm that the University's published requirements are being met. However, exam board minutes and the consequent external examiner reports identify recurrent concerns, particularly prevalent in the assessment of final-year projects, about aspects of marking, moderation and standards more generally. The audit team saw considerable evidence that the University is providing support to address these problems, for example via relevant staff training events during the visits timed to coincide with exam boards, and the requirement that Auston produce an action plan for issues emerging from exam boards and external examiner reports. Both the difficulties and the University's responses are summarised in the Link Tutor's Annual Statements on the Operation of the Collaboration.

60   Its review of minutes and reports, and its meetings with staff in Coventry and Singapore, allowed the audit team to confirm that assessment arrangements are effective. It is clear that the partnership has experienced challenges in terms of difficulties with respect to aspects of assessment processes. However, it is equally clear that the University has been committed in its consistent efforts to improve Auston's performance in adhering to the University's expectations and that Auston staff had fully engaged with the University's initiatives in this regard.

External examining

61   The University's comprehensive External Examiner Handbook is supplemented by more specific guidance at both institutional and faculty level on external examining for collaborative provision. The University has responsibility for the nomination, appointment and induction of external examiners. 'Where possible' externals have responsibility for corresponding programmes at the University.

62   In line with normal University procedure, external examiners are asked to comment on draft examination papers, and they oversee the moderation of students' work. Minutes of Auston examining boards reveal that at least one external examiner attends each board, and they are given the opportunity to feed into this the outcomes of their meetings with students. Their comments on assessment outcomes and processes are also thoroughly debated within the boards.

63   Reports, completed on the comprehensive University template, are sent directly to the University, where the QEU circulates them to the Faculty, the Link Tutor, and the Programme Leader at Auston. The outcomes of the process are recorded in the Link Tutor's Annual Statement on the Operation of the Collaboration which, in turn, goes to FCPC. Minutes seen by the audit team suggest that there is limited discussion of issues at the Senior Faculty Committee, despite the fact that there are three rounds of boards and external examiner reports each academic year. The team also learnt that the University has not hitherto required a formal response to external examiners' reports but, in response to a recommendation in the 2009 Audit of collaborative provision, was piloting a more formal process. However, while there is room for improvement in systematically formalising responses, the team noted two means by which the University does effectively respond to external examiners. Firstly, and more immediately since 2009-10, the Link Tutor and the Auston Programme Leader have produced extensive action plans to address the various issues relating to aspects of assessment (see the previous section). Secondly, all external examiner reports are considered in a summary report produced by the Academic Registrar. The example seen by the audit team revealed full consideration of external examiner reports relating to Auston.

64   Guidance states that the University appoints a chief external examiner for the collaboration and that the consequent report is submitted to QEU and attached to the Annual Quality Monitoring Report. However, the audit team was not provided with any examples.

65   University staff explained that external examiner reports are not shared with students 'for cultural reasons', but that the main points emerge in other contexts. However, students seen by the audit team, while they recalled meeting with external examiners, had no awareness of the formal reports. Therefore, in accordance with the recommendation in the 2009 Audit of collaborative provision, the team encourages the University to review its approach to the sharing of reports with all relevant students.

66   While the audit team found scope for improvement in the University's use of external examiner reports, it was able to establish that, overall, the University makes proper and effective use of external examiners in its collaborative provision with Auston, and this has allowed the University to address issues emerging from assessment processes.

Certificates and transcripts

67   The audit team was able to confirm that the approach to certification is defined as part of the approval process and is set out in the Agreement. The University's overall approach is that certificates and transcripts are produced at the University and then transported to the partner. Reflecting the University's stated policy and referenced against the *Code of practice*, *Section 2*, the certificate states that 'the location of study is shown on the accompanying transcript'. While the audit team recognised that the certificate is consistent with the guidance in the *Code of practice,* the stipulation in the Agreement that the transcript will record the location of study currently runs counter to guidance given by the CPE, which requires that the location of delivery is not mentioned. The team recognises this local requirement and acknowledges that this is also reflected in precept A24 of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, which states that 'subject to any overriding statutory or other legal provision in any relevant jurisdiction, the certificate and/or the transcript should record the name and location of any partner organisation….' In the light of this, the University might wish to consider how it might address this issue in its guidance and agreements on transcripts for Auston students.

Section 4: Information

Student information

68   The Briefing Paper was comparatively silent with respect to the University's oversight of information provided for Auston students. However, standard University and faculty guidance is clear in allocating responsibility to the Link Tutor for the annual monitoring of all course information and the student handbook. The Agreement with Auston reiterates responsibilities and includes a section stating that the partner's regulations on complaints, appeals and disciplinary matters apply. Programme specifications have more general information on academic regulations.

69   The Link Tutor's reports, while comprehensive in many ways, do not provide formal documented evidence that the quality of student information is monitored, but the audit team saw a sample of CARP reports which consider Auston's student handbooks and advice on appeals and complaints. The Auston Handbook itself is comprehensive and includes information on various matters including student support, assessment and the regulations specific to University degrees. Module handbooks, modeled on FEC examples, are similarly helpful. Teaching staff showed a good working knowledge of University and Auston

resources. Auston students, all of whom were studying part-time while in full-time work, were appreciative both of their induction programme and the information provided in the handbooks. They also have access to University resources on referencing and plagiarism.

70   From its analysis of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the audit team concluded that information relating to the student experience is readily available, accurate and clear, and that the University exercises effective oversight. While staff at Auston confirmed that the Link Tutor checks student information, the University might wish to ensure that the process is more formally documented.

Publicity and marketing

71   University guidelines for partner organisations on the production of publicity material which makes reference to Coventry University are appended to the Agreement. Auston is required to send marketing and advertising materials to the University's Marketing and Communication Department prior to their use. The audit team was advised that the University guarantees a response on the material within five working days.

72   University and Faculty documentation gives responsibility to the Link Tutor for monitoring publicity materials. The audit team heard that this is undertaken in the context of the regular visits to Auston, although this was not formally documented in the Link Tutor's annual reports. The team also heard that the Auston website, which makes full reference to the University, is regularly checked by marketing staff at the University. Auston management demonstrated a clear understanding of the procedures relating to the approval of publicity materials.

73   The audit team found that Auston publicity was accurate in its description of the partnership with the University. However, it encourages the University to document more formally and systematically the means by which its oversight of the process is achieved.

Conclusion

74   The University's partnership with Auston is one where, in the main, policies and procedures are well established and understood by University staff. The processes for the assurance of academic standards and quality are sound and draw on the guidance in relevant external reference points. The University was able to clearly demonstrate that the provision and its procedures meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*, for example in organising the Quality & Academic Standards Handbook to reflect the sections of the *Code of practice* and regular monitoring of the University's continuing alignment with the *Code of practice* by the QEU. University staff maintain good working relationships with Auston colleagues through visits, reinforced by electronic communication in between times. The Link Tutor plays a crucial role in the success of the operational management of the partnership. It is also clear that Auston's management and staff, particularly since 2007, have played their part in making the partnership work effectively.

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

- the University's fruitful and scrupulous attention to the *Code of practice* in its approach to collaborative provision (paragraph 18)
- the important role played by the QEU in promoting a consistent approach to the management of collaborative provision (paragraph 20)

- the effective network of liaison with, and support for, Auston, with the Link Tutor and a schedule of visits at the centre of these arrangements (paragraphs 38 and 42)
- the commitment to integrating Auston student records with the University's system, with its potential to promote a more accurate record of students' admission, progression and achievement (paragraph 39)
- the rigorous and effective use of the University's procedures for approval, annual monitoring and periodic and interim review in the development of the partnership (paragraphs 43 to 47)
- the University's prudent and developmental oversight of staffing and staff development at Auston (paragraph 50)
- the unambiguous and well-understood operation of admissions procedures (paragraph 53).

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

- given the centrality of EduTrust status to the viability of the partnership, the University is encouraged to develop a greater and more active interest in the process as it is undertaken by Auston (paragraph 13)
- to monitor more closely the development of Auston's new site in Sri Lanka to ensure that there is documented clarity of partnership agreements and procedures for the management of quality and standards in the relationships between the University, Auston in Singapore and Auston in Sri Lanka (paragraph 29)
- to develop its guidance for collaborative partners on, and hence oversight of, procedures relating to both student support and guidance, and student representation and feedback (paragraph 42)
- to consider strengthening the University's arrangements for the oversight of academic regulations relating to validated collaborative provision (paragraph 55)
- in accordance with the recommendation in the 2009 Audit of collaborative provision, the University is encouraged to review its approach to the sharing of external examiner reports with students on collaborative partnerships (paragraph 65)
- to document more systematically the means by which the University exercises oversight of student information and of publicity and marketing materials produced by partners (paragraph 73).

77   The Briefing Paper guided the audit team to an understanding of the origins and current management of the partnership. The findings of the audit are that in broadly all areas the courses are operating in accordance with the procedures set out in the Briefing Paper and associated documentation. Given that the University's procedures are mapped against the expectations of the *Code of practice* published by QAA, the audit confirmed that the University's policies and procedures for the management of collaborative provision adhere accordingly to the precepts and guidance contained in the *Code of practice*.

78   Given that the link is representative of the principles governing the operation of the institution's overseas collaborative arrangements, the audit would also support a more general conclusion that the University's management of academic quality and standards in its overseas collaborative provision is effective and appropriate.

Appendix A

Coventry University's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with Auston Institute of Management, Singapore

Coventry University welcomes the publication of the report on the audit of its collaborative provision at Auston Institute of Management in Singapore, which indicates that confidence can be placed in the academic standards of awards made in its name. The University is also gratified that the soundness of its approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students, including future plans, is recognised.

The University has noted that a number of areas of good practice were identified by the audit team and have been referred to in the body of the audit report. The University is particularly pleased that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has acknowledged the scrupulous attention paid to the *Code of practice* and the important and effective roles undertaken by the Link Tutors and the Quality Enhancement Unit in ensuring a consistent approach to the management of the partnership, in particular relating to the integration of the student records, the operation of the admissions procedures and the oversight of staff development at Auston.

The University acknowledges the recommendations for action, some of which have already been actively addressed and others that will be addressed subject to further development:

- The Sri Lanka site is an extremely new development and the University intends to monitor its progress closely as has been the case with all its other collaborative partners. Due to the long standing and successful collaboration with the Singapore campus, the University felt confident in encouraging this development with Auston.
- Oversight of Academic regulations with validating collaborative partners will be incorporated into, and monitored through, the Annual Quality Monitoring exercise.
- As with students based in Coventry, those at all collaborative partners also have student representation on local boards and committees where external examiner reports are discussed. The University will ensure that all students are made aware of this, and will work with collaborative partners in reinforcing this through locally produced student guidance.

In conclusion, the University is appreciative of the constructive approach adopted by the audit team, and of the positive outcome of the audit process.

Appendix B

Student numbers for 2010-11

BA (Hons) Logistics - 0 students
BSc (Hons) Computer Science - 0 students
BA (Hons) Business Information Technology - 9 students
BSc (Hons) Network and Mobile Computing - 2 students
BSc (Hons) Engineering Business Management - 12 students
BEng (Hons) Computers, Networking and Communications Technology - 6 students
Eng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering - 11 students
BA Business Administration - 11 students
BA Business & Human Resource Management - 5 students
BA Business & Marketing - 5 students
BA Business and Resort Management - 3 students
BA Business and Finance - 3 students
BA Business and Retail Management - 0 students
MBA International Business - 6 students
MBA Engineering Management - 8 students
MBA Information Technology Management - 0 students