Promoting higher quality

Overseas
Quality Audit Report

University of Bradford
and the
Management Development
Institute of Singapore

Contents

Introduction

1   The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a UK organisation that aims to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. It provides public information about quality and standards in higher education to meet the needs of students, employers and the funders of higher education. One of QAA's activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative arrangements between UK higher education institutions and some of their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2002, QAA audited selected collaborative arrangements between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Singapore. The purpose of the audits was to provide information on the way in which the UK institutions were maintaining academic standards and quality of education in these arrangements.

The process of audit of overseas collaborative arrangements

2   In February 2001, QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information on their collaborative partnerships. Using this information, QAA approached a number of institutions that had indicated that they had collaborative links with Singaporean partners. Following discussion, five UK institutions were selected for audit in respect of a specified partnership. Each of the selected institutions provided for QAA a *Commentary* describing the way the partnership operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which it assured quality and standards. Each institution was asked, as part of its *Commentary*, to make reference to the extent to which the arrangements were representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas collaborative activity. It was also invited to make reference to the ways in which the arrangements adhered to QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision* (QAA's *Code*). QAA's *Code* contains precepts and guidance about the assurance of quality and standards in collaborative activity. In the context of these audits, it was used as a reference point by the audit team and its contents are reflected in the observations in this report. In addition to these documents, the team made use of other information in the public domain, including previous QAA audit reports on the UK institutions and the information made available on the web sites of their Singaporean partners.

3   The five UK institutions selected for audit were visited by members of the audit team to discuss the arrangements they had made for assuring quality and standards in the selected partnerships. During the visit,

each institution made available to the team the evidence it used to satisfy itself of the effectiveness of its arrangements. The team then visited the Singaporean partner institution to gain further insight into the experience of students and staff, and to supplement the view formed by the team from the institution's *Commentary* and from the UK visit. During each of the visits in Singapore, further documentation about the partnership was made available to the team, and discussions were conducted with key members of staff, lecturers and students. QAA is grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Singapore for the willing cooperation provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in Singapore

4   The state is the principal provider of education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Singapore, but the private sector is recognised as playing a complementary role in providing education in a range of specialised areas. Under current regulations, private schools providing such education are required to register both their academic programmes and their staff with the Ministry of Education. In considering applications for registering higher education programmes offered in collaboration with partners overseas, the Ministry seeks, in particular, a close equivalence with the programme offered on the home campus of the overseas institution. There is no system of government recognition, for employment purposes, of qualifications awarded by overseas institutions: individual employers in both the public and private sectors set their own criteria for recruitment. UK institutions are currently collaborating in Singapore with many different types of institution, ranging from the state-funded universities to professional management institutes and private schools.

The background to the collaborative arrangement

5   This report considers the arrangement between the University of Bradford (the University) and the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) for the franchise to MDIS of a portfolio of undergraduate programmes leading to awards of the University. The programmes offered currently have their origin in two schools of the University: the School of Management, which franchises a BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies, BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies (Marketing) and BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies (Accounting and Finance); and the School of Informatics, which franchises a BSc (Honours) Computing with Management. The programmes are

offered on a part-time basis at MDIS and are equivalent in length to the home programmes offered in Bradford. The Computing with Management programme includes attendance at the University for a residential Summer School, at which a 20 credit module is completed. A BSc (Honours) Pharmaceutical Management, available on both a full and part-time basis, will be franchised from the School of Life Sciences from October 2002. All of the programmes are taught and assessed in English. Students are registered as students of the University and total more than 2,500, equivalent to around a quarter of the University's undergraduate population in Bradford; details are provided as Appendix B to this report. In addition, there is a separate agency agreement between the University and MDIS, under which MDIS acts as the University's agent in the recruitment of students to programmes offered in Bradford.

6   The most recent QAA audit of the University at institutional level took place in November 1997. The University's overseas collaborative arrangements have been the subject of two previous QAA audits that resulted in published reports (partnerships in Dubai and India; reports published in 1998). The University's business and management provision and its computing provision were assessed as 'satisfactory' by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 1994, and the quality of its pharmacology and pharmacy provision was approved by QAA in 2000.

7   Founded in 1956, MDIS is a 'not-for-profit' professional institute dedicated to the development and training of individuals as management professionals. It offers a variety of courses ranging from certificates to postgraduate awards and has university partners in Australia and the USA, as well as in the UK. It has recently acquired a new corporate base and learning facilities close to the centre of Singapore and delivers its programmes through a network of six 'Lifelong Learning Centres' spread across the city.

8   The audit team members who conducted the visit to the University on 4-5 March 2002 were Ms S J Clark, Dr D H Furneaux, Dr S Jackson and Professor J H Phillips (the latter as an observer). The members of the team who visited the corporate headquarters and two Lifelong Learning Centres of MDIS on 14 May 2002 were Ms S J Clark, Mrs P K Day (audit secretary), Mr K P Griffiths, Dr S Jackson and Professor J H Phillips. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms S J Clark, Assistant Director, Institutional Review Directorate.

The University's approach to overseas collaborative provision

9   The *Commentary* prepared for the purposes of the audit set the University's approach to overseas collaborative provision in the context of its aim to be distinctive in 'international and national excellence over a whole range of professional and applied disciplines'. The *Commentary* emphasised that the University 'pays particular attention to those programmes provided with overseas partners' with 'great importance' attached to three specific features: 'comparability of the learning experience, equivalence in academic standards, and enforcement of the principle of duty of academic care for all students registered on University of Bradford courses, wherever taught'.

10   Within the University, 'final responsibility for assuring the quality and standards of all academic awards' rests with the Senate. In practice, oversight of quality and standards matters is devolved to the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee, a sub-committee of the Academic Policy Committee, and responsibility is delegated through the committee structure to school level. The management of quality takes place through the operation of a comprehensive set of quality assurance procedures, described in a *Quality Assurance Handbook*. It is a guiding principle of the University that these procedures 'apply equally to all University awards offered through collaborative provision' (with the exception of a UK partner, to which different but equivalent procedures apply). Additionally, the *Handbook* sets out specific 'Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision', developed during 1995-96 and providing guidance on the planning, approval and operational management of collaborative activities. These guidelines have been updated since their original publication and were revised in 2000 to take account of QAA's *Code* and again in 2001 to reflect changes in University structures. The *Commentary* confirmed that the procedures employed by the University in relation to its partnership with MDIS 'also represent its procedures and practices for all overseas collaborative arrangements', which include franchises of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, almost all in business and management, in a range of countries.

11   The *Commentary* stated that the University's quality assurance procedures had been reviewed and restructured in 1998-99 as part of a wider strategic review, and described several recent changes that had served to introduce a greater institutional oversight of quality assurance. In 2000, a Collaborative Provision Quality Assurance Office, based in the Academic Standards and Support Unit (ASSU), was established to assist schools in the quality assurance of collaborative provision and to coordinate support services for

partner institutions. More generally, revised arrangements have included the introduction of new procedures for course approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. The audit team was able to see examples of these new procedures in operation in relation to the programmes franchised to MDIS (see below, paragraphs 13, 24, 25 and 27).

The establishment and management of the link

The approval process

12 The partnership commenced in 1991, initiated by staff of the School of Management and MDIS. It thus predates the development of the Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision, which require a five-stage process for the approval of new collaborative arrangements, including an investigation of the suitability of the partner institution. The *Commentary* reported that the negotiations were informed, nonetheless, by the same guiding principle adopted by the University: that the quality assurance mechanisms used should be the same as those used in Bradford. Early negotiations, based on the accreditation of MDIS certificates and diplomas in Business Management and the validation of a BSc Business and Management Studies and an MBA, involved site visits to Singapore as well as meetings at the University with MDIS staff. As part of this activity, the School of Management evaluated the mission, quality of provision, support services, human resource strategy, learning resources and financial arrangements at MDIS. As a result, and following normal University course approval procedures in operation at that time, a detailed course proposal for the franchise of the BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies was submitted to the former Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Courses Committee. A Contractual Agreement was signed in November 1992 and delivery of the programme commenced in March 1993.

13 Since 1993, there has been a steady growth in the range of the provision franchised to MDIS. Approval for the BSc (Honours) Computing with Management was given in 1996. The Marketing and Accounting and Finance variants of the BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies were approved, at School Board level, in 1995 and 2001 respectively. The approval process for the BSc Pharmaceutical Management commenced in 2001, under the University's revised quality assurance procedures. These provide for the detailed consideration of proposals for new programmes by school-based Course Approval and Review Teams (CARTs), which include external experts. CARTs are charged with considering the academic concept, content, learning resources and

delivery of programmes, including arrangements for delivery overseas, and maintain an overview of course development. A University-wide Course Approval and Review Panel (CARP) has oversight of the approval and review processes. The documentation available to the audit team indicated that, as required by the new procedures, the BSc Pharmaceutical Management proposal had been subject to detailed scrutiny by the Teaching and Learning Committee of the School of Life Sciences prior to submission to the relevant CART. In the view of the team, the University's new procedures provided a sound and comprehensive methodology for approving off-site provision, and met the expectations of QAA's *Code*.

14 While the University's partnership with MDIS operates as a franchise, there are some differences between the programmes delivered at MDIS and the home programmes offered in Bradford. The home equivalent of the Computing with Management degree is entitled Business Computing and other approved variances at MDIS include a 'fixed core' of units delivered for all programmes (to include the BSc Pharmaceutical Management), rather than the full range of optional electives available at the University and, in respect of Business and Management, assessment based wholly on examinations (with the exception of a project). The audit team was informed that these differences had been agreed for marketing and practical reasons, but did not reflect any significant variations in content between the home and franchised programmes: MDIS staff followed the syllabuses as defined by the University, using Bradford course materials, although with some scope to adapt and augment material to reflect local circumstances. Variance in assessment practices is discussed further below, paragraph 37.

Formal arrangements

15 The Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision require each University partnership to be governed by a formal Contractual Agreement. A model Agreement was devised in 1997 and is published in the *Quality Assurance Handbook*. It covers a wide range of appropriate matters, including the respective responsibilities of the collaborating institutions and the University's obligations to students in the event that a partnership is terminated prematurely.

16 In respect of the partnership with MDIS, the University provided the audit team with a Memorandum of Understanding in respect of the proposed BSc Pharmaceutical Management, an agreement covering the agency arrangement between the partners, and two Contractual Agreements in respect of the existing franchised programmes. The first Contractual Agreement, covering the BSc

(Honours) Business and Management Studies and Business and Management (Marketing), was an update of the original 1992 Agreement and was signed for a four-year period in March 2000, following a periodic review of the programmes in 1999 (see below, paragraph 27). It adopted the format of the University's model Agreement and met the expectations of QAA's *Code.* The second, covering the BSc (Honours) Computing with Management, was dated December 1996 and had expired in November 1999; no updated Agreement had been finalised at the time of the team's visit to Bradford, although the periodic review of the programme had taken place in 2000. The team noted that the process of negotiating a new Agreement had been undertaken by the relevant University coordinator (see below, paragraph 20) in liaison with a senior member of the Registrar and Secretary's Office. During its visit to MDIS, the team was provided with a copy of a new four-year Agreement, backdated to April 2000. It was based on the University model and had been signed by both partners in spring 2002. The University will recognise the importance of ensuring that its existing Agreements are reviewed and updated systematically, and that an Agreement for the BSc Pharmaceutical Management is in place before that programme commences. It will also wish to give attention to the position of the BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies (Accounting and Finance), which appears not to be covered by any Agreement, previous or current.

17   QAA's *Code* expects an awarding institution to record the name of its collaborative partner on either the certificate or the transcript provided for students who complete the programme successfully. Reflecting the University's belief that collaborative programmes achieve 'equivalence in academic standards regardless of location of study', the University's policy, as stated in the *Commentary*, 'provides for the place of study to be recorded on the transcript rather than the certificate itself'. However, the transcripts provided for the audit team did not reflect this statement - they mentioned neither MDIS nor the location of study - and senior staff informed the team that the University had yet to move to the position described in the *Commentary*. The team's attention was drawn to debate at Senate about QAA's *Code*, and to a decision not to record the name of the partner institution 'until...a clear national consensus emerged'. The University will wish to reflect further on whether it is confident that its certificates and transcripts cannot mislead stakeholders about the awards offered through its collaborative partnerships - a matter raised for its attention in a previous overseas audit report - and take immediate steps to ascertain whether its current approach is in fact consistent with common practice elsewhere in the sector. It may also wish to consider

whether the provision made in Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision for partner institutions to issue transcripts 'subject to...prior agreement' is consistent with QAA's *Code*'s expectation that the issuing of transcripts should remain under the control of the awarding body. The University informed the team subsequently that no overseas partner had been given permission to issue transcripts.

18   While the *Commentary* made no mention of collaborative arrangements beyond the franchised degree programmes, the audit team noted that MDIS's *Programme and Services Directory* described certificate, diploma and advanced diploma programmes in Business Management and Computing with Management as 'University of Bradford'. Its web site described the University's School of Management as the 'validating body' for these programmes. From the documentation made available to it at the University, the team noted that 'accreditation' of an MDIS Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Business Management had indeed been covered by the 1992 Agreement. It was also evident from the papers of the School of Informatics that this arrangement had been extended to Computing with Management and that the MDIS certificates and diplomas were 'endorsed by the University, which means that all teaching and examining is done by MDIS and the Department moderates all modules'. Senior staff who met the team confirmed that the certificates and diplomas were 'endorsed' and accepted for entry to the franchised programmes but were not University awards. During its visit to MDIS, the team saw a Diploma in Business Management certificate that carried the University's name and logo and had been signed, apparently on behalf of the University, by the Coordinator from the School of Management. It also noted that the University's award ceremony brochure in 2000 recorded the award of advanced diplomas, diplomas and professional certificates (including an Advanced Diploma and Diploma in Industrial and Operations Management) to MDIS students. MDIS staff confirmed that certificate and diploma students had attended University ceremonies until 2001, when graduate numbers became too large. In the view of the team, these practices might reasonably lead students and their employers to believe that they had received an award from the University. The University will wish to ensure that either the programmes are formally approved and incorporated into the awards it offers through MDIS, or that the potential for the misunderstanding of their status is removed.

19   In accordance with QAA's *Code*, the Agreements require MDIS to seek University approval for all publicity relating to the franchised programmes. The *Commentary* reported that either the dean of the relevant school or a 'designated representative' was responsible

for checking and approving draft publicity materials. This procedure was well understood by those who met the audit team and, apart from the confusion surrounding the status of the certificates and diplomas, the factual material in the publicity seen by the team was broadly accurate. The University may wish to reflect, however, on whether the practice of describing a newspaper league table ranking as an 'assessment' is potentially misleading, particularly for an audience that is less familiar with league table conventions and external assessment systems in the UK.

Quality of learning opportunities and student support

Liaison and administration

20   Each Agreement requires the University to appoint a 'coordinator' (referred to as an 'overseas course coordinator' in the *Commentary* and as a 'course director' in other documentation) to monitor the proper implementation of that Agreement in general and, specifically, the comparability of academic standards, entry standards, local assessment arrangements, learning resources and general academic and administrative matters. MDIS is required to identify corresponding course coordinators in Singapore to be the initial point of liaison with the University on all matters covered by the Agreement. The Business and Management programmes are overseen by a Coordinator from the School of Management who has had a long involvement with MDIS, while the School of Informatics has appointed both a Coordinator and a deputy to share responsibilities for the Computing with Management programme. The coordinators report to their deans on matters requiring school or University consideration and, in respect of Computing with Management, the audit team saw evidence of MDIS-related matters raised by the Coordinator at a variety of School of Informatics committees. In Singapore, the team learnt that MDIS's coordinator for all of the University's programmes was the current Manager for Product Research and Development: all communication passed between him and the coordinators and, while individual staff were permitted to contact the University directly, they were required to keep him informed of the matters discussed.

21   The *Commentary* stated that, 'to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching and learning resources', the coordinators made 'regular combined visits' to MDIS. The audit team heard that these visits normally included meeting with both staff and students to evaluate the quality of the provision, discuss current activities and offer support and guidance. Other activities included the provision of orientation sessions at which new students were introduced to the

University and its requirements. While the frequency of visits varied between schools, the School of Management representative, with the larger scale of provision, visited around six to seven times per year. It was clear to the team that these visits were valued by MDIS staff and students, particularly at critical times of the year, and provided opportunity for discussion of a range of matters. It was also evident to the team that the coordinators had a close understanding of the operation of the programmes in Singapore and put much effort into ensuring that a good relationship with MDIS was maintained.

22   The commitment of the coordinators notwithstanding, the audit team noted that, in effect, the University was vesting in three members of staff liaison and monitoring responsibilities for a partnership that was of a size equivalent to around a quarter of the University's undergraduate population in Bradford. It noted, in particular, that the Coordinator for the School of Management, with sole responsibility for the Business and Management programmes, was required to approve student admissions (see below, paragraph 34); advise on quality assurance; undertake annual monitoring; meet with and advise students; audit the conduct of examinations; and chair the boards of examiners (see below, paragraph 40). The team acknowledged the value of an individual having an intimate knowledge of the provision and recognised the importance of this Coordinator in the day-to-day running of the programme and the continuing development of the partnership. In the view of the team, however, his wide range of duties presented a significant challenge for one individual, and the dual roles of adviser to MDIS and evaluator of the partnership presented potential conflicts of interest and loyalty. The implications of placing a heavy reliance on one individual to secure the effectiveness of a partnership were drawn to the University's attention in a previous overseas audit report.

23   The audit team's concerns in this area were exacerbated for two reasons. First, while the coordinators made informal notes on their visits to MDIS, there appeared to be no formal mechanism for them to report back to the University on the proceedings, and no specific requirement for the information to feed into programme monitoring and review (see below, paragraph 25). As a result, the University has no comprehensive documentary record of visits to MDIS to use as an information source for future coordinators and to inform its oversight of the partnership. Again, this matter was raised for the University's attention in a previous overseas audit report and the University's response, published with that report, suggested that it had been addressed. Second, the work of the coordinators aside, other contacts between the University and MDIS appeared to

the team to be relatively limited. While MDIS senior managers had visited the University on several occasions in the early days of the partnership, none of the staff who met the team had been to the University: their points of contact were the visiting coordinators. An administrator from the School of Management had visited MDIS on two occasions, but a reciprocal visit appeared to have been arranged only recently (and, in the event, had been postponed with good reason). The team was informed that there was frequent email traffic with a variety of staff at the University, and that this was the preferred method for maintaining regular contact. Nonetheless, the University may wish to take steps to assure itself that the nature and frequency of its contact with MDIS is appropriate to a partnership of this scale.

Monitoring and review

24   Consistent with the University's principle of using the same procedures for both internal and collaborative activity, its Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision prescribe monitoring and review procedures equivalent to those in use for its home programmes. Under arrangements introduced in 1999-2000 (see above, paragraph 11), annual monitoring reports are produced at school level and are considered by University Annual Monitoring Teams (AMTs), with membership drawn from CARP. The reports are produced to a standard format that includes an action plan identifying points to be addressed and providing feedback on matters raised previously. AMT overview reports, submitted to the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee, highlight good practice and make recommendations for action; where appropriate, recommendations requiring institutional action are approved by the Academic Policy Committee and Senate. Annual reports for franchised programmes must be produced 'by the "home" School with the active support of the partner institution', and are submitted for consideration by the designated AMTs alongside the reports for home programmes. In the view of the audit team, these new arrangements were well-structured and, although relatively untested, had the potential to provide an effective annual monitoring process and to make overseas provision more visible at institutional level.

25   The audit team had access to recent annual monitoring reports for the programmes franchised to MDIS. Written by the coordinators, the reports covered a range of matters and included statistical information on student enrolments, progression and awards. MDIS staff informed the team that they provided the coordinators with the required information and, subsequent to the monitoring exercise, held discussions about matters requiring further consideration. Reports from the School of Informatics included a tabular

listing of action points with an indication of how they would be progressed. The earlier reports from the School of Management were more discursive, however, and there was a lack of clarity about how action points would be followed through. None of the reports discussed issues raised by students or staff at MDIS. These matters notwithstanding, it was evident that the most recent reports met the University's expectations for annual monitoring and, particularly in the case of the BSc (Honours) Computing with Management, had prompted a range of actions within the University. The team remained concerned, however, that primary responsibility for annual monitoring at MDIS was vested in the coordinators, given the advisory role they played in relation to the partnership (see above, paragraph 22). In the view of the team, this particular difficulty might be alleviated were the University to give MDIS greater responsibility for the production of the annual reports, a development that would not be inappropriate given the maturity of the partnership and the evident capability of its staff.

26   The *Commentary* described feedback as 'critical to the learning process' and stated that 'all schools make provision for students, wherever taught, to comment on their learning experience through a variety of feedback mechanisms'. In respect of MDIS, the audit team learnt that the mechanism used was meetings between students and the coordinators, conducted during the regular visits to Singapore. It was apparent that these meetings provided a measure of support and guidance for the students who participated and, together with meetings with MDIS staff, a forum for taking an academic overview of each programme as a whole. However, it was unclear to the team what happened to the matters raised at the meetings, given the absence of a formal reporting route into either the University (see above, paragraphs 23 and 25) or senior management at MDIS. The team learnt that MDIS had its own procedures for collecting student feedback, based on the completion of module evaluation forms but, as far as the team could ascertain, neither the forms nor MDIS's subsequent analysis were viewed systematically by University staff or reported back to the University. The team noted that, as a result of the 2000-01 annual monitoring exercise, the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee had given consideration to the use of the University's own 'stage questionnaires' in off-site provision, a 'long-standing' issue now 'felt to be in need of urgent action'. The University will no doubt wish to act promptly on its own analysis, and establish a mechanism through which its large numbers of students at MDIS can provide it with regular formal feedback on the quality of their learning experience.

27   The University's revised arrangements for quality assurance include new procedures for periodic review, termed Course Continuation Review (CCR). CCR takes

place on a five to six year cycle and is conducted by the relevant CART, with the aim of providing a full review, at institutional level, of all aspects of a programme. The outcomes are reported to Senate and, where appropriate, action plans are produced and progress monitored by the CART. The CCRs of the franchised BSc (Honours) Business and Management Studies and Computing with Management programmes took place in 1999 and 2000 respectively. The *Commentary* drew attention to the success of these reviews in bringing about the resolution of some operational difficulties, particularly in respect of the Computing with Management programme. The audit team concurred with the University's view that the CCR process provided an effective means of periodic review, and had enhanced institutional oversight of the franchised provision.

Staffing and staff development

28   QAA's *Code* expects an awarding institution to ensure that effective means exist to review the proficiency of staff delivering collaborative programmes. Under the Agreements, MDIS is responsible for appointing staff 'who meet the standard specified by the University' and recommending them to the University for approval. It is also responsible for providing the University with 'updated information' about staff qualifications and experience. Formal approval of new staff is the responsibility of the relevant dean. MDIS teaching staff are normally appointed on short-term contracts reviewed at the end of each term. Many are management professionals employed on a part-time basis and teach on a variety of programmes in addition to those franchised by the University. The University informed the audit team that it had reviewed MDIS's appointments procedures and evidence was provided that CVs of proposed new staff had been assessed on an individual basis by the appropriate dean. However, staff at the University appeared to be generally unclear about the extent of staff turnover at MDIS, and three of the five members of the MDIS teaching staff who met the team were not on the University's list of current lecturers, even though all three reported that they had been teaching on the franchised programmes for some years. The University may wish to review its arrangements for meeting this aspect of QAA's *Code*, to ensure that its information about the staff delivering its programmes is both accurate and current.

29   The Agreements commit the University to providing, in collaboration with MDIS, appropriate staff development both for MDIS staff and for University staff involved in the partnership, meeting the costs of the latter. The *Commentary* described several development activities for University staff, but provision for MDIS staff by the University appeared to be limited to the offer of email contact with their counterparts at the University and informal sessions provided by visiting University staff. The audit team was informed that some MDIS tutors had established links at the University and received help and guidance with the delivery of modules. It also learnt that MDIS had its own procedures for staff development and appraisal, based on the maintenance of professional standards in teaching. However, it appeared to the team that the nature of the employment arrangements at MDIS provided little opportunity for staff to discuss matters as a programme team and had limited attempts by the University to fulfil its commitment to providing training and development. This being the case, the University may wish to consider whether alternative activities, such as involvement in annual monitoring (see above, paragraph 25) and with external examiners (see below, paragraph 39), might be a means of providing additional development opportunities.

Student information and support

30   QAA's *Code* expects awarding institutions to approve the information provided for students on collaborative programmes and to ensure that it is comparable to that provided for internal students. The Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision outline the University's approach to this aspect of QAA's *Code* and the *Commentary* reported that all MDIS students received a handbook (called *Student Rules and Regulations*) 'which provides appropriate details of University regulations and appeals procedures etc' and is revised annually. In addition, all students receive a copy of the University's examination regulations. The audit team saw copies of the handbook at both the University and MDIS, and noted that it covered a range of appropriate matters, including syllabus and assessment information, and information about learning resources. The students who met the team were familiar with this information.

31   The handbook is clear that the University is responsible for handling academic appeals arising from the franchised programmes. It indicates that students who wish to make an academic appeal must complete both a University and an MDIS appeals form and that 'all appeals must be accompanied by a non-refundable fee of S$103.00 per module'. The audit team queried this practice with staff at the University and was informed that the sum was an administration fee charged by MDIS; such charging was believed to be common practice in Singapore. The University will wish to reflect on the equity of levying such a fee on its students at MDIS, given that no charge is made for appeals by its students studying in Bradford.

32   In terms of student support, the audit team was informed that academic and pastoral guidance was generally provided by the International Affairs Manager at MDIS and by individual members of staff.

Support for final-year project work was provided as a formal timetabled session. Students who met the team reported that these systems worked well and that, although the majority of both staff and students were part-time, appropriate contact was maintained by email. The team also heard that students were free to contact staff at the University in respect of their project work (although few students had availed themselves of this opportunity) and that orientation sessions, project preparation talks and the Summer School for Computing with Management students provided further opportunities for direct contact with University staff. In the view of the team, the part-time nature of the programmes and the size of the student body made it difficult for the University to ensure that all students were provided with an opportunity to meet staff from Bradford, a situation that rendered the establishment of effective feedback systems all the more important (see above, paragraph 26).

33   It is a guiding principle of the University that students registered on its franchised programmes should be permitted to transfer to the home programmes at Bradford, should they so wish. Only a small number of students from MDIS have taken this opportunity, but the audit team met two students who had transferred to the University to complete their studies. They reported that the process of transfer had operated smoothly and that the learning experience had been positive. It appeared that they had received little in the way of formal preparation for the transition to the UK, but they spoke highly of the information provided about the University by both MDIS and the Coordinator from the School of Management, and of the support provided by their personal tutors in the first few weeks at Bradford.

Assurance of the standards of awards

Admissions

34   QAA's *Code* expects awarding institutions to determine the admissions requirements for programmes leading to its awards, and to monitor the application of those requirements. Under the Agreements, MDIS is responsible for recruiting and admitting students in accordance with the University's general regulations, and the specific regulations for the franchised programmes. The standard entry requirement for stage 1 of the programmes is a Singaporean Diploma; those with an Advanced Diploma may seek direct entry into stage 2. Holders of the MDIS Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas endorsed by the University (see above, paragraph 18) are accepted automatically for entry; an approved list of 'other qualifications' is used to assess individual applications from elsewhere. Applicants with

non-approved qualifications or other special circumstances, are referred to the University for consideration. In cases where students have an appropriate level of entry qualification but an inappropriate spread of subject knowledge, MDIS offers bridging modules to prepare them for entry to the programmes. The audit team was informed that the final authority over admissions rested with the coordinators, who consulted their school admissions tutors as appropriate. The annual monitoring reports seen by the team did not contain detailed statistical information about entry qualifications, but they showed evidence that appropriate monitoring was undertaken by the coordinators. The team was satisfied that the University's practices in this area met the expectations of QAA's *Code*.

Assessment of students

35   The principal elements of assessment for the franchised programmes are formal examinations, a final-year project and, in respect of the BSc (Honours) Computing with Management, some elements of coursework. The *Commentary* reported that responsibility for assuring that the standard of assessment was equivalent to that of the home programmes rested with the appropriate school, its external examiner(s), the boards of examiners and Senate. It indicated that the University was satisfied that the academic standards of the awards attained by its students at MDIS were equivalent to those attained by students at the University, although with a preponderance of Lower Second class degrees, attributed to a tendency for students to report on what they had learnt in texts rather than demonstrating skills of analysis and reflection.

36   The Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision specify that students on franchised programmes 'will take assessments in the same format and of a comparable standard to those taken at the University. The assessments will be set by University staff and...it shall be normal for first and second-marking to be undertaken by University staff'. The *Commentary* explained that these arrangements would be followed for the new BSc Pharmaceutical Management, but that the two existing programmes were regarded as sufficiently mature to permit MDIS staff to produce examination questions and model answers for the University's approval, and to undertake first-marking of scripts and projects. These practices were confirmed in the audit team's discussions with staff at the University and MDIS. In the view of the team, the systematic second-marking of all assessed work by Bradford staff provided the University with a secure mechanism for ensuring equivalence of academic standards, meeting the expectations of QAA's *Code*. It was also evident that, in

accordance with QAA's *Code*, the University had taken steps to ensure that MDIS staff had a clear understanding of its requirements in respect of the administration of the assessment process, with safeguards for the security of examination papers and appropriate supervision of formal examinations.

37 QAA's *Code* indicates that the examination and other assessment requirements for franchised programmes should be the same as those for the home programmes of the awarding institution, except where essential variations have received prior approval. While coursework contributes to assessment for the University's home programme in Business and Management, only formal examinations are used at MDIS. The University's rationale for this difference includes the need for effective moderation mechanisms and a concern for problems of plagiarism in coursework. The students who met the audit team varied in their views on the assessment arrangements: some indicated that a concentrated period of post-module assessment was easier to manage, alongside their work commitments, than a continuing emphasis on coursework; others would have preferred more opportunity to be assessed on coursework and oral presentations. In the view of the team, the different patterns of assessment represented a significant variation between the programmes as offered at the University and MDIS, and might also help to reinforce identified differences in styles of learning. The University may wish to give further consideration to this matter.

External examiners and examination board arrangements

38 QAA's *Code* indicates that external examining procedures for collaborative programmes should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used for internal programmes and should remain under the control of the awarding institution. In accordance with QAA's *Code* and the Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision, external examiners for the programmes franchised to MDIS are appointed and inducted through normal University procedures and, to ensure comparability of standards, are responsible for both the home programmes and off-site provision. The audit team was informed that in recognition of this workload, three external examiners were now in place for the Computing with Management programme to cover all aspects of both home and overseas provision. External examiners' reports are reviewed by ASSU and the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, and matters requiring institutional action are compiled by ASSU into an annual report for the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee. Serious issues are taken up directly by the Vice-Chancellor. At subject level, matters are considered as part of the annual monitoring process.

39 The *Commentary* indicated the University's belief that these arrangements were working effectively, citing as evidence a reduction in the number of matters requiring action in relation to MDIS in the external examiners' reports. The reports seen by the audit team contained no specific criticisms of the programmes as franchised to MDIS, although one recent report had commented that the level of challenge in overseas programmes did not 'generally match the Bradford level, with some examination papers being rather too simplistic and descriptive in nature'. The team heard that the University was taking steps to address these matters through additional advice and staff development activity. It was not evident from its discussions at MDIS that such steps were being taken; more generally, MDIS staff appeared not to have seen external examiners' reports nor be aware of the matters raised within them. In the interests of good practice and staff development, the University may wish to ensure that external examiners' reports are shared and discussed routinely with its partner. The team also noted that ASSU's annual report for 2000-01 to the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee provided detailed discussion of a range of issues, but made no mention of franchised programmes. While accepting that the external examiners' reports it saw raised no serious matters of concern of a general nature, the team found this omission surprising given the scale of the University's collaborative provision.

40 The Quality Assurance Arrangements for Collaborative Provision state that boards of examiners for franchised programmes will normally take place at the University and be chaired 'by the same person who chairs the Board of Examiners for the University-based course. At least one member of staff of the franchisee should be present'. The minutes of the assessment committees and boards of examiners for the programmes franchised to MDIS indicated that the meetings were held at the University and were chaired by the coordinators, normally without representation from MDIS. Apparently, as a consequence of this lack of representation, some matters regarding student performance had been dealt with by correspondence rather than discussion at the Board. Some of the minutes seen by the audit team were very brief and recorded no information about the proceedings and no evidence of discussion and consideration of students' performance. In one case, relating to Computing with Management, only the Coordinator and his deputy had been present. The team assumed that it was not the University's normal practice for meetings of boards of examiners for its home programmes to be so sparsely populated and inadequately recorded. In addition, while appreciating the potential timing difficulties caused by the part-time nature of the programmes offered at MDIS, the consideration of MDIS results in isolation from those of the home programmes appeared

to the team to limit the University's opportunity to compare profiles of student attainment. Given that boards of examiners were cited in the *Commentary* as an important mechanism for assuring standards, the University will wish to review their operation in relation to the programmes franchised to MDIS as a matter of priority and, in so doing and in the light of observations made elsewhere in this report (see above, paragraph 22), to consider whether the Coordinator is the most appropriate person to act as chair.

Conclusions

41   The University of Bradford's (the University) partnership with the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) was established in 1991 and has developed steadily since that date to include the franchise of four honours degree programmes. More than 2,500 students - a number equivalent to around a quarter of the University's undergraduate population in Bradford - are studying on these programmes. The franchise of a fifth programme is expected to commence in autumn 2002.

42   The University's management of the partnership has, since its inception, been governed by a clear set of principles relating to equivalence of academic standards, a concern to ensure that its students at MDIS have entitlements comparable to those of its students in Bradford, and the application of quality assurance procedures identical to those in operation for its home programmes. This approach, coupled with the commitment and professionalism of the staff at MDIS, has ensured that the partnership is governed by a set of clear, well understood procedures in which the principles of equivalence and identicality are paramount. These procedures have been further strengthened in the last two years as part of wider revisions to the institutional quality assurance system, and the University now has in place well-structured arrangements for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review that have served, among other things, to strengthen the visibility of collaborative provision at institutional level. The partnership appears, in addition, to be characterised by a strong sense of goodwill, generated in no small part by the dedication of the coordinators appointed by the University to liaise with MDIS and to carry out a wide range of other responsibilities.

43   The University's approach of undertaking the second-marking of all assessed student work at MDIS provides it with a demonstrably and commendably secure mechanism for assuring academic standards. There are, however, other areas in which its management of the partnership has been less sound. As it continues to strengthen its arrangements for

collaborative provision, it may wish to consider a range of matters, some of which have been drawn to its attention in previous overseas audit reports. These include ensuring that contractual agreements are renewed in a timely manner and are in place for all programmes, observing the detail of the formal requirements both of those agreements and, more generally, of its quality assurance procedures in terms of, for example, the monitoring of new staff appointments and the composition of boards of examiners. It will also wish to give particular attention to clarifying the status of the certificate and diploma programmes offered by MDIS, and its position in respect of the requirements of QAA's *Code of practice* relating to certification. In both of these areas, the University's current practices have the potential to confuse students and other stakeholders. Above all, in the light of the scale of the partnership, it will wish to give prompt attention to establishing a formal means by which all students have the opportunity to provide feedback to the University on their learning experience, and to reflect on the extent and nature of the responsibility devolved to its overseas coordinators. Given the scale of the operation, the current workload of the coordinators, and the ambiguity of their position in relation to MDIS, considerably weakens the reliance that can be placed on the coordinator role as a quality assurance mechanism.

44   The *Commentary* prepared for the purposes of the audit gave a broadly accurate summary of the partnership, but in some areas lacked detail or did not reflect current practice. The University considers the procedures it employs in relation to MDIS to be typical of its procedures and practices for overseas collaborative arrangements more generally. If this is the case, then the findings of this audit would support a conclusion of broad confidence in the University's stewardship of academic standards in those arrangements, but of less confidence in the design and operation of its quality assurance procedures.

Appendix A

Commentary on the overseas quality audit report supplied by the University of Bradford

Information on changes that have been implemented since the audit visit or are about to be implemented:

Paragraph 16:   The University Register of Collaborative Partnerships is now held in the Collaborative Provision Quality Assurance Office. The Register contains information on review and renewal dates for contracts so that these are now noted for action in advance of their due date.

Paragraph 17:   Members of the Council of Validating Universities have been asked if they were aware of any national consensus. There did not appear to be any emerging consensus that members were aware of and, therefore, they were further asked what practice their universities had adopted. As a result of this consultation a recommendation will be presented to the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee on 25 September 2002 that the regulations be amended with immediate effect, in that a statement be recorded on every certificate that a transcript is available, providing further details of the programme of study to which the certificate relates, which will record: collaborative partner, the location and, if appropriate, the language of study.

Paragraph 18:   Discussions between the University and MDIS regarding the endorsement of MDIS Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diplomas began in August 2002.

Paragraph 20:   The University has now rationalised the terminology of course director and course coordinator. Course coordinator will now be the term used.

Paragraph 23:   In future, the formal notes already made after each visit will be reported into the governance committee structure of the appropriate academic School, and issues raised at the Quality Assurance Sub-Committee, Academic Policy Committee and the Senate as appropriate.

Paragraph 25:   Discussions regarding MDIS taking greater responsibility for the production of annual reports began in August 2002. Annual Monitoring Reports for collaborative provision will now include a staff list.

Paragraph 26:   A 'stage questionnaire' proposal is going to the Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee in September 2002, for intended use at the end of the academic year 2002-03.

Paragraph 44:   A review has been established to re-evaluate the design and operation of the University's quality assurance procedures for collaborative provision. Members of the review are the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) Chairperson; the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, School of Life Sciences; the Course Coordinators of Business and Management, Computing and Management, Pharmacy and Management; and the Head of the Collaborative QA Office.

Appendix B

Students registered on programmes leading to University of Bradford awards at MDIS, 2000-01

BSc (Hons) Business and Management Studies: evening programme	Year 1: 164
BSc (Hons) Business and Management Studies: daytime programme	Year 2: 431
BSc Business and Management Studies: Ordinary	Year 3: 775
	Total = 1,370
BSc (Hons) Business and Management Studies (Marketing): evening programme	Year 1: 141
BSc (Hons) Business and Management Studies (Marketing): daytime programme	Year 2: 252
BSc Business and Management Studies (Marketing): Ordinary	Year 3: 563
	Total = 956
BSc (Hons) Business and Management Studies (Accounting and Finance)	Year 1: 7
BSc Business and Management Studies (Accounting and Finance): Ordinary	
	Total = 7
BSc (Hons) Computing with Management: evening programme	Year 1: 29
	Year 2: 132
	Year 3: 218
	Total = 379
Overall total number of students on the MDIS programmes	**= 2,712**