

Overseas Quality Audit Report

University of Huddersfield
and
Nanyang Academy of
Fine Arts, Singapore

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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 Huddersfield (the University) and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) for delivery by NAFA of three undergraduate programmes leading to the University awards of BA (Honours) Interior Design, BA (Honours) Multi-Media Design, and BA (Honours) Fine Art: Painting and Drawing. The University describes the collaboration as a franchise. Each programme is three semesters of full-time study in length (180 credits in total) and is designed to build upon a NAFA diploma. Each derives from the final year of the corresponding programme offered by the University's School of Design Technology in Huddersfield, but also includes selected elements from the second year to provide appropriate bridging

between diploma and degree-level study. All student cohorts undertake a five to six week study visit to the University. The programmes are taught and assessed in English. The students are registered as students of both NAFA and the University. Each cohort admitted to date has numbered less than 10, but student numbers are expected to expand in the future; details are provided in Appendix B to this report.

6 The most recent QAA audit of the University at institutional level took place in June 2000. The quality of the University's art and design and materials technology provision was approved by QAA in January 2000. The University's overseas collaborative arrangements have not previously been the subject of a separate QAA audit.

7 Founded in 1938, NAFA is the oldest arts academy in Singapore. It is registered as a private school with Singapore's Ministry of Education but was given the status of a tertiary institution in 1999 and, as such, is in receipt of some state funding. It began developing its own awards in the 1970s and offers a variety of programmes in the fields of visual arts, performing arts and fashion studies; since 1998, it has also offered degree programmes through collaboration with other universities in the UK and Australia. It has a population of around 1,300 (full-time) and 2,200 (part-time) students, and more than 200 academic staff. Currently, NAFA is located in accommodation on three sites in Singapore but its physical resources are in the process of significant upgrading and a new integrated campus is scheduled to open in 2004.

8 The audit team members who conducted the visit to the University on 9-10 April 2002 were Ms J M Cairns, Mr K P Griffiths and Dr F M Mannsåker. The members of the team who visited the three campuses of NAFA on 15 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 partnership in the context of the intention of the School of Design Technology, expressed in its *School Plan*, to create 'opportunities to relate learning to the wider international arena'. The University's overseas collaborations are numerous and varied, and its approach was described to the audit team as strongly supportive of individual school initiatives in developing links with international partners.

10 Within the University, oversight of collaborative provision is the responsibility of the Standing Panel on Collaborative Provision (SPCP), a subcommittee of the University Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC). TLC reports directly to Senate and delegates powers for the validation, monitoring and review of collaborative provision to SPCP. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) chairs TLC, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor is a member of SPCP. Partnerships are managed with reference to a portfolio of guides of University quality assurance procedures, including formal *Guidelines on Collaborative Provision* (the *Lilac book*) and a *Students Handbook of Regulations* (the *Raspberry book*). The processes used for the development and management of collaborative provision were considered as part of QAA's audit of the University in 2000, the subsequent report of which indicated that the University was adhering to its policy of being 'careful' in its approach to partnership activity. The report also commented on the comprehensiveness of the *Lilac book* and on the rigour of the procedures it contained. The current audit team noted that, as part of a Registry 'Best Practice Project', the *Lilac book* had recently been converted into a series of flowcharts that were both informative and accessible.

11 Formal responsibility for quality and standards, and for determining the procedures for assuring quality, rests with Senate, operating through TLC and the school boards. At school level, responsibility for the quality assurance of collaborative provision rests with the relevant dean of school. These matters are made clear in the formal agreements governing the partnership with NAFA (see below, paragraph 18). The audit team noted that there had been some refinements to the University's quality assurance procedures since the inception of the NAFA link, and that these had generally served to strengthen the role played by institutional level committees in approving and evaluating collaborative provision, assuming responsibilities previously undertaken by schools.

12 The *Commentary* reported that the University 'through its committee system embraces' QAA's *Code*. The evidence provided by the University in relation to the audit was arranged according to the precepts of QAA's *Code*. The *Commentary* also stated that the partnership with NAFA was 'representative of the University's procedures and practice for franchised degrees'. The audit team noted that, in respect of the School of Design Technology, this provision included an honours degree in Graphic Design franchised to a partner in Cyprus and a small number of UK partnerships.

The establishment and management of the link

The approval process

13 Discussions between the University and NAFA commenced in 1998 and were initiated by NAFA, as part of the latter's strategy to become recognised as a 'world class arts institution' and to develop links with universities overseas. The initial discussions focused on the possible development of a link in Interior Design. The *Commentary* reported that, having established there was 'a shared ethos and culture' between the two institutions in respect of design education, and in accordance with the *Lilac book*, senior School staff made a reconnaissance visit to NAFA in March 1999, and also sought information from the British Council. The scrutiny included consideration of the financial security of NAFA through a review of an independent audit report. In the light of the findings of this visit, an event was held in Singapore in September 1999, under the auspices of TLC, 'to consider NAFA as a franchise centre for the delivery of the programme'. The resulting recommendations, which were accepted, were that NAFA was an appropriate partner and that the franchise of the Interior Design programme should be approved for a period of three years. As a result, NAFA's delivery of the Interior Design programme commenced in January 2000. In November 2000, a further reconnaissance visit took place in relation to proposals for the franchise of the Multi-Media Design and Fine Art: Painting and Drawing programmes, and validation events were held at NAFA in February 2001. Delivery of these programmes commenced in July 2001 (Multi-Media Design) and January 2002 (Fine Art: Painting and Drawing).

14 From the evidence available to the audit team it was clear that the approval and validation processes had followed formal procedures and had been thorough. In accordance with QAA's *Code*, the University had taken appropriate steps to satisfy itself about the good standing of NAFA, and of the compatibility of its objectives. It had also considered the longer-term implications should NAFA pursue its ambition to have its degree programmes validated within Singapore. Each validation was supported by substantial documentation, including information on the quality of physical and human resources that would be available to support the programmes. The validation reports specified that a number of conditions should be met before the programmes commenced and, in due course, responses to these conditions were approved and recorded appropriately. The team noted, in particular, that the validation process had resulted in approval of a rolling programme of library acquisitions, which included clarification of arrangements for stock

updating and the development of technical information resources in collaboration with University subject staff and librarians.

15 While the University's partnership with NAFA is described as a franchise, there are differences between the programmes delivered at NAFA and the home programmes offered in Huddersfield. Some variance at the intermediate level of the curriculum was agreed during the development of the partnership to ensure a good fit between the NAFA diplomas and the University degrees. Since validation, the Interior Design programme has been further modified through adjustments to the number and ordering of modules available at NAFA, together with the introduction of 'a small number of modules designed specifically to satisfy regional requirements'. These changes, described as 'evolutionary', were made in the light of developing experience of curriculum delivery and student workload, and were considered by the University to provide a 'greater equability of learning experiences'. The *Commentary* stated that the final two semesters of the programme remained 'virtually identical'. Documentation available to the audit team made it clear that the changes had been approved at school level through the University's formal procedures, and that approval had been given prior to implementation; staff who met the team at NAFA were clear about the procedures to be followed in the event of proposals for further modifications. It was also evident that the new modules developed for NAFA were themselves having an impact upon curriculum development at the University.

16 As part of the validation processes, a review of the level and standing of the NAFA diplomas was undertaken. As a result, the University decided that the relevant three-year full-time diploma, for which students can register after 'O' levels, was an appropriate entry qualification for the corresponding three-semester degree programme, providing students reached an appropriate standard in a specified NAFA module (see below, paragraph 32). The audit team noted that the entry age for the diploma programme made it conceivable that students could achieve an honours degree in less time, in total, than would normally be possible for students studying at the University. It was clear, however, that the University had noted this possibility and considered, given that NAFA diplomates would spend three years developing their subject skills, the agreed structure of the programmes was appropriate.

Formal arrangements

17 The *Lilac book* states the University's belief that 'it is essential that the quality assurance of any collaborative arrangements is maintained at the same level as that expected for campus-based programmes'.

To ensure that this principle is maintained, considerable emphasis is placed on the establishment of a framework of procedures, the detail of which is then set out in a memorandum of cooperation: 'such procedures are the principal means by which the University can assure the quality of programmes delivered by external institutions on its behalf'.

18 In accordance with these statements, each programme franchised to NAFA is governed by a formal Memorandum of Cooperation, based on a standard University template and signed by senior officers of both institutions before the programmes began. The Memoranda specify the locus of responsibility for quality and standards, provide detailed management arrangements, set out the University's obligations to students in the event that the partnership is terminated prematurely, and require reapproval to take place every three years. Each Memorandum is accompanied by a financial appendix. The audit team noted that the Memoranda did not specify the number of students that would be acceptable to the University, although the financial appendices budgeted for up to 25 for each programme. While it was apparent that an increase in cohort student numbers would not create resource difficulties for NAFA, the University may find it valuable to specify maximum and minimum numbers within the Memoranda, to ensure that both parties understand the limits of the agreement. The team also noted that there was some ambiguity in the Memoranda as to whether the students were 'registered students of the University' or (as referred to in the financial appendices) 'registered students of NAFA', a matter of ownership that the University will wish to clarify as a matter of priority. These points notwithstanding, the team was satisfied that the agreements met the expectations of QAA's *Code*.

19 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, and to keep control of the process for issuing certificates and transcripts. Consistent with QAA's *Code*, the University includes the name of the partner institution on the certificate. The audit team was provided with information about the University's system for the production and issuing of certificates and was satisfied that it was both systematic and secure. The team heard that the automatic generation of transcripts was still under development but would remain under the control of the University; staff at NAFA confirmed that they expected to receive transcripts direct from the office of the University's Academic Registrar.

20 In accordance with QAA's *Code*, the Memoranda specify that all NAFA marketing and publicity information relating to the programmes 'will require the specific prior approval of the School on behalf of the University'. The audit team learnt that, to date, the School had maintained oversight of this matter through its regular contacts with NAFA, but that a recent amendment to procedures would require all schools, with effect from 2002-03, to comment on their scrutiny of publicity and marketing materials within annual programme evaluation reports (see below, paragraph 23). The NAFA publicity materials provided for the team described the link accurately, and were generally of a very high quality. Given the importance of ensuring that award titles provide a clear indication of content for prospective students and employers, the University may wish to address a tendency, observed by the team in both the materials produced by NAFA and the University's own materials, to refer to the Multi-Media Design and Fine Art: Painting and Drawing programmes in shorthand terms ('Multi-Media' and 'Fine Art').

Quality of learning opportunities and student support

Liaison and administration

21 Arrangements for liaison between the partners are outlined in the Memoranda. Within the School of Design Technology, each University programme, known as a 'pathway', is managed by a Pathway Leader, supported by a Pathway Committee. A Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) operates as a subcommittee of the Pathway Committee. The Memoranda require NAFA to replicate this model, with the Pathway Leader at the University acting as the primary link between the two programmes. The committees at the University and NAFA operate independently, although the Memoranda make provision for cross-representation. In addition, the Memoranda require the designation of a Liaison Officer for each programme, responsible for ensuring compliance with the Memoranda, disseminating information and facilitating programme development. The Head of the Department of Design undertakes this role on behalf of the University. The audit team noted that to date, NAFA had maintained separate pathway committees and SSLCs for the three programmes, but had recently agreed with the University that the committees should be amalgamated in order to facilitate a sharing of good practice and a consistent approach to the management of the three programmes, together with the establishment of a 'degree community'. The two new committees will be chaired by the Director of the School of Visual Arts at NAFA and, in a further attempt to 'tighten the process', their minutes will be submitted to the University more

rapidly and also forwarded to senior management at NAFA. The team viewed these developments as a positive response to the first round of evaluation (see below, paragraph 24), in which NAFA had emphasised that the action points identified were relevant to all three programmes.

22 The *Commentary* reported that since the inception of the link, University staff had normally visited NAFA once each semester and had kept in 'regular communication...by email, phone and fax throughout the year'. The University Pathway Leader for Interior Design (or his representative) had visited three times annually, timed to coincide with admissions and assessment periods, and staff associated with the newer programmes had also visited. Brief but regular reports on the partnership were made to the School Board. The audit team noted that NAFA staff accompanied the students on their five to six week study trip to Huddersfield and thus had the opportunity to meet their University counterparts, participate in teaching sessions, and gauge and compare academic standards. The team also heard that, prior to the commencement of the Fine Art: Painting and Drawing programme, a total of six staff and 16 students from NAFA had visited the University in an acculturation visit. The level of contact and personal involvement between the staff of the School and NAFA appeared to the team to be commendable, although this is a matter that the University will no doubt wish to keep under review, as it considers how to maintain an appropriate level of support for NAFA into the future.

Monitoring and review

23 The *Lilac book* requires collaborative programmes to be 'subject to the same monitoring and evaluation processes as campus-based programmes'. Consistent with this statement and with the requirements of the Memoranda, the NAFA Pathway Committee is expected to produce an annual evaluation report and action plan for each programme, using a standard University pro forma. The pro forma covers a range of areas, including student performance, student feedback and comments by external examiners. The reports are considered, alongside those for the home programmes, by the School's Annual Evaluation Committee, reporting to the School Board and to Senate. The Committee includes a representative of TLC who is responsible for preparing a report on the evaluation process for the two senior committees. The reports, the School's analysis and the TLC representative's comments are also scrutinised by SPCP. The audit team noted that the University had taken steps to satisfy itself, during initial validation, that NAFA's internal arrangements for quality assurance would enable it to discharge its responsibilities for annual evaluation in a manner consistent with University policy.

24 The audit team had available to it the first and only evaluation report to date from NAFA, submitted in October 2001, in relation to the Interior Design programme. Prepared by the NAFA Pathway Committee with the advice of the University Pathway Leader, the report adhered to the required format and was appropriately self-critical. It contained an 18-point plan requiring actions by both NAFA and the University. The report had passed through the School's Annual Evaluation Committee alongside the equivalent report for the home programme. The latter had also contained detailed information about the link with NAFA. The Committee had commented that NAFA's report did not 'seem to pick up on the issues raised in the UK report', but had nonetheless approved it as presented. The team was informed of the actions University staff had put in place in response to both reports and heard that these would be checked as a matter of routine through the next evaluation. The team was concerned, nonetheless, that the first report from a new partnership had apparently not been subject to more detailed comments by the School. Within this context, the team noted that NAFA's report had been forwarded to the relevant central committees, but that there had been a delay in the completion of SPCP's scrutiny of its contents, such that the team was unable to track the evaluation cycle to its conclusion. In the light of these matters, the University may wish to reflect on whether, on this occasion, its scrutiny of NAFA's annual evaluation report enabled it to assure itself that matters were being addressed appropriately.

25 Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on their learning experiences through the SSLCs and also have significant representation on the Pathway Committee. They may discuss their programmes with the University pathway leaders on the latter's regular visits to NAFA, and during the study visit to Huddersfield. The SSLC minutes available to the audit team indicated that student attendance was extensive and that the meetings generated lively debate. There was evidence that students' comments had prompted discussions between staff at NAFA and the University on a range of issues and had led to some changes in curriculum content and delivery. The team noted from NAFA's annual evaluation report that the requirement, specified in the Memoranda, for students 'to complete course evaluation questionnaires as agreed by the School', had yet to be implemented fully. The University will no doubt be supporting NAFA in ensuring that this matter is addressed in the near future.

26 The Memoranda specify that each programme will be subject to reapproval every three years. The *Lilac book* defines reapproval as 'the mechanism through which the Senate reviews and assesses the quality of franchise provision of University programmes', states that it 'will be undertaken by means of a visit to the

institution concerned', and describes the procedures to be followed. The audit team was informed that a review of the Interior Design programme, which was due for reapproval in autumn 2002, had been scheduled for July 2002 but that, contrary to the *Lilac book*, the review event would take place at the University. The team heard that this departure from procedure had been agreed because of the significant benefits in conducting the review at a time when students from NAFA would be studying and exhibiting at the University, alongside the Huddersfield-based students. By the time of the team's visit to Singapore, NAFA had already produced and delivered the review documentation required by the University. The team was satisfied that the University had established an appropriate mechanism for the periodic review of its franchised provision, and observed that the preparations and involvement of both parties in the first NAFA review were characteristic of their thorough engagement with the partnership more generally.

Staffing and staff development

27 QAA's *Code* expects an awarding institution to ensure that effective means exist to review the proficiency of staff delivering its programmes. Under the Memoranda, all NAFA tutors delivering the University's programmes must be approved in advance by the School Board on the basis of a submitted curriculum vitae (CV). The audit team noted that existing NAFA staff were approved by the University at initial validation and that summary CVs were kept on record at the University. The team heard that no new staff had been appointed subsequently, but that any such proposals would be considered by the Chair of the Board, in consultation with relevant subject staff. The team noted that the close liaison between NAFA and the University had enabled the University to assist in the resolution of minor staffing difficulties and also to begin to address the 'teething problems' experienced by NAFA staff (and students) in moving from a 'diploma to a degree ethos'. This had involved strategies to address passive learning and develop 'challenging and enquiring design methodologies'. Given the close and frequent contact between the partners, the team was satisfied that the University had established appropriate procedures for monitoring the proficiency of staff.

28 The staff development needs of the partnership were considered by the University as part of the initial validation. The subsequent report noted that NAFA's internal arrangements for staff appraisal and development were extensive and generously funded, and included pedagogic training for new staff through their compulsory involvement in external professional development programmes. However, the report also recommended to NAFA the establishment of 'a more structured staff development programme to meet the

needs (including quality assurance) of the franchise'. It appeared to the audit team that the University had not taken steps to assist NAFA in this work, but had instead relied on more informal means, primarily regular contact between academic staff, to ensure that the programmes were delivered in accordance with its expectations. The team saw no evidence that this approach had been unsuccessful and it was clear that both partners were finding mutual benefits - 'opportunities to review and develop our respective curricula and teaching strategies, informing the multicultural aspects of subject delivery' - in working together on the programmes. The University may need, however, to become more systematic in planning its input to the development of NAFA staff as student numbers grow and staff changes are made.

Provision of information to and support for students

29 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. In respect of the programmes franchised to NAFA, students are provided with a *Student Handbook* for each year of study. The *Handbooks* contain clear and succinct information about the structure and assessment of each programme together with, for example, general regulations, information about student representation, and full contact details for relevant staff at NAFA and the University. They make reference to more detailed information sources, such as the Pathway Documents and the *Raspberry book*, which are 'stored in the School Office of each site and are available for...reference'. Students who met the audit team were clear about the nature of the link between NAFA and the University, and found the documentation appropriate to their needs.

30 While the Memoranda state that the assessment of the programmes 'will be governed by the examination regulations of the University', NAFA is responsible for establishing 'procedures based on those operated by the University under which...students may request a review of a decision by the Board of Examiners'. The audit team saw no evidence of such a NAFA procedure; the documentation prepared by NAFA in relation to the audit indicated that the University's Academic Registrar and the pathway leaders, together with the *Raspberry book*, were its reference points in relation to academic appeals. The students who met the team reported that they had all received copies of the *Raspberry book*, in which the University's own procedures for complaints and appeals are detailed. Nonetheless, the University may wish to act on its own view, expressed to the team, that the availability of complaints and appeals mechanisms might be signalled more clearly to students than is the case at present.

31 A particular feature of the franchised programmes is the provision of a five to six week study visit to the University for each student cohort, 'usually at the time of the final degree exhibitions, in order to study in the Department of Design with tuition from Huddersfield University staff'. The *Commentary* stated that the visits were 'an extremely useful mechanism to demonstrate to both staff and students what standards are expected'. The visit involves considerable expense, and it was evident to the audit team that it was well-organised and students were clearly informed of its purpose, content and timing. However, although all students who met the team at NAFA had participated, or intended to participate in the visit, there was some significant confusion among both staff and students as to whether the visit was a compulsory element of a student's programme. The University will wish to clarify whether the visit is, as described in the *Student Handbooks*, 'an essential part of the degree', or only, as the team heard at NAFA, 'highly recommended', before this matter is put to the test, with potentially serious implications for the students concerned and for the University's awards.

Assurance of the standards of awards

Admissions

32 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. The entry requirement for the franchised programmes, set out in the validated Pathway Documents, is successful completion of the relevant NAFA diploma or its equivalent, with achievement of at least 65 per cent in the Research Methodologies module. Overseas applicants are also required to demonstrate English language proficiency. Mature students with appropriate experience may be considered for entry under the University's formal Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning procedures; a bridging course in Research Methodologies is available for them where this is deemed necessary.

33 The Memoranda devolve responsibility for admissions to NAFA, but the *Commentary* reported that 'in the early stages' of each programme University staff were 'involved in monitoring student applications'. The audit team learnt that this included scrutiny of application forms, viewing portfolios and being present at interviews (although the latter did not appear to have happened for the first intake in Multi-Media Design). The team heard that, should a member of University staff not be present at the interview, NAFA would complete the process and send the requisite forms to the University; it was entitled to make an offer

of entry, in these circumstances, without the University's permission. Students are enrolled at NAFA and their details are forwarded to the University, from which a formal letter of acceptance is sent. NAFA is also required to inform the University immediately of withdrawals or suspensions. The team had access to the student records held by the University and was satisfied that its current practices for setting and monitoring entry requirements met the expectations of QAA's *Code*.

Assessment of students

34 The *Commentary* provided little information about the process of student assessment. The Memoranda make it clear that assessment procedures for the franchised programmes are governed by the examination regulations of the University. The programmes are assessed by a combination of coursework, portfolio, and visual and oral presentation; the assessment strategy for each module is specified in the Pathway Documents. The audit team noted from the Memoranda that NAFA was responsible for setting the coursework, with the outcomes to be 'submitted for consideration by the relevant staff in the School', a process described as 'internal verification' in the *Commentary*. The team learnt that the majority of assignment tasks were set individually by NAFA staff, according to the parameters defined in the module descriptions and marked, again by NAFA staff, according to agreed criteria. The presence of University staff during key points of the assessment process, and the development of clear procedures observed by the team for recording students' grades, were considered by the University to be major safeguards in its control of assessment and standards. In Huddersfield the team saw a wide sample of submitted work which demonstrated that, for each piece of assessment, NAFA staff completed standard feedback forms and made them available for future scrutiny and comparison.

35 QAA's *Code* expects that for franchised programmes the examination and other assessment requirements will be the same as those required by the awarding institution, except where essential variations have received prior approval. The audit team was satisfied that, while the individual assessment tasks set by NAFA would clearly not be identical to those set at the University, the assessment requirements were governed by identical criteria set out in the module descriptions, and University staff were in a position to judge whether students' work was equivalent in standard to that produced in Huddersfield. However, the assessment responsibilities devolved to NAFA are significant and the team was surprised that this devolution had not been accompanied by a more formal approach by the University to providing staff development for the NAFA staff involved, particularly

given that most were new to UK assessment practices and teaching at honours level (see above, paragraph 27), and that the NAFA diplomas used a different marking scale. This is a matter that the University will no doubt wish to keep under close review, in the light of the performance of the first cohorts of graduating students. Nonetheless, the team was satisfied that the current assessment arrangements were generally secure, given the close scrutiny and direct assistance given by the University's staff and the small numbers of students involved.

External examiners and examination board arrangements

36 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. While the Memoranda do not specifically cover external examiners, they refer to regulations governing the appointment and responsibilities of external examiners in relation to all University awards. For the programmes franchised to NAFA, the University's approach has been to appoint the same external examiner as for the home programme, and to consider students' final results at the same Pathway Assessment Board, held at the University. The first cohort of Interior Design students graduated in 2001. The University Pathway Leader attended the project shows of these students and participated in the assessments held at NAFA, then brought CD-ROMs of their work back to the UK for the external examiner's consideration. The latter's subsequent report confirmed that assessment and standards at NAFA were sound and praised the rich focus of the work, but expressed concern that inconsistencies in 'the content of evidence' available to him prevented 'effective examination of the full range of knowledge and skills acquired'. It was clear that the University had taken prompt action in response to these comments: it had developed strategies with NAFA to ensure that the evidence provided for his scrutiny in 2002 would be appropriate, and had determined that he would be asked to visit Singapore as part of the standard reporting process.

37 Although final results are considered in Huddersfield, a Progression Assessment Board meets at NAFA at the end of the first semester to consider whether students should be permitted to progress to the final stages of the programme. Initially the Board was chaired by the NAFA Pathway Leader, but it has now been agreed that the University representative will take the chair - a decision reflected in the papers of the most recent meeting. The audit team noted that the letters published following meetings of the Board were signed by both the NAFA and University pathway leaders.

38 In accordance with its general policy and with the agreement of the University, NAFA has appointed 'two external assessors from industry' to assist its staff with the assessment process for the final stages of the franchised programmes. The audit team noted that NAFA had developed clear criteria for the appointment of the assessors and required them to review student work and the grades awarded by its staff before the results were submitted to the University. While recognising the potential value of this arrangement, the team perceived some confusion in NAFA's annual evaluation report about the respective roles of external assessor, external examiner and University internal examiner. The University will be alert to the need to continue to work closely with NAFA, and particularly with any new staff, to ensure that all parties are clear about the respective roles and responsibilities of those involved in assessment.

Conclusions

39 The University of Huddersfield's (the University) partnership with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) was established in 1999 and is thus, as the University acknowledges, 'still very much in its infancy'. Cohort numbers for the three franchised honours degree programmes are currently in single figures, but both institutions have aspirations for the partnership to grow in terms of student numbers and, possibly, further programmes.

40 The University's approach to the partnership has been characterised by its emphasis on working within clearly documented procedures that take account of QAA's *Code of practice* and are reflected in comprehensive memoranda of cooperation. This emphasis has ensured that the initial consideration of NAFA as a potential partner and the approvals of the three franchised programmes were undertaken with appropriate caution and attention to detail; that clear lines of communication have been established; that the formal processes of annual evaluation and periodic review are properly specified and well-understood; that care has been taken to establish and observe appropriate mechanisms in key areas such as the monitoring of student admissions and assessment, and the approval of publicity materials; and that there is immediate knowledge and understanding of the collaboration at senior levels of both institutions. The care which characterised the early discussions between the partners and the clarity of the University's expectations have been rewarded by a real sense of mutual trust and a recognition of the benefits that the collaboration might bring.

41 As it continues to develop its partnership with NAFA and to strengthen the arrangements it has established to date, the University may wish to give

attention to several matters. These include working with NAFA to further develop student feedback mechanisms; tightening its arrangements for scrutinising annual evaluation reports; and clarifying its requirements in respect of the study visit to the UK. Most importantly, the University may wish to keep under close review the extent of the responsibilities delegated to NAFA in respect of assessment, and to take steps to ensure that appropriate and formal development activities are provided for the staff who set and examine the work leading to its awards, particularly those who are new to NAFA or lack previous experience in delivery at honours level. More generally, if student numbers increase the University may need to consider how the practices it has adopted so successfully in the early years of the partnership might need to be modified in the future, and resources redirected, without reducing the benefits achieved through the frequent and informal interaction between its staff and their colleagues at NAFA.

42 The *Commentary* prepared for the purposes of the audit gave a brief but open account of partnership, although it lacked detail in some areas. The University considers the procedures it employs in relation to NAFA to be typical of its procedures and practices for franchised degrees. If this is the case and the successes of the early days of the partnership are maintained in the future, then the findings of this audit would support a conclusion of broad confidence in the University's stewardship of quality and standards.

Appendix A

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

In the context of both NAFA and University staff wanting to improve the quality and professional attainment of each of the three degrees, a number of developments have occurred which were either the result of the audit visit or of the integral process of improvement to which both institutions aspire.

The developments are listed below relating to the numbered paragraphs in the audit report:

- Paragraph 18 Agreement between NAFA and the University has been met over minimum intake figures of 9/10 per individual degree intake per year. The term 'registered students of the University' will be consistent in both the Memorandum of Cooperation as well as the financial appendices.
- Paragraph 20 The full title of BA (Hons) Multi-Media Design and BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting and Drawing will in future be used on all references to course titles and awards.
- Paragraph 24 The 18-point joint action plan by NAFA and the University in the Annual Evaluation report which is currently being addressed will be reported in the next Interior Design Annual Evaluation Report.
- Paragraph 25 All three degree courses will ensure that course evaluation questionnaires will be implemented more fully.
- Paragraph 26 The University's review of the BA (Hons) Interior Design degree was carried out successfully and a different delivery pattern was approved which will subsequently be used by the other two degree courses (see final two paragraphs).
- Paragraph 28 As a result of NAFA's knowledge of the University staff development process, a more comprehensive strategy and approach will be adopted by NAFA which will be very similar to the University system.
- Paragraph 30 A two-member team Review Appeals Committee comprising the Director of the School of Visual Arts and the NAFA Registrar will be formed to contribute to the University Appeals system so that 'the availability of complaints and appeals mechanisms might be signalled more clearly to students than is the case at present'.
- Paragraph 31 The visit to the University by NAFA students will now become mandatory.
- Paragraph 35 NAFA staff development for assessment responsibilities has occurred through UK pathway leaders and a Principal Lecturer from the department visiting NAFA to communicate the key features of assessment responsibility. This will continue.
- Paragraph 38 All NAFA staff now clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of the external assessor, the University internal examiner and the University external examiner.

Finally, as a result of the BA (Hons) Interior Design University review, it has been agreed that the delivery pattern for the three degrees will change to 48 weeks. The total credits of 160 will still remain and the entry requirements of a minimum of 65 per cent will now extend to the final diploma major project in order to attain a high-quality intake.

The two major reasons for these changes are that another UK university is offering one-year honours level degree programmes in the same disciplines at another institution in Singapore, resulting in the NAFA programmes being more expensive and uncompetitive. The other reason is that after three cohorts of Interior Design degree experience it is quite clear that the NAFA students can achieve a high quality of attainment with a very rigorous work ethos and it is our view that they will be able to achieve the same level using the new delivery pattern.

Appendix B

Students registered on programmes leading to University of Huddersfield awards at NAFA

Interior Design	Cohort 1: 9 students
	Cohort 2: 7 students
	Cohort 3: 5 students
Multi-Media Design	Cohort 1: 5 students
Fine Art: Painting and Drawing	Cohort 1: 4 students

