

Overseas Partnership Audit Report

University of Wales
Institute, Cardiff and
Fundación San Valero

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW DIRECTORATE

OCTOBER 2000

ISBN 1 85824 538 9

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Published by

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
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Gloucester GL1 1UB
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Web www.qaa.ac.uk

Printed by

Frontier Print & Design Limited

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Introduction

1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a UK organisation which 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 links between UK higher education institutions and some of their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2000, QAA audited selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Spain. 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 their partnerships with institutions in Spain.

The process of audit of overseas partnership links

2 In planning these audits of overseas collaborative provision, QAA invited all UK institutions to provide a list of their collaborative links with Spanish partners. On the basis of the information provided on the range and scale of the links, business and management studies were selected as the subject focus for the audit. Each of the UK institutions whose collaborative link had been selected for the audit provided a *Commentary* describing the way the partnership operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which the UK institution assured quality and standards in the link. In addition, each institution was asked, as part of its *Commentary*, to make reference to the extent to which the link was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas collaborative activity or specific to this link, subject or country. QAA identified six UK institutions which had established arrangements where most or all of the educational provision was delivered through a Spanish partner, and these institutions were visited by small teams of auditors to discuss the arrangements with appropriate staff and to look at relevant documentation.

3 Audit teams visited the Spanish partner institutions 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 Spain, further documentation about the link was made available to the team, and discussions were conducted with key members of staff, lecturers and students. In addition, members of the team, who included subject specialists in business and management, were able to

see facilities and resources available to the students, and examples of students' work. QAA is grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Spain for the willing cooperation provided to the teams.

4 Institutions were invited, in their *Commentaries*, to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the Higher Education Quality Council's (HEQC) *Code of Practice for Overseas Collaborative Provision in Higher Education, 2nd edition* (1996) (HEQC's *Code*). HEQC's *Code* contains advice and recommendations about the assurance of quality and standards in overseas partnerships. In the context of these audits, it was used as a reference point by the audit teams, and its contents are reflected in the observations in this report. Some institutions also made reference, in their *Commentaries*, to the ways in which they were working towards implementation of QAA's *Code of practice on the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, section 2: collaborative provision* (1999) (QAA's *Code*), which takes full effect in August 2000. In the context of these audits, there was no expectation that institutions would necessarily be able to demonstrate that they met the expectations of the latter *Code*.

The context of collaborative provision with Spanish partners

5 Substantial responsibility for the administration of education in Spain is devolved to the 17 autonomous communities that now constitute Spain. Under Spanish legislation passed in 1991, private institutions offering the awards of foreign universities may apply for official government recognition, and the status of 'centre of a foreign university in Spain'. Recognition of institutions is the responsibility of the governments of the autonomous communities. Through a separate process known as 'homologation', students holding qualifications of foreign institutions may apply to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of the central Spanish government for official recognition of their awards (and thus permission to work in the public sector). Current interpretation of Spanish law means that it is very unlikely that an award obtained through study at a non-recognised institution will be homologated.

The background to the partnership

6 This report considers the franchise to the Fundación San Valero (the Fundación) by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) of a two year full-time 'top-up' honours degree programme leading to the award of BSc in Technology Management, and a three year full-time honours degree programme leading to the award of BA in

European Administration with Modern Languages. Although the programmes are franchised, UWIC's own BSc Technology Management programme ceased to recruit in 1995, and its BA programme carries a different title from that offered by the Fundación. The programmes are part of a more extensive package which encompasses, in total, the franchise of two diploma and five degree programmes. The programmes are taught and assessed in Spanish. Details of student numbers, provided by UWIC, are attached as Appendix B to this report.

7 The *Commentary* provided for the purposes of the audit set UWIC's partnership with the Fundación within the context of its own development as an institution, and its position as a member of the federal University of Wales (the University). It indicated that the development of the partnership, in the early 1990s, had taken place at a time when UWIC's approach to collaborative provision had been largely 'reactive' in terms of strategy. The establishment of the partnership, prompted by an approach from the British Council, had been viewed as an opportunity to add 'a European dimension' to UWIC's work, and there were also 'philanthropic' motives 'associated with assisting a fellow institution to progress along the academic pathway from further to higher education'. The *Commentary* was clear, however, that UWIC's approach to collaborative provision had developed considerably since that period, and was now based on consideration of more strategic matters, underpinned by comprehensive quality assurance procedures. As a result of this increased emphasis on strategy, UWIC's Academic Board decided in 1999 to adopt a new Collaborative Provision Policy, which concentrates on partnerships within Wales and prohibits further delivery of collaborative programmes in languages other than English or Welsh. This decision has coincided with the Fundación's desire, also for strategic reasons, to offer programmes of its own design. As a result, the entire franchised provision is to be replaced by five new degree programmes, validated in November 1999 by the University of Wales Validation Board, and to be offered under the auspices of the University. The last intake to UWIC's franchised programmes took place in October 1999.

8 The *Commentary* stated that UWIC did not consider its partnership with the Fundación 'to be representative of its collaborative provision or its strategy...and will not enter into similar arrangements in the future'. The *Commentary* indicated that there were two principal reasons for this analysis: the language of tuition and assessment was not English or Welsh, and UWIC had 'determined that its future in collaborative provision lies within Wales'. Within this context, the audit team noted that UWIC's only other overseas collaborative provision was in Ireland, but

that links in Malaysia had also been investigated recently. The team heard that, after due consideration, the Malaysian links had not been pursued, but that such collaboration would not be ruled out for the future. UWIC later informed the team that its reference to not entering into 'similar arrangements in the future' was intended to apply only to situations in which the language of tuition and assessment was not English or Welsh.

9 The Fundación San Valero, a private institution, is a diocesan secondary school and technical college situated in Zaragoza. It has strong religious and vocational origins, having been established in 1953 by the Diocese of Zaragoza, through the Assembly of Social Works of Catholic Action. It has five divisions, of which four are strongly vocationally oriented below higher education level. The Fundación's partnership with UWIC is associated exclusively with the fifth division, the Higher Education Centre (CES), established in 1989. CES has around 450 students and over 80 members of staff, of whom approximately 50 per cent are permanent.

10 The audit team members who conducted the UK visit to the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff were, Ms S J Clark; Mr J G Harris; and Professor M P Shaw. The members of the team who visited the Fundación San Valero were, Professor M Bond; Mr G Clark (audit secretary); Professor J Coyne; and Professor M P Shaw. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms S J Clark, Assistant Director, Institutional Review Directorate.

Formal arrangements

11 The *Commentary* reported that the formal agreements governing the partnership had been revised on several occasions, as UWIC developed its approach to managing collaborative provision. The original *Memorandum of Institutional Cooperation*, signed in 1991, was replaced in 1995-96 by open-ended *Memoranda of Course Agreements* and *Memoranda of Financial Agreements*. These were replaced, in turn, by the current *Memoranda of Course Agreements* and *Memoranda of Financial Agreements*, one of each for each programme, signed by the partners in June and September 1998. These latest documents were the result of the introduction of a new standard template, constructed on the basis of legal advice and taking account of HEQC's quality audit of UWIC in 1996. The audit team was able to confirm that the current *Memoranda* were comprehensive in coverage, linked to UWIC's regulations and procedures for collaborative provision, and consistent with HEQC's *Code*. It noted in particular that they made provision to safeguard the interests of students in the event of termination of the partnership. The *Commentary* stated that UWIC had 'imposed' the revised *Memoranda* on the Fundación because the

latter's senior staff saw no need for them after several years of 'institution-to-institution partnership'.

12 In accordance with HEQC's *Code*, the *Memoranda* are explicit that UWIC is responsible for the accuracy of publicity relating to the programmes and to the partnership, and that the Fundación is required to submit advertising and publicity material to UWIC for prior approval. The *Commentary* reported that such material was scrutinised at validation and periodic review events, and that moderators (see below, paragraph 21) also checked publicity material on their visits to Spain, an arrangement confirmed to the audit team by the Fundación's staff. The *Commentary* indicated, however, that UWIC had identified the need for 'a more systematic and all-encompassing approach' to scrutinising publicity, and that this matter was 'currently under consideration'. The team concurred with this analysis: during its visit to Spain, it noted publicity materials which attributed different versions of incorrect titles to the BA degree, part of a more pervasive problem with the nomenclature of this programme, of which UWIC is aware (see below, paragraph 14).

13 As the awarding body for UWIC, the University of Wales is responsible for certification relating to the programmes franchised to the Fundación. The University's policy on certification, consistent with HEQC's *Code*, is to record both the location and language of study (unless English or Welsh) on degree certificates. The audit team saw evidence of this policy in practice in relation to the BSc Technology Management. In relation to the BA programme, however, the team heard from staff at UWIC that the University had on occasion issued certificates using the wrong title. The team was provided, in Spain, with a sample certificate which bore the incorrect title 'BA European Business Management' and also recorded the language of delivery and assessment as English. The certificate bore the name of a student and was accompanied by a transcript for a student of the same name.

14 The audit team noted that this error, and the inaccurate publicity noted in paragraph 12 above, were illustrations of what the *Commentary* made clear were long-standing complications relating to the title of the BA award. Although UWIC's programme, franchised to the Fundación, is entitled 'European Business Management', at the time of initial approval the existence of an exclusivity agreement between the University and another institution in Zaragoza had required UWIC to remove the word 'business' from the programme as franchised. This requirement had been the source of some irritation to UWIC's staff, and staff at the Fundación informed the team that without the word 'business', the title of the degree was misleading. The team noted several examples of the title being used

incorrectly: in addition to publicity and the degree certificate, the application for recognition by the government of Aragon (see below, paragraph 19) referred to 'European Business Management', the *Student Guide* for 1998-99 was entitled 'European Business Management with Languages' and the Fundación's latest annual course reports referred to 'European Business Administration with Modern Languages'. Students informed the team that the title of their award would be 'European Business Administration'. The team noted that UWIC's Director of Academic Affairs had corresponded with the University about the matter of certification, and that the recent periodic review of the BA programme (see below, paragraph 23) had resulted in a firm recommendation that the partners clarified the definitive title and ensured its accurate usage. However, the evidence available to the team suggested that the problem remained pervasive. UWIC and the University will be aware that failure to ensure that the award title is used correctly could result in students and their future employers being misled. They will wish to take unequivocal and urgent action to ensure that the problem does not continue to recur. Further comment on the title is provided below, paragraph 27.

Responsibility for quality and standards

15 Consistent with HEQC's *Code*, the *Memoranda* are explicit that 'responsibility for oversight and maintenance of academic standards will rest with the Academic Board of UWIC and all quality assurance procedures of UWIC will apply'. The *Commentary* made it clear that the ultimate authority for the standards of awards rested with the Academic Board of the University of Wales: in accordance with its regulatory framework, the University's Validation Board maintains an oversight of all collaborative provision and has full responsibility for the quality and standards of validated programmes, but delegates to its members responsibility for franchised programmes, within a common framework for annual reporting and external examining. Within UWIC, oversight of the partnership is maintained by two key committees: the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) and the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC), both reporting through the Learning and Teaching Board (LTB) to Academic Board. The *Commentary* reported that the current committee structure had been in place since 1999, and resulted from an internal reorganisation that had seen the removal of faculties and the establishment of a school structure: the audit team was informed that the new structure would provide greater coordination of schools' work, by filtering all business through LTB. In addition, an administrative office has been established, under the Director of Academic Affairs, 'to give greater central thrust to collaborative provision'. At subject level, operational responsibility for the quality and

standards of collaborative programmes lies with the relevant school (previously the faculty) - the Business School, in respect of the BA and BSc programmes. The team heard from senior staff that the different approaches of the various faculties working with the Fundación had caused confusion in the past. Under the new structure, schools would be more accountable, and learning and teaching directors would have responsibility in each school for all programmes, whether delivered at UWIC or collaboratively. The *Commentary* indicated that the new structure and systems would require time to 'bed in', but the team heard that the changes were expected to lend fresh impetus to the partnership, as new people became involved in securing improvements for the remaining period.

16 The *Commentary* reported that the partnership had been conducted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Wales's *Franchising Handbook*. UWIC's own quality assurance procedures for collaborative programmes are defined in an *Academic Handbook* (the *Handbook*), first published in 1995, as a compilation of new and existing procedures. At the time of the audit visit, a new edition of the *Handbook* was in the final stages of completion. The *Commentary* described how the text had been updated and developed over the years as a repository of recognised good practice and in response to the changing regulatory requirements, and that the revised version would incorporate changes to comply with QAA's *Code*. The audit team was able to confirm that the *Handbook* was comprehensive in scope and included, for example, UWIC's policy on academic standards, detailed procedures for annual monitoring, and arrangements for managing collaborative provision.

The approval process for this partnership link

17 The *Commentary* reported that UWIC's approach to the approval process for collaborative provision was the same as for its internal programmes, but with several additional features, including a 'preliminary investigative visit' to proposed new partners. It outlined the development of UWIC's partnership with the Fundación. The partnership began in 1990 when the British Council in Spain asked UWIC to assist in the development of engineering and computing courses at the Fundación; a visit took place and the first franchises, of diploma programmes, were approved in 1991. The franchise of the BSc Technology Management was approved in 1993, following the submission of a programme document and scrutiny of the proposal by a validation panel. Approval was without conditions but carried some recommendations, including improvements to library provision. The franchise of the BA European Administration with Modern Languages took place incrementally, commencing with approval for a Certificate in European Administration in 1994. Approval for the BA was given in 1995, but a failure to

meet the conditions of validation - attributed in part, in an internal UWIC memorandum, to 'poor guidance and communications from the franchising faculty' - resulted instead in the introduction of a Diploma. The full BA was approved in 1996, with conditions relating to library texts and submission of a plan for expansion of available space.

18 The *Commentary* was frank in drawing attention to 'insufficient rigour at initial validation events' and in acknowledging that some particular difficulties for the partnership, including the assurance of learning resources (see below, paragraph 28) and the appointment of external examiners (see below, paragraph 40), might have been avoided had they been explored more fully at validation. This view was confirmed to the audit team by staff at UWIC, who emphasised that significant improvements had occurred subsequently, and that a great deal had been learnt from the experience. The team heard, for example, that the Academic Office would in future be responsible for the preliminary investigative process, previously the responsibility of the faculties. UWIC may wish to reflect on how to apply this process to maximum effect in the future development of its collaborative provision.

19 The *Commentary* outlined the status of the Fundación in respect of official recognition by the Spanish authorities. The audit team noted that the Fundación had been granted recognition for the franchised programmes from the government of Aragon.

Quality of learning opportunities and student support

20 UWIC's guidelines on partnerships, published in the *Handbook*, include a commitment to securing the quality of provision on collaborative programmes. This entails ensuring that 'the arrangements for maintenance of such provision are at a minimum of acceptable threshold levels at the time of initial scrutiny, or, with suitable quality enhancement procedures, can be made so within an acceptable timescale'. The *Commentary* identified the key mechanisms for quality control as moderator scrutiny, external examining, annual reporting and periodic review. These mechanisms are specified in the *Memoranda*, which are explicit that improvements to 'staffing and both course specific and general learning resources' may be required as a result of monitoring and review, and if not achieved 'may jeopardise the course validation'.

Liaison with the partner and administration of the link

21 The *Commentary* drew attention to the key role of moderators, appointed for each franchised programme

by UWIC from its academic staff, in providing 'regular formal contact' with the Fundación 'for advice and scrutiny purposes'. An extensive and demanding range of moderators' duties are defined in the *Handbook*, including submission of an annual report (see below, paragraph 23) and continuing work with partners to deal with matters arising during the year. The *Commentary* noted that the BSc programme had benefited from the involvement of a single moderator throughout, while the 'excessive changes of moderator' in respect of the BA programme had made it more difficult for UWIC to promote 'consistent and sustained improvement'. The audit team's discussions with staff at UWIC, including current and former moderators, confirmed the central role that they had played in the partnership. In Spain, the team heard that most communications were directed through the moderator and the Fundación's Course Director. The team met seven members of the teaching staff, only two of whom had visited Cardiff. The team considered that UWIC's heavy reliance on the moderators as a means of securing the quality of provision might be ameliorated by encouraging greater contact between other relevant module tutors at UWIC and the Fundación, such as might be regarded as good practice in franchising. UWIC may wish to consider whether increased academic contact might be of benefit in the remaining years of the partnership, and in future collaborative ventures.

22 The audit team was informed that, in order to secure effective liaison and in addition to the regular visits by the moderators, other mainly senior staff had visited the Fundación and now always chaired examination boards. The team noted that administrative links had also been strengthened, in particular through the attendance at the final examination board of the Academic Registrar. Reciprocal visits to UWIC by the Fundación's management staff have also taken place.

Monitoring and review

23 The *Commentary* summarised the monitoring and review mechanisms in place for the partnership. In discharging its responsibility for the quality and standards of its awards, the University of Wales requires the submission by UWIC of an annual 'Franchise Summary Report', for consideration by its Validation Board. The *Commentary* reported that UWIC's own monitoring processes for collaborative provision were based on those for its internal programmes: key elements are an Annual Course Review (ACR), prepared in this case by staff at the Fundación, the moderators' annual reports and external examiners' reports. Under the new committee structure, ACRs are considered by school learning and teaching committees and school boards then submitted, together with the moderators' and external examiners' reports,

to CPC, ASC and LTB. The audit team was informed that this lengthy committee cycle would not delay action on important matters: the Director of Academic Affairs was responsible for writing direct to schools on issues raised by external examiners, for example. UWIC also has in place a system of periodic review and the BSc and BA programmes were subject to such review in 1997 and 1999 respectively. The team had access to ACR, moderators' and periodic review reports for the partnership, and was able to confirm that UWIC's processes had been both thorough and effective in identifying areas of difficulty.

24 The *Commentary* reported that UWIC required, for each of its programmes, the establishment of a Course Committee with student representation. Course Committees are required to meet once a term and their minutes are appended to ACRs. UWIC's staff informed the audit team that it had taken several years to embed this system at the Fundación, but it was now working effectively, assisted by sending UWIC agendas as models for staff to follow. The team met two students who spoke positively of their work as student representatives, and considered that they were able to raise matters on behalf of the student body. It noted that the latest examples of Course Committee minutes included a section devoted to student comment and feedback, although in other respects they were brief. UWIC is to be commended for the evident effort invested in supporting its partner in the development of the Course Committee system, and may wish to consider whether the process could be further strengthened, in respect of the BA programme, by the routine exchange of minutes between home and partner committees.

25 The *Commentary* reported that UWIC required the inclusion of student feedback in ACRs and that the Fundación had in place a template for module evaluation. It cited, as evidence of the effectiveness of these mechanisms, minor adjustments to modules and the removal of teaching staff, on the basis of student comment. The audit team heard from the moderators that, as with the Course Committee, the use of formal student feedback had taken some time to develop, although in their view the informal procedures that existed previously had also been effective. The team noted that the moderators were expected to meet students during their visits to Spain and received confirmation, through annual reports and its discussions with students, that such visits took place on a regular basis.

Curriculum

26 The *Commentary* acknowledged that some difficulties with the partnership had resulted from 'allowing course variations compared to the equivalent

UWIC course'. UWIC's own BSc Technology Management no longer exists: its last student intake was in 1995. The BA programme offered at the Fundación is different in title from the home programme, and the audit team noted that there were also differences in content between the current programme offered in Spain, the programme as initially franchised, and the home programme. Although some of the differences were clearly the result of appropriate contextualisation, to take account of the needs of students studying and intending to work in Spain, it was apparent that additional drift had occurred: approval of changes by UWIC had been dependent on staff in Spain notifying UWIC's Academic Office or recording such changes in the Course Committee minutes, and formal procedures for approving minor changes had only been followed recently. The team noted, in addition, that course restructuring and modularisation at UWIC had caused difficulty for the Fundación in relation to both the BA and BSc. This has resulted, in one case, in the delivery of a module and its assessment at the wrong point in the programme.

27 The evidence available to the audit team suggested that UWIC's control over ensuring the comparability of the curriculum, and over curriculum development, had been weak. As a result, the partnership had veered towards a validation arrangement, in that the programmes originally approved for franchise had changed considerably. The team had particular concerns in respect of the BA programme, where both moderators' and external examiners' reports had suggested that the curriculum might be insufficiently challenging for honours level. The team concurred with this view, particularly in relation to the business elements of the programme: somewhat paradoxically, its scrutiny of curriculum materials indicated that the correct but controversial title of 'European Administration with Modern Languages' was broadly appropriate, given that core business material appeared to be relatively light. UWIC will wish to give prompt attention to securing the level of the BA curriculum for the remaining years of the partnership, and to consider how best to control curriculum changes in future partnerships.

Learning resources

28 The audit team saw evidence that the learning resources available to students had been scrutinised by UWIC as part of the initial approval process, and had been subject, subsequently, to regular monitoring. It noted that library facilities in particular were a continuing theme in monitoring reports and had been regularly highlighted by moderators as a matter requiring attention; the lack of a dedicated language laboratory had also been identified as a difficulty. The

Commentary stated that, while computing provision was good, the library facilities were not directly equivalent to those that might be found in the UK, although there had been continuing improvements and students also had access to supplementary texts available in staff rooms and to the library of the local university. The team concurred with UWIC's analysis. The physical environment provided by the Fundación was attractive, with well-equipped classrooms, internet access and specialist IT facilities. There was no language laboratory, such as might be expected for delivery of a degree programme with a modern languages component, although senior staff informed the team that there were plans to adapt a multimedia suite of PCs for language learning support in the near future. Book provision in respect of the franchised programmes was, in the view of the team, very modest in relation to the needs of honours degree work in business and management, and the librarian did not appear to have received guidance from UWIC about the necessary provision or had any contact with UWIC's own librarian. The team was informed at UWIC that the moderators were encouraging the Fundación to reflect on how resources were used, and to apply a clearer methodology to resource allocation - an approach that might have been of benefit in the early days of the partnership. UWIC will wish to continue to support the Fundación's work in improving learning resources, and to ensure that its own requirements in respect of the franchised programmes are made clear.

Student information and support

29 The *Commentary* reported that partner institutions had been permitted, to date, to issue their own student handbooks, providing that some standard UWIC information, including assessment regulations and appeals procedures, was included. UWIC has recently recognised, however, the need to devise and distribute its own student handbook for collaborative provision, 'as a more effective means of assuring standardisation and accuracy of information'. A version for the Fundación was under development at the time of the audit. The audit team noted that the existing handbooks, produced by the Fundación, included the required information, notwithstanding the inaccurate nomenclature discussed above (see above, paragraph 14) and that the contents had been monitored by UWIC as part of the periodic review process. The students who met the team expressed satisfaction with the information they received about their programmes, in the form of course handouts and placement guides, and reported that they had been made familiar with the regulations as part of their induction. They were aware of the appeals procedures and rules on plagiarism, and they understood the honours degree classification system and recognition matters relating to

the award. The team concluded that UWIC and its partner had taken care to ensure that students were well-informed on a range of important matters.

30 The *Commentary* identified as 'a particular strength' the Fundación's robust student support infrastructure, covering both academic and pastoral needs. The students in Spain spoke highly of the support they received, and drew attention to the way in which they were prepared for placements and received careers guidance. The evidence available to the audit team suggested that UWIC's confidence in this area was well-placed. The team noted, however, that the need to ensure that students received both clear guidance on what was expected of them in assessments, and formal feedback on their work, had been highlighted in several reports, including the periodic review of the BA. As a result, UWIC's own assessment cover sheets had been introduced at the Fundación, in order to assist staff in providing feedback. The student work seen by the team indicated that the provision of feedback remained variable. Coursework itself was returned at the end of the academic year, although students were provided with unconfirmed grades each February. Conversely, the team noted that there had been a recent instance of students being given assessment results which had not been confirmed by the external examiner, without it being made clear to them that these marks were provisional. UWIC will wish to continue to work with its partner in ensuring that students are provided with appropriate and timely feedback.

31 The current *Memoranda* do not make formal provision for students studying at the Fundación to transfer to UWIC, and it was not clear from the *Commentary* that such opportunities existed. However, the audit team learnt during its visit to Cardiff that a sample cohort from the second year of the BA programme came to UWIC either for a semester or for a shorter period before proceeding to a placement. Ten students were visiting on this basis at the time of the audit visit but, as the team had been previously unaware of their presence, were not included in the programme of meetings. In Spain, the team heard from students who had studied in Cardiff in the past that the experience had proved valuable, allowing them to feel more a part of UWIC and providing experience of a different learning style and environment.

Staffing and staff development

32 The *Memoranda* make clear UWIC's responsibility for monitoring 'staff changes, additions to staffing and staff development activities' and advising on the suitability of staff. They also state that UWIC will provide 'appropriate training/guidance in relation to academic quality and its enhancement...where it is

deemed necessary and viable', although responsibility for ensuring 'that staff maintain a level of relevant expertise appropriate to the needs of the course', and that new staff are appropriately qualified is allocated to the Fundación. The CVs of all staff teaching on the programmes were approved at initial validation and subsequent changes are reported through the ACR system: the moderators informed the audit team that staff turnover had 'settled down' and was fairly stable. As is common in Spain, many staff have other appointments and work at the Fundación on a part-time basis. The moderators informed the team that while they received the CVs of new staff and could, in theory, intervene if appointments appeared unacceptable, there was 'a sense of the retrospective' about the process. In the interests of demonstrating its assurance of the quality of staff delivering its programmes, UWIC may wish to consider whether its current process for approving new staff is too informal and reactive.

33 The *Commentary* reported that a policy for staff development for teaching at degree level was recommended at the initial validation event for the BA, and that implementation of this policy had been monitored through ACRs. Although the audit team did not see this policy, it noted that staff development needs had been tracked for both programmes through the ACR system, with both personal development and quality assurance training needs identified, and an expectation that the Fundación would provide most of this training itself. The *Commentary* reported that the Fundación provided annual development sessions, which included coverage of the framework of the franchised programmes and assessment matters. It also made reference to 'ongoing staff development in collaboration with UWIC', including sessions on quality assurance, assessment and programme management, in addition to the more informal development provided through visits of the moderators. The team heard from the moderators that what the *Commentary* described as 'the transient nature of non-permanent staff, particularly of the Course Director', required constant involvement, on their part, in staff development relating to assessment.

34 The audit team was informed by staff in Spain that they had not found it easy to adapt their own quality assurance systems to those required by UWIC, but referred to the work of the moderators and special meetings and seminars as helping to promote an understanding of the procedures. The team noted that UWIC's efforts to ensure compliance with its requirements, although commendable, appeared to be focused predominantly on matters of process: the continuing work of the moderators aside, it found little evidence of staff development in relation to discipline-specific matters. In the view of the team, more systematic participation by UWIC in matters such

as assessment might have helped to prevent the difficulties described elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraphs 39 and 40). While the responsibility placed on the Fundación for staff development is consistent with the *Memoranda*, UWIC may wish to reflect further on whether the different culture and expectations of overseas partners might require it to take a more strategic, proactive and systematic approach to staff development. Such an approach might usefully include stronger academic links with tutors in the UK (see above, paragraph 21) to promote a deeper understanding of standards matters.

Summary

35 From the documentation available to it in the UK, and from its discussions at UWIC, the audit team formed the view that UWIC had established an appropriate framework for assuring the quality of learning opportunities and student support at the Fundación. It noted, however, that while some procedures - most notably those relating to annual monitoring and review - had been effective, others had proved to be too weak. The team also believed that contact between academic staff at UWIC and the Fundación might benefit from enhancement. This view was confirmed by the team's visit to Spain.

Assurance of the standards of awards

36 The *Memoranda* make clear that UWIC is responsible for ensuring 'that the academic standards attained by students receiving awards are at least equivalent to those attained by students receiving comparable awards (elsewhere) in the UK'. The *Commentary* claimed that the standards of the awards offered through its partnership with the Fundación were 'comparable with equivalent courses in the UK'. It identified the key mechanisms for assuring academic standards as the regulation of entrance qualifications, initial validation and review, the proper conduct of assessments, and the role of the moderator and external examiner in overseeing the standards of question papers and levels of marking. The importance of the external examiner in ensuring the comparability of standards is also emphasised in UWIC's guidelines on partnerships.

Entry requirements

37 The *Commentary* stated that entry requirements for both franchised programmes were set at initial validation. Entrance to the BA programme requires the Spanish equivalent of A-levels (the COU) or national diplomas/GNVQs, although the periodic review report of 1999 stated that, in response to recruitment problems, the Fundación had developed a strategy of encouraging internal applicants from its own

computing and IT courses. Sixty five per cent of the 1998 cohort was drawn from this source. Entrance to the BSc programme is via successful completion, at an agreed standard, of UWIC's franchised Diploma in Maintenance Engineering. The external examiner for the latter has reported consistently on the high achievement, in comparison with UK standards, of students who have completed the Diploma programme successfully. Moderators are responsible for checking on entry qualifications, and for considering applications for entry with advanced standing: the audit team heard that a small number of such applications had been approved for entry to level 2 of the BA programme. The team was informed that, consistent with UWIC policy, entry with advanced standing to level 3 had not been permitted.

The assessment of students

38 The *Commentary* stated that all partners were required to comply with UWIC's procedures for assessing students, as specified in the *Handbook*. The *Memoranda* provide clear specification of the responsibilities of the Fundación in relation to assessment. It is expected to provide details of assessment arrangements to UWIC's Registry; cooperate with external examiners and moderators; submit draft papers and marking schedules as required; provide translated samples of students' work; and modify papers and marks as requested. Examination boards are held in Spain, but chaired by a senior member of staff from UWIC; the Academic Registrar also attends final award boards to ensure regulatory compliance. In accordance with normal procedures, external examiners for the franchised programmes are nominated by UWIC and approved and appointed by the University of Wales. Thereafter, the constituent members of the University operate within a common framework of principles and procedures for external examining, but are responsible for ensuring that the system works effectively. The audit team heard that, where problems arose either in relation to appointments or as issues in external examiners' reports, members were responsible for resolving them, unless University intervention was specifically requested.

39 The *Commentary* drew attention to difficulties that had occurred in the assessment process by referring to the range of moderators' and external examiners' reports made available to the audit team. That these problems remained current was clear from external examiners' reports for both programmes in 1999. The external examiner for the technology components of the BSc had been broadly satisfied with the examination arrangements and had commented on the good 'in some cases excellent' performance of the students. His counterpart for the management

components, however, had commented on some inappropriate question papers for final degree level examinations (the recommended changes to which had not been implemented in one case), the need to give further guidance to students on what was expected of them, and some significant over-marking which suggested that the standard required for honours was 'not understood'. The BA external examiner stated that the marking of assessments was satisfactory. He reported, however, that draft examination papers had arrived too late for effective moderation (or had not been sent at all) and the recommended changes had not been implemented, that the questions had tended to invite description rather than analysis, and that there had been several difficulties relating to translation (see below, paragraph 41). It was clear to the team that the seriousness of these matters had been recognised by the moderators and the Director of Academic Affairs, who had required a formal response from the staff team concerned. In Spain, the team heard that the failure to make the recommended changes to draft examination papers had been the result of an administrative error that would be avoided in future due to a new system of stamping amended papers: the team perceived, however, that subject staff were not aware of the seriousness of the external examiners' reports. While the requirements listed in the *Memoranda* might suggest that some of the difficulties that had arisen could be attributed to the Fundación, the team believed that UWIC was wholly responsible for ensuring that the assessment process for its franchised programmes was conducted appropriately and its expectations understood. UWIC later made it clear to the team that it accepted such responsibility.

40 In addition to difficulties in relation to the process of assessment, the *Commentary* was frank in analysing the historical weaknesses of UWIC's approach to standards assurance at the Fundación. It drew attention, for example, to the initial appointment of Spanish external examiners who, with hindsight, were found to be unfamiliar with UK higher education, the allowance of variations between the 'home' and franchised programmes, and the lack of common assessment and common examination boards. UWIC's staff indicated to the audit team that, in retrospect, they might not have franchised at honours level. The team concurred with this analysis, and believed that the amount of autonomy given to the Fundación in relation to assessment had been greater than might normally be expected in a franchise arrangement in its early stages of development. The urgency of making progress in staff understanding of honours level work was also underscored by the standard of the student work in business and management seen by the team in Spain, which did not appear to be consistently at honours level. The team heard that UWIC was taking action to address these matters for the remainder of the

partnership, common assessments for the BA were planned for the future (although staff in Spain observed that variations in course content might make this difficult to achieve in practice); steps had been taken to increase administrative support for examining processes in Spain; and the moderators were continuing to make considerable efforts to provide advice and to convey standards requirements to their colleagues at the Fundación. On the basis of the evidence available, however, the team believed that UWIC still faced a considerable challenge in assuring standards.

Language of tuition and assessment

41 The franchised programmes are taught and assessed in Spanish. The *Memoranda* are clear that the Fundación is responsible for providing 'both written and verbal translation' to enable UWIC 'to make judgements on the operation of the course, its quality and its academic standards'. This requirement is amplified in the *Handbook*. The *Commentary* alluded to moderators' and external examiners' reports which had identified 'some problems relating to the language of instruction'. The audit team noted that these problems related to the appropriate and timely translation of students' work for moderation purposes. Both of the external examiners' reports for 1999 commented on the continuing failure to implement as required the translation of dissertations and projects, and in the case of the BA, the examination scripts. The external examiners have also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the machine translations that have sometimes been used, a view with which the team concurred: the machine-translated work it saw provided an unacceptable basis for making academic judgements. The *Commentary* stated that 'the time, effort and cost of translation' had made the Fundación 'resistant to full cooperation'. UWIC will be aware, however, that securing appropriate and sufficient translated materials is fundamental to its assurance of standards for the franchised programmes, and will wish to pay continuing attention to this matter for the remainder of the partnership.

Summary

42 From the documentation available to it in the UK, and from its discussions with staff at UWIC, the audit team considered that, while UWIC had put in place an appropriate framework for the assurance of standards in the partnership, in practice it had faced continuing difficulties in ensuring that its requirements were met. This view was confirmed by the team's visit to Spain.

Conclusions

43 University of Wales Institute, Cardiff established its partnership with the Fundación San Valero in the early 1990s. The partnership has developed incrementally since then, and is now based on the franchise of five degree and two diploma programmes. However, for strategic reasons, and with the consent of both partners, student intakes to the franchised programmes ceased in 1999, and the partnership is being replaced, gradually, by a validation arrangement between the Fundación and the University of Wales.

44 UWIC's approach to managing the partnership may be seen in the context of its own development as an institution, and in its introduction, progressively, of processes for the quality assurance of collaborative provision. It now has in place detailed, comprehensive procedures and memoranda of agreement that take full account of HEQC's *Code*. Of particular note is its approach to monitoring and review, which has proved effective in identifying matters for concern that have arisen in relation to the programmes franchised to the Fundación. It is clear, however, that the management of the partnership has proved, in practice, to be particularly difficult for UWIC, in part because its procedures were insufficiently developed in the early days, but also because the degree of autonomy that it has granted to its partner, particularly in relation to assessment matters, has been more in accordance with a validation arrangement than a franchise. As a result, it has found itself in the position of having to take remedial action to ensure that its expectations are understood. Notwithstanding the termination of the partnership in the near future, there is a pressing need for continuing action in several areas, most notably the nomenclature of one of the franchised awards, the level of the curriculum, the provision of appropriate library resources, and arrangements for ensuring that external examiners are able fully to exercise their responsibilities for assuring standards. The action is most likely to be successful if it is underpinned by a sustained contribution, by UWIC, to staff development provision for the staff delivering its programmes.

45 The *Commentary* provided for the purposes of the audit gave a frank account of the difficulties experienced in the partnership but also drew attention, with justification, to the incremental progress made by UWIC both generally, in improving its internal structures for managing collaborative provision, and specifically, in embedding its expectations at the Fundación and in securing improvements. Senior staff at UWIC are clear that, even though the partnership has only a limited time left, UWIC will remain committed to its students at the Fundación and will continue to devote the necessary energy to ensuring the successful delivery of the programmes. UWIC does not

consider its management of this partnership to be representative of its approach to collaborative provision more generally, because the language of tuition and assessment is not English or Welsh, and has stated that it will not enter into similar arrangements in the future.

Appendix A*

Commentary on the audit report supplied by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

The following have been implemented since the audit visit:

- (Paragraph 14) the University of Wales Registry has undertaken an investigation of certificates issued and it can be confirmed that the correct title and language of teaching and assessment have been in use on certificates for at least the last two graduating cohorts preceding the audit. Prior to this and wherever possible, the University Registry will write to students and where necessary recall and reissue degree certificates;
- (Paragraph 18) the Preliminary Investigative Visit (PIV), which had been enhanced over the years of UWIC's franchising programme, has been further strengthened by the addition of a member of the UWIC's Library and Information Systems (L&IS) staff to the visiting team. Recent franchises have been preceded by PIVs with the revised visit team specification and this has been found to be useful and informative by both UWIC and the franchisee;
- (Paragraph 24) whilst the practice of exchanging Course Committee Minutes with regards to the BA programme has taken place, we are in the process of developing methodologies to ensure a more systematic and visible approach;
- (Paragraph 27) no further curriculum changes will be allowed during the remaining life of the programmes;
- (Paragraph 28) because there are course design and requirement similarities between the outgoing UWIC franchised courses and the new courses validated by the University of Wales Validation Board, and because there will be a few years overlap as new courses develop and franchised courses reach termination, UWIC will work with the Board to continue to secure learning resources improvements. Discussions between UWIC and the University of Wales Validation Unit have taken place in relation to 'hand over'. UWIC is also in the process of organising an advisory visit to FSV by a senior member of L&IS staff;

- (Paragraph 32) initial agreement with regards to the methodology by which the approval of new or replacement staff appointments has been obtained with partner institutions through UWIC's Collaborative Provision Committee. The methodology will be incorporated into UWIC's regulatory framework.

UWIC is cognisant of other issues raised by the report, in particular those relating to academic staff contact, staff development, translation and standards, and will continue in its efforts to resolve such issues for the duration of the franchises.

* as supplied by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff and Fundación San Valero

Appendix B*

Student numbers

Awards completed

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	Anticipated enrolments 2000-01 (Progressing students only - no new cohort intakes)
BSc (Hons) Technology Management	17	18	9	10	12	5	18 final year (+9 examination resit students)
BA (Hons) European Administration with Modern Languages			5	3	10	8	16 final year (+12 examination resit students)

* as supplied by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff and Fundación San Valero