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**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

Overseas Quality Audit Report

Manchester Metropolitan University
and the International Hotel
Management Institute and the
International Tourism Institute,
Lucerne, Switzerland

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Introduction

1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a UK organisation that seeks 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 2002, QAA audited selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. 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 these countries.

The process of audit of overseas partnership links

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 who had indicated that they had established collaborative links with Danish, German or Swiss partners. Following discussion, a variety of collaborative partnerships were selected for scrutiny. 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 the partnership being audited or country.

3 Audit teams visited the Danish, German and Swiss 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 the visits to Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, further documentation about the partnerships was made available to the team, and discussions were conducted with key members of staff, lecturers and students. The team comprised Professor R H Bryant, Professor R Pearce, Professor M P Shaw, auditors. The UK and overseas audit exercise was coordinated for QAA by Dr P J A Findlay and Dr C J Haslam, Assistant

Directors, Institutional Review Directorate. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Denmark, Germany and Switzerland 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 QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision* (QAA's Code), which took full effect in August 2000.

5 This report describes the audit of the collaborative link between Manchester Metropolitan University ('MMU' or 'the University') and the International Hotel Management Institute (IMI) and the International Tourism Institute (ITIS) (together 'the Institute') in Lucerne, Switzerland. The audit was conducted on the basis of visits by an audit team to the institutions concerned and on the scrutiny of documentary evidence made available by both the University and the Institute. A series of meetings were held on the 18 March 2002 at the University between the team and senior staff of the University, and this was followed by a visit to the Institute on the 6 May 2002, when the team met with staff and students at the Institute.

6 The most recent QAA audit of the University at institutional level took place in 1999. The University's overseas collaborative arrangements have not previously been subject to QAA audit. The University's hospitality, leisure, recreation, sport and tourism provision was 'quality approved' by QAA in 2001.

The background to the collaborative partnership

The partner organisation

7 The link between the University and the Institute is currently based on the accreditation of a Higher Diploma in Hotel and Tourism Management, the validation of a BA (Honours) degree (International Hotel and Tourism Management), and the validation of a masters degree (MSc International Tourism Management).

8 IMI and ITIS are related private (proprietary) organisations that share common management structures and operate from the same site in Lucerne. IMI was established in 1991, followed by ITIS in 1996. IMI is accredited by the Association Suisse des Ecoles Hôtelières. The Institute has grown from 50 students on two programmes with six staff in 1991, to over 500 students on eight programmes with 60 full and part-time staff in 2002. At the time of the audit visit in May 2002, there were 43 registered students who had begun the BA

(Honours) programme in January 2002. In addition, there were seven students who had commenced the masters programme, also in January 2002.

The history of the collaborative partnership

9 The University's formal links with the Institute date from 1993 when IMI's Higher Diploma in Hotel and Tourism Management was accredited. The University's definition of accreditation is that the programme is 'recognised' by MMU as having a credit value that permits progression with advanced standing to a University award. However, the accredited programme remains a programme of the Institute and progression is not guaranteed, but depends upon individual consideration of each application. In 1997, the University validated an unclassified BA degree course in International Hotel and Tourism Management for a period of three years. In 2000, a proposal from the Institute to upgrade this to an honours degree was accepted and validated by the University. The following year, the University validated the MSc in International Tourism Management.

10 Between the audit team's visit to the University in March 2002 and the team's visit to the Institute in May 2002, the University conducted a scheduled review of the BA (Honours) programme. This resulted in the approval, subject to a number of conditions and recommendations, of three separate award titles, namely in: International Hotel Management; International Tourism Management; and International Hotel and Tourism Management. In addition, the 'accreditation' of the Higher Diploma became one of 'recognition' of the Institute's Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma. At the time of the team's visit to the Institute, the draft *Validation Report* indicated that these new programmes were to apply from the next scheduled intake of students in July 2002. Further discussion of the validation process is provided in paragraph 18 below. The team learnt that the Institute intends to offer an MBA from 2003 which will be entirely its own award and have no formal connection with the awards of the University.

The University's approach to collaborative provision

11 The University has a considerable range of overseas collaborative links. Many of these are dual award arrangements with University partners in Europe. Other types of collaboration include franchise arrangements, recognition agreements (as at IMI/ITIS) and progression agreements. There are only three externally validated courses, all in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management within the Hollings Faculty. In addition to the two degree courses offered at IMI/ITIS, the University is also involved in awarding an MSc in International Hospitality Management through another partner in Switzerland.

12 The University's approach to overseas collaborative provision is described in the *Commentary* as being 'cautious and attentive', and that 'neither the Directorate nor the Academic Board imposes collaboration on departments or faculties or puts pressure on them to work closely with partners where there is no clear rationale for doing so'. The *Commentary* stated that the primary responsibility for overseas links rests at departmental or faculty level and that University policy is to develop links only where there is recognised University subject expertise. The University suggested to the audit team that this approach ensured responsibility resided with those with direct expertise of the relevant teaching and learning activities.

13 In respect of its quality assurance arrangements for overseas collaborative provision, the University states that these follow 'the same principles which apply to all the University's taught course provision as set out in the *Quality Assurance Manual 2001-02*'. A University handbook, *Links with Other Institutions and Organisations: A University Handbook on Practices and Procedures*, provides a framework 'with the flexibility to allow informed judgements to be applied to a range of circumstances, relationships and partner institutions whilst ensuring that the University can be confident in the standard of awards and the quality of students' learning experience'. However, the audit team was informed that in the light of QAA's *Code* and other recently published guidelines, the University was reviewing its policies, procedures and arrangements, which will result in a new section in the University's *Quality Assurance Manual*. Initially, this review is concentrating on UK-based collaborative links.

14 The University indicated to the audit team that QAA's *Code* had encouraged the institution to reflect critically on existing processes and procedures. Although the University considered that its processes and procedures were satisfactory, some variability of practice and phraseology was acknowledged and some attendant need for improvement. In respect of the link with IMI/ITIS, the University regarded it as typical of its approach to collaborative provision in that standard procedures had been applied, and that the pace of development had been 'very steady'. University staff believed that its processes for the approval of the collaborative programmes had been effective.

15 The Institute indicated in discussions with the audit team that its view of the link was that it maximised dual strengths: Swiss hotel expertise, and the distinct market advantage of a UK degree. Institute staff saw the relationship between the Institute and the University as evolutionary; in the early stages of the relationship the Institute had been largely reactive in terms of the University's policies and procedures, while

now the Institute considered itself as being a much more proactive partner. From its discussions in Switzerland, the team noted with interest that the Institute was proposing to develop further its Academic Advisory Committee. It appeared to the team that the Committee, which seeks to secure external involvement in the development and scrutiny of the Institute's academic plans, was likely to play an increasingly important role in the Institute's quality assurance infrastructure.

The establishment and management of the collaborative partnership

Approval of the collaborative partnership

16 The audit team examined relevant documentation and held discussions with both the University and the Institute in relation to the initial approval of the link; the validation of the BA (Honours) programme in 2000; and the revalidation process of the BA (Honours) programme in 2002.

17 The original link was established in 1993 under procedures that have now been superseded. The audit team was informed that at that time IMI approached the University with a view to developing a link. Checks were made by the University on the status of IMI through the Canton and the British Council. Particularly relevant to the University was the accreditation of IMI by the Association Suisse des Ecoles Hôtelières. However, no formal financial checks were made on the Institute at the time. Drawing upon QAA's *Code*, the University indicated to the team that if a similar link was now to be proposed, more extensive checks would be made. During its visit to IMI in May 2002, the team was able to confirm that the Institute was accredited by a number of leading professional bodies.

18 The audit team explored with the University the processes relating to the validation of the BA (Honours) degree in 2000. Documentary evidence was provided which indicated that a Faculty Steering Group and a Course Approvals Panel, meeting under the auspices of the University's Academic Standards Committee (ASC), had both considered the course proposal. In the view of the team there was sufficient evidence to suggest that these procedures, involving external assessors, had been appropriately conducted. The Steering Group stage, providing advice on the development of appropriate quality assurance arrangements (although not now forming part of the University's quality assurance arrangements), seemed to the team to have been particularly useful. Reviewing all the evidence available to it, the team would wish to encourage the University to consider the merits of reintroducing the Steering

Group procedure for those new programmes originating outside the University, given the particular challenges and potential degree of risk involved in such collaborations. In respect of the BA (Honours) degree, the validation event took place in late February 2000. The Approvals Panel imposed four conditions, two of which had to be addressed immediately, and two within two months. The team was interested to learn how the University was made aware that validation conditions had been satisfied. Although correspondence existed between the University and the Institute that indicated the validation report had been transmitted, the University was unable to locate the appropriate minutes of the Course Approvals Subcommittee which indicated formally that the conditions had been satisfied. The University will wish to ensure that appropriate documentary records are maintained.

19 Immediately prior to its visit to the Institute in May 2002, the audit team was supplied with a copy of the draft report of a revalidation of the BA (Honours) programme that had been conducted by a Faculty Programme Review Panel in late April 2002. Again, the report indicated that the event itself had been conducted in accordance with University procedures. The revalidation report dealt with a number of matters that had been raised by the team during its earlier visit to the University. It appeared to the team that rather short timescales had been agreed for the meeting of the revalidation conditions, some of which were not insignificant including, for example, the production of a definitive course document. Noting that the Institute was planning to admit a new cohort of students in the summer of 2002, the team considered that the University should stipulate longer lead times, thereby allowing its conditions and recommendations of approval to be properly considered by the Institute, evaluated by the Faculty Approvals Committee, and then implemented at operational level.

Written agreements

20 At the time of the audit visit to Switzerland in May 2002, three formal agreements were extant between the University and the Institute:

- (i) a recognition agreement, dated February 2000, for the Institute's Higher Diploma;
- (ii) a validation agreement, dated February 2000, for the BA (Honours) course; and,
- (iii) a validation agreement, dated February 2002, for the MSc course.

21 The latter two agreements offered comprehensive coverage of quality assurance, standards and financial matters, and complied in broad terms with the precepts within QAA's *Code*. However, the University will wish

to take the opportunity afforded by the revalidation report of April 2002 to ensure that all the aspects outlined in QAA's *Code* are fully covered.

Certificates and transcripts

22 The *Memoranda of Agreement* between the University and the Institute (for the BA (Honours) and the MSc) stipulate that the preparation and issuing of degree certificates is the responsibility of the University. An exemplar certificate for the BA (Honours), made available to the audit team, featured the logo of the University and made it clear that the degree programme was that of the University, conducted 'in collaboration' with the Institute. However, the team learnt that, in addition to the University's degree certificate, following the final Examination Board the Institute issued a transcript containing a list of modules and performance achieved to individual students. The Institute indicated that two types of transcript were issued: an 'interim' version, issued immediately after the Examination Board had met, and a 'final' version, once formal ratification of the degree class had been made by the Academic Board of the University. The University is not sent these transcripts, nor did there appear to be a mechanism by which the University could monitor the accuracy of these transcripts, although the University does receive lists emanating from the Examination Board held at the Institute. The University stated that it was comfortable to leave the checking of transcripts to the Institute. The team noted, however, that the University's practice was at variance with the relevant precepts of QAA's *Code* that are designed to safeguard the authority of the awarding body, the integrity of the process and the accuracy of information relating to awards. The team would wish to encourage the University to review its procedures in this regard, and ensure that there is an effective system of control for all certificates and transcripts issued in its name.

Publicity and marketing of the collaborative partnership

23 Publicity and marketing for all University-related courses is undertaken primarily by the Institute. However, the terms of the *Memoranda of Agreement* state that 'the University will retain control over all promotional material relating to the course which mentions the University and/or uses its logo. Accordingly, all course publicity material must be agreed with the Faculty Secretary prior to use'. The Institute explained that, in practice, publicity was the responsibility of the Chairman of IMI/ITIS and the Principal, but that copies of all published materials were retrospectively forwarded to the University. The Institute indicated that it had a clear understanding of what could be included in such publicity materials.

The audit team was able to inspect a range of publicity material issued by the Institute, including the Institute's web site. These materials were of good quality and gave appropriate acknowledgement to the position of the University in respect of the diploma and degree courses. However, the team noted that no mention was made of the University on the Institute's application form for the MSc in International Tourism Management. The University will wish to ensure that it has sight of all publicity and related material prior to its formal publication.

24 Documentation was made available to the audit team that indicated that, recently, one of the Institute's 'partner' organisations in India had erroneously described its own courses as leading to a degree of the University. Once this matter had been drawn to its attention, the University had acted promptly in requiring the Institute to take steps to ensure that such misrepresentation did not recur. Such assurances had been forthcoming and the Institute's view was that this had been an isolated incident. The University will wish to review whether it has sufficient knowledge of the activities of the Institute's partner institutions to take early action should any similar incidents arise in the future.

Quality of learning opportunities and student support

25 The respective formal responsibilities of the University and the Institute are set out in the *Memoranda of Cooperation*. The Institute is responsible, on a day-to-day basis, for the maintenance of appropriate academic standards in accordance with the University's policies. The Institute is specifically responsible for the establishment of mechanisms, similar to those employed within the University, which permit the proper involvement of staff, students and external examiners in monitoring and evaluating adherence to agreed course aims and objectives. The University's role, exercised through the Faculty, is to maintain oversight and monitoring of quality and standards.

26 Staff of the Faculty indicated that the key person in fulfilling the University's role was the Link Coordinator, appointed by the Head of Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. This role is a comprehensive one, and entails frequent contact with the Principal or Assistant Principal of the Institute on a range of academic and support matters. The Link Coordinator is involved in, for example, keeping the Institute abreast of key developments within the University, assisting with the preparation of Quality Action Plans (QAPs), representing the University on assessment boards and producing an annual report on the link. Both the Institute and the University regarded

the Link Coordinator's role as an effective one and opined that 'communications have improved in recent years'. In general, the audit team would concur with this assessment. However, during the course of its discussions the team was made aware of examples where a full understanding of respective institutional developments appeared not to have been secured. These instances included, for example, information on additions to the Institute's network of collaborative partners (see above, paragraph 24) and the University's changing requirements in relation to validation processes.

27 In addition to channels of communication through the Link Coordinator, liaison takes place at a number of other levels including those between individual members of teaching staff, and between the Dean or the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University and senior staff of the Institute. Senior staff of the University regularly attend graduation ceremonies at the Institute. The audit team noted, however, that to date these linkages have involved only a limited number of teaching staff and have varied considerably in extent.

Monitoring and review

28 The Institute's course annual monitoring processes are designed to integrate with the University's standard procedures. The *Commentary* indicated that this primarily entails the production of an annual QAP, which is designed to serve 'as a focal point for evaluating programme quality and quality enhancement on an annual basis and also evidence to support longer term course planning'. Sources of evidence required include external examiner reports, Course Committee meetings, course statistics, staff-student meetings and the Link Coordinator's report.

29 Three quality action plans (embracing the 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02 sessions), completed in January each year by the Institute, were made available to the audit team. It was reported that some assistance had been given by the Link Coordinator in completing the QAPs. Although these plans provided a systematic outline check on key features related to a number of core quality assurance aspects, in the opinion of the team they could be made more detailed for audit purposes. The QAPs are moved forward within the University's quality assurance system through the Head of Department's Annual Report. Of the two departmental reports examined by the team, one made no reference to the collaborative link in Switzerland while the other contained a commentary and specific evaluation of the link. The Head of Department's report goes to the Faculty ASC and thence forms part of the evidence for the Dean's overview which goes to the University's ASC. The team was informed that these overview reports make specific reference to

collaborative provision. The University assured the team that it did not believe there was an attenuation of information on collaborative provision as it progressed through the University's deliberative and executive frameworks. It was explained that the Head of Department's report is expected to highlight collaborative provision and to identify those matters which demand specific attention. Based on the evidence made available to it, and having regard to the recommendations of both the University's 1996 and 2001 institutional audit reports, the team would wish to encourage the University to consider ways in which cross-faculty issues relating to overseas collaborative provision might be discussed and reviewed at more senior levels of the University.

30 As noted previously, the Link Coordinator produces an annual report that includes an overview of student feedback. The annual reports examined by the audit team contained useful insights into the operation of the programmes offered in collaboration with the Institute. Staff at the Institute indicated that they received rapid feedback on QAPs through the Link Coordinator. Follow up on the QAP was achieved both through the subsequent QAP and the Link Coordinator's annual report.

31 Overall, the audit team considered that the University's monitoring system appeared to be soundly based, although it does rely particularly on the competence of the Link Coordinator and, to be fully effective, needs to be consistently applied at all levels. There is an inherent danger, recognised fully by the University, that the Link Coordinator may at times be fulfilling potentially conflicting roles of both facilitator and evaluator. The University will wish to reflect further on this matter. In the view of the team, there might be merit in establishing a cross-University forum in which issues relating to the role, experience and effectiveness of link coordinators might be monitored and evaluated.

Student information and support

32 The audit team met with a representative group of students at the Institute. The students, very few of whom were native English or German speakers, were supportive of the Institute, appreciative of their experience, and paid particular tribute to the Institute's teaching staff. Several students had been at the Institute for a number of years, progressing through various levels of study onto the University's BA (Honours) degree programme. A small number of students had progressed to the recently validated MSc. Several students had been admitted directly onto the University's BA (Honours) degree programme from partner organisations linked to the Institute, and many had chosen to come to the Institute specifically

because of the prospect of a British university qualification. The team learnt that the Institute provides prospective students with prior information, primarily through the internet and publicity brochures (see above, paragraph 23).

33 The students reported on their experiences at the Institute and acknowledged that in recent years significant improvements had been made in terms of the library, computing and other support facilities. However, although students were clear about the link to the University in respect of the final award, they consistently observed that they received little information about the University itself or its responsibilities in relation to standards and the management of the student learning experience. The students felt their identification was very much with the Institute, and that the University was largely 'invisible'. Nonetheless, they had received from the Institute itself information about the course, the content of modules and the course regulations. These were contained in the *School Rule Book* which had been adapted by the Institute to University requirements.

34 Asked what they would do if they had a complaint, or if they wished to appeal against an assessment result, students indicated to the audit team that they would initially approach a member of staff at the Institute, or bring the matter to the Student Council, convened by the Assistant Principal. Students described how they were given the opportunity to complete anonymous end-of-module evaluation forms, and that there was evidence of remedial action taken by the Institute in response to their concerns. However, it was clear to the team that the students were largely unaware of the position of the University in relation to the mechanisms for safeguarding standards, particularly in relation to the rights of appeal and complaint to the University. The University will wish to consider, in discussion with the Institute, ways of ensuring that such channels are made more apparent to students.

35 In relation to language support, although there is an English language test on entry in addition to Test of English as a Foreign Language requirements, voluntary English classes are also made available to students. However, remedial English language tuition represents an additional cost to the student and is of limited duration. Other forms of support include study skills support, German language tuition as part of the curriculum, and careers and counselling support. From the evidence made available, these facilities appeared to be broadly comparable with those provided by the University.

36 The audit team noted the concern, expressed in the Link Coordinator's reports and also described in the *Commentary*, about the need for improvements in

learning resource facilities at the Institute. It was clear that in response to the University's expressed concerns, the Institute had taken action. In particular, the team noted comments in the draft April 2002 validation report which indicated that the panel had been 'impressed by the rapid and extensive improvements to the learning resources, in terms of computer provision and library facilities'.

Staffing and staff development

37 The audit team noted that one of the recurring themes that featured in the *Commentary*, QAPs and the Link Coordinator's annual reports related to staffing. The appropriateness and expertise of staffing is a matter to which the University gives considerable attention at validation. However, the *Commentary* recognised that in the competitive world of hotel and tourism management, stability in the staffing cohort can be difficult to maintain. The *Commentary* indicated that due to the departure of key members of staff at the Institute towards the end of 1999, the University had postponed the review of the BA degree until measures had been taken by the Institute to address the situation. The February 2000 validation report indicated that the panel had been satisfied that the proposed honours programme was underpinned by an appropriate cohort of staff, but recommended that a detailed staff development plan should be formulated. Subsequently, in July 2001 the validation report for the MSc established conditions in relation to the appointment of staff and to the production of a staff development plan. The Institute prepared a staff development plan in connection with the revalidation of the BA (Honours) programme in April 2002, but the panel nonetheless considered that a fuller staff development programme was needed which addressed, *inter alia*, the currency of subject knowledge. The University will wish to ensure that appropriate action is taken at the earliest opportunity in respect of this matter.

38 While appreciating fully that the appointment of staff at the Institute is not the direct responsibility of the University, the audit team nevertheless considered that the University might wish to explore how enhanced liaison might take place between the Institute and the University at the time of individual appointments, rather than retrospectively through conditions and recommendations at validation. According to the written *Agreement* for the BA, an annual report on staffing should be submitted by the Institute to the Head of the University's Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. The team could find evidence of only one such report.

39 During the course of the collaborative partnership, the University has made a number of efforts to support staff development at the Institute. The audit team would wish to commend these initiatives. Examples of reciprocal staff visits were cited in the *Commentary* and were additionally described by staff of both organisations during discussions with the team. Teaching staff at the Institute expressed their appreciation of the visits that had been made by University staff, and for the help and guidance that had been given with respect to the supervision of dissertations. Some limited staff development opportunities have also existed for several support staff, for instance, the Institute's librarian has visited the University library in Manchester. Nonetheless, staff from the Institute also suggested that there might be a number of ways in which these links might be strengthened, for example, through the sharing of cognate syllabuses and through being 'recognised' by the University, perhaps by way of involvement in the University's staff induction programme.

40 Although the University has put in place a number of staff development opportunities, it may wish to consider the means by which it ensures that effective measures exist to review the proficiency of staff teaching on its collaborative programmes with the Institute. In particular, the audit team considers that the University should ensure that it has detailed, verified and regularly updated information about the qualifications and experience of all staff involved with the programme; and that every encouragement is given to the Institute to enhance its staff development programme.

The assurance of the standards of the awards

Student admissions

41 The formal *Agreement* for both the BA and the MSc states 'that the Institute will be responsible for the processes of selection, admission and enrolment of students, subject to principles and practices approved at validation. Registration of students with the University for the award of (BA/MSc) shall be the responsibility of the Institute which shall ensure that all administrative and academic criteria are met'. The audit team explored with staff of both the University and the Institute how entry standards are safeguarded, particularly in relation to the BA. Although the *Commentary* suggested that registration forms are forwarded to the Link Coordinator, staff of the University explained that the Link Coordinator did not in fact see individual student details. The University, reflecting the level of trust that has developed between the two organisations, expressed itself happy to leave the student admissions process and related discussions to the Institute.

42 The Institute's Registrar explained that student admissions was the Institute's responsibility and that the information required by the University for registration purposes simply consisted of student names and numbers; the University did not ask for proof of qualifications. As far as the degree was concerned, most students came through IMI: in order to progress to the degree, a pass mark of 48 per cent from the Higher Diploma was required. However, the audit team noted that an increasing number of students on the University's degree programme came from non-IMI sources, and was interested to learn how the admissions process operated in these cases. The Institute explained that most non-IMI students came from their 'partner' organisations, of which there were three at the time of the visit, one in Malaysia and two in India. The Institute indicated that their partners offered similar sub-degree awards to themselves. Students are also accepted onto the University's programmes from other schools which are members of the Association Suisse des Ecoles Hôtelières. In discussion with the team, the Institute indicated that there were tentative plans to extend the Institute's partner college network. The Institute also confirmed that, hitherto, the University had not sought any involvement in the selection or approval of IMI partner organisations.

43 The audit team noted that the matter of direct student entry had been of interest to the University validation panel that had considered the BA programme in April 2002. The team noted that, in its recommendations, the panel had required that 'there should be an explicit statement that entry requirements for direct entrants to the degree stage should be established between IMI/ITIS and the MMU faculty'. While certainly not wishing to question the competency of Institute staff, the team would nevertheless wish to encourage the University to monitor more closely the application of its admission requirements to ensure appropriate consistency and compatibility with the requirements pertaining within the University itself.

The assessment of students

44 The various *Agreements* between the University and the Institute provide for assessment processes in relation to the BA and the MSc to be conducted by the Institute, but within the policies and procedures defined by University regulations. The University is responsible for ensuring that examination and assessment requirements should be equivalent to, and as effective as, those on a comparable course delivered at the University. Decisions relating to the progression and assessment of students rest with a Board of Examiners that is chaired and serviced by the Institute. The Link Coordinator is a member of the Institute's Board of Examiners and is responsible, following

agreement from the external examiner, for completing the conferment list and forwarding it to the Faculty Secretary within the University.

45 The audit team inspected a number of documents related to the ways in which standards were maintained through the assessment process including, for example, external examiners' reports, Link Coordinators' reports and QAPs, and discussed a number of assessment matters with staff of the Institute. Notwithstanding extant protocols, it appeared to the team that there had been a number of difficulties in relation to assessments, largely related to the lack of familiarity of staff at the Institute with the University's regulatory framework. As the *Commentary* acknowledged, during 1999 and 2000 a number of concerns had been expressed by the external examiner about, *inter alia*, assessment schedules, the organisation of unseen examinations and marking schemes. While no serious problems had been recorded in the Institute's QAP for 2000-01, these matters were taken up in the Link Coordinator's Report for 2002 and the Head of Department's report covering the same period. The external examiner's report of January 2002 expressed satisfaction 'at the procedural and administrative changes which have recently been implemented'. It appeared to the team that the University had acted appropriately in resolving these issues.

46 Currently, monitoring of the assessment process relies largely on the external examiner's report and attendance by the Link Coordinator and other University staff at assessment boards held at the Institute. Teaching staff of the Institute described examples of how the University had provided assistance in relation to assessment standards and procedures, for instance, through the provision of assignment exemplars. In addition, the University had recognised that Institute staff might have limited experience of the supervision and marking of dissertations, and guidance on dissertation supervision had accordingly been provided. However, while the audit team was made aware of occasions where the Link Coordinator, acting in a non-moderating capacity, had looked at assessed work during visits to the Institute, there does not appear to have been a mechanism for ensuring that staff at the University had access to assessed student work. The team concluded that the University placed considerable reliance on the external examiner to assure academic standards. Staff of the Institute, in discussion with the team, indicated that they would welcome greater sharing of assessment strategies and practice, as well as curricula, with staff of cognate subject areas at the University (see above, paragraph 39). The University will wish to reflect further on these matters.

47 From the information made available, it appeared to the audit team that the University may initially have overestimated the experience and capabilities of the

Institute's staff in implementing assessment policies and practices that accorded with the University's own standards. While the team would wish to acknowledge the effective and well-documented action taken by both the University and the Institute to resolve the issues identified in 1999 and 2000, the University may nevertheless need to exercise greater vigilance in ensuring that there are continuing, robust and supportive mechanisms which ensure that the Institute understands fully and follows the University's requirements relating to the conduct of assessments.

48 All the programmes offered by the Institute and which lead to a University award have an external examiner appointed and remunerated by the University. The procedure for appointment starts with nomination by the relevant department to the Faculty ASC, followed by formal approval by the University's ASC on behalf of the Academic Board. In the case of the University's programmes at the Institute, an experienced and well-qualified English examiner had been identified and appointed through the University's standard procedures. The audit team was grateful for the opportunity to meet with the external examiner as part of their discussions with University staff. It was explained to the team that the current external examiner acted on behalf of both the University in relation to the degree programmes, and for the Institute in respect of the Higher Diploma programme. This arrangement was regarded by the University as being a strength, the view being that it enabled an integrated view to be taken of the suite of higher education programmes from diploma through to masters level activity. The external examiner approves assessments and moderates assessed work; since both tuition and assessment is undertaken in English, there are no language difficulties. The external examiner, in strongly supporting the collaborative partnership, drew attention to the heavy workload and the possibility that this might increase with the recent approval of the MSc.

49 The audit team explored the extent to which equivalence in standards was being assured between the University and the Institute, especially in respect of student achievement. Although the successive reports of the external examiner confirmed that standards of achievement had been particularly strong, the team observed that the external examiner had no direct comparative involvement with any of the University's other programmes in this subject area, either in the UK or in other overseas locations. The team considered that equivalence of standards might better be assured through the use of an external examiner who also had some form of engagement with similar courses offered elsewhere by the University. Subsequent to the team's visit to the University, and despite the absence of recorded discussion on the matter in the April 2002 validation report, the validation panel for the BA

(Honours) established a condition that the University should appoint two external examiners for the degree programme 'one of whom would also have responsibilities at the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at MMU'. The team welcomed this recent development and noted also the possibility that the second external examiner might initially 'shadow' the first external examiner in order to gain appropriate experience.

Conclusions

50 The collaborative partnership between the Manchester Metropolitan University (the University) and the International Hotel Management Institute and the International Tourism Institute (the Institute) is currently based on the accreditation of a Higher Diploma in Hotel and Tourism Management, the validation of a BA (Honours) degree (International Hotel and Tourism Management), and the validation of a masters degree (MSc International Tourism Management). The link between the University and the Institute has been in existence for nearly 10 years. At the time of the audit visit in May 2002, there were 43 registered students who had begun the BA programme in January 2002. In addition, there were seven students who had commenced the masters programme, also in January 2002.

51 The *Commentary*, together with the supporting documentation and discussions with staff and students, provided considerable evidence of the development and current status of the collaborative partnership. Although in its *Commentary* the University did not set out an overall view of the partnership, senior staff of the University indicated that the audited link with the Institute was typical of the University's approach to collaboration and that the University was content with the way the collaboration had developed. At the time of the audit visit, the University was engaged in a review of its overseas collaborative arrangements. Once complete, the University will wish to ensure that appropriate amendments are made to the University's *Quality Assurance Manual*.

52 The University considers that the development of the collaboration has been 'very steady'. Reviewing the available evidence, it appears that the rate of change in recent years has, in fact, been rather more significant, involving three important programme validations of the BA (Honours), the MSc and then the revised BA (Honours) programmes. These developments appeared in large measure to have been initiated by the Institute in response to growing institutional self-confidence and maturity, new staff appointments, marketing considerations and developmental changes in the Swiss hotel and leisure management system. In accepting that

the growing experience of the Institute rightly permits a greater degree of confidence to be exercised by the University in respect of its collaborative partner, the audit team nevertheless considered that a higher level of liaison was merited. On occasion, the University has not been able to maintain as close a check on developments at the Institute as it might wish, evidenced, for example, through the assurance of appropriate assessment arrangements and the production of student transcripts. It might be thought that some of these matters should have been resolved through the conditions and recommendations made at initial validation. In this regard, it was noted that it was proposed that conditions set at the April 2002 validation event, some of which the team considered to be somewhat complex in nature, would be satisfied by June 2002 thereby enabling the recruitment of a further cohort of students in July 2002. The University will wish to review carefully whether the timescales set in response to validation conditions and recommendations are always sufficient to ensure that appropriate remedial action is effected prior to the admission of students.

53 During the course of the audit, several instances were noted where the University's adherence to QAA's *Code of practice* should be made more secure. While recognising that adjustments in policy and procedure to meet the *Code* may take time, the University has yet to complete a review of its overseas collaborative provision that was originally signalled in the University's January 2000 *Institutional Audit Report*. Reviewing the available evidence, there was no overt indication that QAA's *Code* had been considered systematically in respect of the courses considered by this audit, although staff of both the University's Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management and the Institute were aware contextually of the *Code*.

54 A strong and mutually productive relationship has very clearly been established between the University and the Institute. Notable strengths characterising the manner in which the University has sought to manage the partnership have included the constructive developmental role played by the Link Coordinator; the University's willingness to take decisive action in response to recognised breaches of agreed practice in relation to the Institute's promotional activities; and the University's recent proposals to introduce an additional external examiner to help secure comparable academic standards between the University's home and overseas provision in this subject area. Among other matters, in taking forward the collaborative partnership, the University will wish to have regard to whether the reintroduction of a Faculty Steering Group phase as part of the institution's validation processes would provide added reassurance in respect of the approval of overseas collaborative partnerships; whether the

University might provide more overt support to staff and students at the Institute; how the experiences gained by link coordinators might be shared more widely across the University; ensuring that appropriate mechanisms exist to enable the University to maintain an accurate overview of the staff who are appointed to teach on its validated programmes at the Institute; and ensuring that appropriate mechanisms exist to verify and monitor the application of the University's admission and assessment requirements at the Institute.

55 Reviewing carefully the available evidence, it is considered that the University's collaborative arrangement with the Institute is basically sound and that there can be broad confidence in the way that the University is exercising its stewardship of the quality and standards of its awards offered in association with the Institute. In taking forward the collaborative partnership the University will, however, wish to explore the means by which it might establish, where relevant, a more participative involvement in respect of the Institute's development aspirations, thereby ensuring that full consideration is given to the implications of these developments for the security of the standards of the University's awards. The University will additionally wish to satisfy itself that its collaborative activities adhere to QAA's *Code*.

Appendix A

University commentary on the link between the University and IMI/ITIS

Switzerland has a world-wide reputation for its strengths in hotel and tourism and in the education and training of students for those industries. As a major UK provider of hospitality and tourism management, the University's collaboration with IMI/ITIS serves to enhance its own international reputation in the field and IMI/ITIS benefits through being able to offer high quality programmes of study leading to UK degrees.

The link between the University and IMI/ITIS was established to benefit those students, mostly international students, who wish to learn about Swiss hotel service and tourism expertise and couple this with the strong hospitality and tourism management emphasis characteristic of UK degree programmes. This defines the University's relationship with IMI/ITIS, a relationship which embraces the respective strengths of each institution. To this end, the University has chosen to recognise and validate the Institute's own programmes rather than a franchise arrangement.

Since the inception of the University's relationship with IMI/ITIS in 1993, very positive and productive working practices have evolved to support key programme developments at Higher Diploma, Bachelors degree and, more recently, at masters level. The University's procedures have proved robust and helpful in assuring the standards of awards and ensuring a proper focus on the development needs of the Institute's members of staff.

The University's philosophy in the validation of programmes, as reflected in its quality assurance systems, is to ensure that the programme team has, and maintains, the expertise to deliver programmes leading to University awards and that it is fully capable of undertaking responsibility for programme management and administration in line with University regulations. The Faculty of Food, Clothing and Hospitality Management has the responsibility for ensuring that this philosophy is carried through for all programmes, and that it is applied both within the University and across its partner institutions through the University's programme review and modification procedures, and its annual monitoring and evaluation processes. The University is satisfied from the processes in place and the reports on student performance and achievement, that the standards of its awards are secure.

The Quality Assurance Agency, in its report on the link between the University and IMI/ITIS, indicates possibilities for enhancing some aspects of the relationship and the University is happy to accept such recommendations as part of its institutional commitment to continuing development and improvement.

