



# **Overseas Quality Audit Report**

University of East London,  
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and  
the Centro Studi Martha Harris, Florence

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## Introduction

1. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) is a UK organisation that seeks to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education (HE) are being safeguarded and enhanced. It provides public information about quality and standards in HE to meet the needs of students, employers and the funders of HE. One of the Agency's activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative links between UK HE institutions and their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2003, the Agency selected partnership links between UK HE institutions and institutions in Italy. 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.

## The process of audit of overseas partnership links

2. In July 2002, the Agency invited all UK HE institutions to provide information on their collaborative partnerships in a range of overseas countries. Using this information, the Agency approached a number of institutions who had indicated that they had established collaborative links with partner institutions in Italy. Following discussion, a variety of collaborative partnerships was 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 discussing 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. Institutions were also invited, in their *Commentaries*, to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision* (1999) published by the Agency, which took full effect in August 2000.

3. In the spring of 2003, audit visits were made to each UK institution to discuss its arrangements in the light of the *Commentary*. In May 2003, an audit team visited the partner institutions in Italy 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 institutions in Italy, 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 for this audit comprised Professor A Gale, Professor J H Phillips and Professor G Chesters. The UK and overseas audit exercise was coordinated for the Agency by Dr P J A Findlay and Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Directors, Reviews Group. The Agency is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Italy for the willing cooperation provided to the team.

4. This report describes the audit of the collaborative link between the University of East London (the University or UEL), the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust (the Trust), and the Centro Studi Martha Harris, Florence, Italy (the Centro Studi). The audit also included discussion with former staff and students at an associated link, the Centro Studi Martha Harris, Rome. The audit was conducted on the basis of the visits by the audit team to the University and the Centro Studi and on the scrutiny of documentary evidence made available by both partners and by the Trust. A series of meetings took place on 1 April 2003 between the team and senior staff of the University and the Trust, and this was followed by visits to the Centro Studi, Florence on 23 and 24 May 2003 and a meeting with a tutor and students, previously enrolled with the Centro Studi, Rome, on 27 May 2003.

5. The most recent audit of the University by the Agency at institutional level took place in 1999. The University's overseas collaborative arrangements have not previously been the subject of a report by the Agency. A subject review report on the psychology provision of the Trust was published in 2000 by the Agency.

## The background to the collaborative partnership

6. The partnership is based on the validation by the University of the Postgraduate Diploma/MA in Psychoanalytic Observational Studies (Observational Studies). This programme of studies developed by the Trust is delivered at a number of centres in the UK, and at the Centro Studi where its delivery has been separately and specifically approved by the University. The Trust is an accredited partner institution of the University, and since 1999 it has been formally recognised as having an equivalent status, in terms of academic authority and quality assurance responsibilities, to the schools of the University. This status reflects the University's confidence in the association with the Trust, which formerly was linked to the University's School of Social Sciences.

7. The Trust was founded in 1920 and the Portman Clinic in 1933, with NHS Trust status being gained in 1994. In 1999, the Trust had 239 teachers on its programmes, including 27 full-time, 105 part-time and

107 external. In 1999, 1,125 students were registered at the Trust of which 752 were following courses accredited by UEL. In addition to its special arrangements with the University, the Trust has educational links with a number of other UK universities. The Observational Studies Diploma/MA programme is one of 17 psychoanalytically-based postgraduate courses devised and taught at the Trust, which include professional doctorates. The programme is now offered at the Trust and at seven centres in the UK, together with three centres in Italy. It is the largest of the Trust programmes, with a total of 242 part-time students registered, the majority in the UK. One full-time member of teaching staff and 91 part-time academic staff are involved in delivery of the programme over its various centres.

8. The Centro Studi, Florence was founded in 1993. It is a non-profit organisation which promotes the psychoanalytic understanding of children, young people, parents and families. It is affiliated to the European Federation of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapists (Child Section). The Observational Studies programme is delivered in accommodation rented from a local educational centre specialising in foreign language teaching. The Centro Studi additionally offers a range of courses in the area of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy; these include clinical training in child psychotherapy which is available for students who have completed the Observational Studies programme, and is approved by the Italian Government. The founder members of the Centro Martha Harris Association, who have been teaching an observational course since 1987, are visiting lecturers at the Trust.

9. The version of the Observational Studies programme delivered at the Centro Studi started in 1987, was validated by the University in 1996, and was revalidated in 2001. In Italy 11 students are currently registered at Centro Studi, Florence. A centre in Milan/Genoa has 20 registered students. There was previously a similar centre based in Rome, which is no longer recruiting, but has six remaining students registered for 2002-03. The course offered at the Centro Studi is broadly similar to that offered by the Trust in the UK, except for variation in duration, the languages of instruction (both English and Italian are used) and the dropping of one module from the curriculum. The course is delivered over two years at the Trust and three years in Florence. However, the tradition at the Trust is to allow a flexible pattern of study and students, who are typically full-time employees in various caring and associated professions, may complete their programmes over a longer period. Staff at both the Trust and Centro Studi teach on the course in Florence. While the present report focuses on the course at the Centro Studi, Florence, the audit team

also met with a tutor and a group of students registered at the Centro Studi, Rome to learn about the arrangements in place for supporting the students during the period of course termination (see below, paragraphs 38-41).

10. Observational Studies is an experientially-based course and teaching and learning depends '...on the experience and training of the seminar leader...'. At the Centro Studi it is taught over five weekends per term, 15 weekends per year for three years, and delivered by Italian and UK staff. It is delivered on a bilingual basis, with the use of interpreters as required. One or two seminar leaders present the course on each study weekend, rotating through the term, and return for equivalent weekends each term. While possession of the Observational Studies qualification allows progression to Centro Studi courses in child psychotherapy recognised by the Italian government, it is only possible for students to progress to recognised clinical training in Italy if they already possess a first degree in psychology or medicine. Thus completion of the course allows progression to recognised training but is not in itself a locally recognised qualification for clinical practice.

#### **The University's approach to overseas collaborative provision**

11. In its *Commentary* and in meetings with the audit team, the University made it clear that the locus of responsibility for the quality and standards of the validated course resides in the final instance with the University's committees, but that it was not directly responsible for the course delivery. The Centro Studi course is subject to the procedures set out in the University's Quality Manual (the Manual), last published in 2001. The University's policies and procedures relating to collaboration and specifically to overseas collaborative provision are set out in the relevant parts of the Manual. In the *Commentary*, the University described how its assurance of the partnership was grounded in these standard procedures, which included: initial institutional approval; validation and five-yearly revalidation with a visit to the centre; annual monitoring incorporating student feedback; the existence of a link person (in this case, a tutor at the Trust) directly responsible for ensuring effective communication with the partner institution, together with a link person at the overseas centre with responsibility for maintaining links with UEL (in this case through the Trust). The team found that the Manual provided clear criteria and procedural requirements for these activities, and also covered such relevant matters as language of instruction, the approval of a memorandum of cooperation, financial arrangements, certification, and the procedures to be followed where the arrangement is to be terminated.

12. The University indicated that ultimate responsibility for quality assurance lies with the University's Academic Board. The more direct oversight of quality in the University's schools lies with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and reports to Academic Board. This committee relationship is paralleled at school level, where each school board has a quality committee chaired by the school leader for quality assurance who has wide-ranging responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement across the school. This includes responsibility for the school's implementation of the University's annual quality improvement process (AQIP). A detailed planning statement accompanies the annual AQIP report from each school, and together these constitute the main vehicle for annual monitoring (see below, paragraph 29). In relation to collaborative provision, responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the partnership agreement are fulfilled lies with the Head of School, who in compiling the AQIP report must refer to all programmes for which the school is responsible, including any overseas partnerships. The AQIP reports for each programme within the school are audited each year by an independent colleague from another school, who draws attention to quality and standards issues, including examples of good practice. Reports are then scrutinised by the Validation and Review Sub-committee (VRSC) of the QAEC. These procedures apply to the Trust's programmes as if it were a school of the University. Thus, oversight of collaborative provision falls within, and is consistent with, the University's general arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement.

13. To support the effective management of collaborative links the University has recently appointed a Collaborations Liaison Officer, responsible to the Head of Quality Assurance, within its Quality Assurance Office. The job description includes wide responsibilities in relation to collaboration: assisting in the development of policy; responsibility for procedures relating to institutional approval; liaison with link tutors at home and abroad; ensuring the integrity of records; involvement in aspects of staff development; and audit of quality assurance processes. Through this appointment the University seeks to ensure consistency of practice in relation to collaborative provision, across its 10 schools. The audit team found this appointment to be good practice. In addition to this more general role, the University has appointed for the partnership an Academic Link Person, a senior member of the University, who has a key role in coordinating and managing the link between the Trust and the University.

14. The Trust's main academic committee, the Tavistock and Portman Training Committee (TPTC), because of the status of the Trust's relationship with the University, has devolved powers to manage key elements of the processes relating to validation and revalidation and to approve minor modifications of courses. The TPTC delegates to a sub-committee, the Quality Committee, a range of quality assurance matters which include overseeing the initial stages of course monitoring, approving reports prepared for the University, the approval of minor modifications to courses and the approval of staff teaching on the Trust programmes. The TPTC Committee is chaired by the Trust's Dean of Postgraduate Studies and its membership includes senior postholders within the Trust, the Academic Link Person, the University's Collaborations Liaison Officer and representatives of other universities with whom the Trust has educational links, as well as representatives of all the Trust courses.

15. The QAEC has responsibility for assuring that the University's practices are consistent with the *Code of practice*. As part of its continuing review of the *Code*, at its meeting of November 1999, the QAEC reviewed four sections of the *Code* one of which was Collaborative provision, and received recommendations in relation to each precept. The University considers that it adheres to the *Code* and that it has an appropriate means of ensuring continuing adherence. The audit team scrutinised the agenda papers for the meetings of QAEC and was able to confirm the thoroughness with which the University's practices with regard to collaborative provision had been tested against the precepts of the *Code*.

16. In the *Commentary*, the University pointed out that the Centro Studi partnership is unusual in that it is based on a three-way relationship. UEL has accredited the Trust and validated its programmes, and it then also validates the courses for delivery in overseas centres, as a franchise of the Trust programme. Although the primary relationship with the centres delivering the programme is through the Trust, the University had been careful to retain final authority for quality assurance and to conduct a thorough validation and revalidation with the overseas partner. This arrangement is reflected in the tripartite agreement governing the partnership (see below, paragraph 21).

## **The establishment and management of the collaborative partnership**

### **The approval of the partnership**

17. The Centro Studi in Florence was selected by the Trust on the basis of existing collaborative arrangements and the observational teaching which had taken place at Centro Studi since 1987. Preliminary

approval to proceed with validation was given by the University's Academic Planning Committee which in March 1996 ensured there was a *prima facie* case for the establishment of a collaborative link, and a validation/institutional approval visit was held in July 1996. The visiting panel's remit was 'to ensure that the quality of the student experience on the franchised programme would be comparable to that offered by the University for the same or similar programme'. The University regards the course as a franchise of the accredited Trust programme, and the panel was required to ensure that the proposed course team had a clear understanding of, and commitment to, the aims and objectives of the programme and an effective implementation plan. The panel was chaired by a member of the University's Quality Committee and included in its membership an Italian adviser, a University senior lecturer, and the Senior Administrative Officer of the University's Quality Assurance Office. It determined *inter alia* that the arrangements were consistent with the University's mission and strategy, consistent with the faculty's strategic plan, that sufficient resources would be available, and that the proposal had either academic benefit for the University and/or was financially viable. Satisfaction of a number of conditions was approved in October 1996.

18. The University undertook a revalidation of the course delivery at the Centro Studi in 2001, when the course was revalidated for a further period of five years. The panel was chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and included a member of University staff, an external adviser, and a member of the Quality Assurance Department. There were no conditions set for revalidation. In its report, which provided an overview of the operation of the course at Florence, the panel made some recommendations to the Trust. The revalidation documentation included appropriate information such as the *curricula vitae* (CVs) of staff, the report of an external examiner, the timetables, reading lists, details of students and their personal tutors, examples of correspondence between London and Florence, the names of interpreters used during teaching, and notes of various meetings, together with examples of staff commentaries on the performance of students. Some of the documentation was in Italian, much of it consisted of existing material in use, and the purpose of some of the material included was not wholly clear. Few formal minutes of meetings in Florence were presented in the revalidation documentation nor was it always clear who was present at meetings; rather, there were typically brief notes of meetings between staff and between staff and students, sometimes followed by an action plan. It was not clear to the audit team whether or not the Trust had required the Centro Studi to provide it with formal records of all key meetings. The team found that the

papers assembled for revalidation were largely descriptive in quality and presented only limited analysis and critical evaluation of the delivery of the course under consideration. The team noted that the Manual stated that the panel chair must be satisfied that the documentation is adequate before a validation proposal could proceed. Overall, the documentation provided for revalidation appeared to the team to fall short of the very clear guidelines set out in the 2001 version of the University's Manual. In this context, the team was pleased to note that one of the duties assigned to the newly appointed Collaborations Liaison Officer was to review the guidance that it provides to schools in preparing documentation.

19. In considering the validation reports, the audit team noted that the course as presented at Centro Studi does not include one module (Personality Development) that is part of the programme approved for delivery at the Trust. This modification to the programme for Centro Studi students was approved at initial validation and confirmed at revalidation. In discussion, the team was satisfied that proper consideration had been given to the overall programme of study, and that a case had been made for the local variation in the curriculum.

20. With the reservations noted above, the audit team found that the specification of the requirements for validation and revalidation were appropriate and that the conduct of the validation and the subsequent reporting of the outcomes of the validation events were managed in accordance with the University's procedures.

### The collaborative agreement

21. The University's *Commentary* explained that a written agreement between UEL and the Trust had been in place for a considerable time. Previously, the relationship between UEL, the Trust, and other centres delivering the Trust/UEL programmes had been dealt with by making an addendum to the written agreement for each additional centre. A recent review had determined that the agreement would benefit from updating, and therefore in 2003 new agreements were drafted, with legal advice, which would codify more clearly the precise arrangements in place. The audit team was able to see the recently signed Collaborative Agreements for the Italian centres. These were tripartite, signed by all three partners and specified in detail their respective responsibilities in the operation of the programme. The team believed that this tripartite approach was an appropriate and timely one in view of the nature of the collaboration. It found that the revised Collaborative Agreement was comprehensive and thorough. It was generally consistent with the recommendations in the *Code of practice*, with the exception that no reference was made to the status of



the award in the country where it is delivered, and only limited reference was made to the language of delivery and assessment (for instance the desirability of specifying that at least one of the external examiners be able to access material in Italian).

### Certificates and transcripts

22. The current certificate for the programme was appended to the *Commentary*, which acknowledged that the award certificate was deficient with regard to the expectations of the *Code of practice*. The current certificate applied to the Observational Studies programme as a whole, and referred only to the Trust as a partner in delivery of the programme, with no mention of the Centro Studi. The University attributed the omissions to an administrative oversight, and showed the audit team the draft of a revised certificate which now mentioned both the Italian centre of delivery and the languages of instruction. The University will no doubt wish to introduce the new version immediately.

### Publicity and marketing materials

23. Both the Trust and the Centro Studi have promotional materials and web pages for the marketing of the Observational Studies programme. The *Commentary* stated that a draft copy of the publicity material for the Centro Studi course is sent to the organising tutor in London for approval prior to publication as part of the checking process for accuracy. The Organising Tutor at the Trust, who also teaches at Centro Studi, is able to inspect the Italian marketing materials. However, at a meeting with the audit team it was evident that the Trust tutor had only become aware of the Centro Studi web page after its publication and was not clear about the extent to which the Italian printed materials or the web page referred to the University. Indeed, contrary to the claim of the *Commentary*, it appeared to the team that the Organising Tutor's involvement occurred after the material was published and not before. The team also noted that publicity and marketing materials for the Observational Studies programme as a whole were prepared by the Trust which appeared to have full responsibility, without University oversight, for the content. The University might wish to review its arrangements for scrutiny of publicity material, including web pages, to determine whether its oversight is sufficient. It may also wish to ensure, in the context of overseas provision, that its involvement with a programme is represented clearly.

## Quality of learning opportunities and student support

### Communications and general administrative support

24. The *Commentary* made clear that there had been a substantial and longstanding association between the University and the Trust, with formal links at a senior level, and the Vice-Chancellor and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) meeting regularly with senior staff at the Trust. Senior staff of the University, including the Academic Link Person with an ongoing responsibility for overseeing the partnership, are involved in the committee work of the Trust on a regular basis. A continuing administrative link between the University and the management of the programme is provided by the UEL Collaboration Liaison Officer's membership of the Trust Quality Committee.

25. An administrative officer at the Trust has an overarching responsibility for arrangements relating to the Observational Studies programme at its 10 delivery centres. The main focus of communication for day-to-day management of the Florence-based course is between the Trust and the Centro Studi. Because staff from the Trust teach at Centro Studi, there is very frequent contact between the two teaching teams. In particular the Organising Tutor at the Trust, who also teaches at the Centro Studi, has a key role in providing information and support to colleagues. Two organising tutors of the Centro Studi staff, who also teach, deal with administration, including admissions, student records, timetabling, organisation of teaching, appointment of staff, and day-to-day communication with London. The audit team saw email exchanges between Florence and London which demonstrated a regular flow of information and a high degree of collaboration between the two centres. The Florence team has considerable autonomy while being supported effectively by their counterparts at the Trust.

26. The *Commentary* reported that there had been a period of poor administrative liaison between 1998 and 2001 but that this had been rectified by the appointment of a more senior administrative officer at the Trust with responsibility for administration of courses delivered at external centres. While staff at the Trust confirmed that there was a considerable administrative burden in offering the programme at several centres, they nevertheless considered that this was being managed effectively. Prior to the appointment of the present administrative officer at the Trust, various difficulties had been encountered, including a failure to submit on time the annual report 2001-02 for the overall programme. Its delivery, some 10 weeks late, reflected a failure to gather in the required information from centres. However, the Organising Tutor informed the audit team that this had

not been due to any difficulty at the Centro Studi, and that preparation for, and delivery of, the current annual report for the programme were within the timetable required by the University.

27. Students' personal files are kept by Centro Studi, but formal records of enrolment and achievement are also held at the Trust and passed to the University. The original validation report of 1996 expressed some concern about the maintenance of tutors' records of individual students at Florence. However, the revalidation report of 2001 noted that an effective system was in place, ensuring that the different tutors responsible for individual students had access to their personal records. In a meeting with those responsible for student records at Florence the audit team was informed that because the Centro Studi was a tenant at its teaching centre and did not have full office facilities there, student files were kept in the consulting rooms of the senior tutor. The University may wish to consider whether such practice is consistent with its policies regarding student personal files. The organising tutors at Florence informed the team that the Centro Studi was seeking its own accommodation where freedom of access to facilities and teaching rooms was secure. Should this arise, the University might wish to ensure that student records are maintained in a secure office on the premises.

28. In discussion with the audit team, senior staff at Centro Studi explained that quality assurance procedures as practised in the UK educational system were quite new and challenging for them. They considered quality assurance practices to be helpful but saw themselves as still developing their competences in this respect. The team observed that while several issues relating to quality assurance had been addressed in the revalidation report there was no section dealing directly with existing quality assurance arrangements and practices at the Centro Studi. The University may wish to consider whether the section of the Manual concerned with the validation of overseas provision might be amended to direct panel members to the need to provide an overview of the entirety of a partner's quality assurance arrangements, its committees, and key personnel responsible. The team recognised that the present course, as offered in Florence, is modest in size and unlikely to expand to a significant degree. It will be a fine judgement for the University to determine how large a course has to be for a formal quality assurance system to be in place, and in this case the issue is further complicated by the division of responsibility for quality assurance between the Trust and the Centro Studi. While all the key elements recommended in the *Code of practice* appeared to be present at Florence the team found it necessary to engage in considerable investigation before the processes in place became fully explicit.

### Annual monitoring

29. The University has a well-specified procedure for annual monitoring, which includes all collaborative provision. As part of the annual quality improvement procedure, each school gathers appropriate information from course organisers and the Head of School submits the annual AQIP report (see above, paragraph 12) together with a plan, which sets out the tasks to be achieved in the ensuing year and may include requests for further funding. Full requirements for this purpose are set out in two parts of the Manual. The AQIP report must take into account *inter alia*: external examiner reports, student feedback, student characteristics on entry and data on student progression and achievement and first destinations. It is meant to be reflective and focused on improvements in provision across the six aspects of provision formerly considered in the Agency's subject review. Once submitted each school's AQIP report is scrutinised by an auditor appointed from another school, who evaluates both the report and the plan, identifies issues, checks on action taken on the basis of the previous plan, and highlights examples of good practice. The AQIP report, the plan and the independent auditor's commentary are reviewed initially by the School Board and then submitted to the VRSC which has delegated authority to oversee the process on behalf of the QAEC. However, it was clear from the documentation provided by the University, that in 2002 the AQIP reporting process had fallen short of the University's expectations. In the specific case of the partnership with the Trust, the University had noted that reports had not been appropriately 'signed off' by course tutors, and that the AQIP report of Observational Studies had not been submitted by the due date. At a meeting of the Academic Board held in May 2002, the Board considered various recommendations of QAEC based on a detailed analysis of the shortcomings in the 2001-02 round of reports. The minutes of the QAEC and the VRSC indicated that the University was determined to take appropriate action to remedy the faults it had identified. The audit team noted the relevance of these debates to the late submission of the report on the Trust programme in 2001-02. However, the team also observed that the University had rapidly identified the omissions through its auditing process, and had subsequently written formally to the Trust in order to alert its partner to the concerns. The team was encouraged by this rapid action and by the fact that the University's reports on the annual monitoring process for 2001-02 were direct, analytical, frank and to the point and attested to the serious business conducted by its deliberative committees. In taking the recommendations of QAEC forward, the University will wish to ensure that receipt and consideration of monitoring reports on its collaborative provision continue to be timely and effective.

30. The audit team was able to see the AQIP action plan submission for 2000-01 from the Centro Studi as well as the Trust report for the full Observational Studies programme (but without the annexes relating to the other centres). The report for 2000-01 from Centro Studi took the form of a checklist of some 83 statements of good practice arranged to comply with the Agency's six aspects of provision. The checklist was accompanied by a reflective report covering recruitment, the Italian teachers, the provision of Italian tutors for students (in response to a student request), meetings between Centro Studi and UK teachers, marketing of the course, student access to library and data bases; research seminars and scientific meetings. A return from Centro Studi for 2002 was also available. This was a brief report covering items identified for improvement in the previous year, and items identified for the following year, with actions proposed. The previous year's items were in relation to the recommendations made by the revalidation panel.

31. The Trust Organising Tutor's report for the whole programme for 2001-02, while containing a similar checklist, also contained additional sections reporting progress on the previous year's action plan as well as an action plan for the current year. While several of the items identified in the previous year for action were still described as 'ongoing', the report was found to be comprehensive and reflective, and gave the audit team confidence that the Organising Tutor was familiar with all aspects of the programme, including the special problems of the subsidiary centres.

### Feedback from students

32. While the *Commentary* emphasised the importance that the University placed on student feedback, it was relatively silent about the formal means of securing student opinion on the experience of the course. The audit team discussed the issue of student feedback with tutors at both Florence and London and with students at the Centro Studi. The team was informed by staff that feedback was elicited mainly through oral discussion between students and tutors in Italy. There is a course review meeting once a term held with all the students and chaired by one of the staff. The record of the meeting is then distributed to all tutors. The arrangements for securing student opinion therefore seemed at first sight to be in some respects insecure. While there was evidence of the introduction of changes in response to student views (for example, the provision of Italian personal tutors for Italian students) there seemed to be relatively little formal documentation about consultation with students or any formal student evaluation of courses. Trust staff pointed out that the Centro Studi cohort was small, the students are postgraduate, and that the seminar mode of instruction together with the arrangements for

personal tutoring facilitated interaction between students and staff so that students could make their views known without difficulty. However, the *Commentary* also noted that the traditional teaching style of Italian tutors tended to be didactic and not always student-centred; this could imply that it might be difficult for students to find opportunities to raise issues of concern about the effectiveness of the teaching they receive from individual tutors.

33. At a meeting with some students at Florence, the audit team sought to secure their opinion of the ease with which they could express their views. The students were asked about the conduct of the course review meetings, the use of questionnaires, the nature of feedback provided regarding issues they had raised, and whether the culture of the Centro Studi was conducive to the free expression of their views. The students expressed warm and enthusiastic appreciation of the course, the openness of the staff to student comment and the effectiveness of review meetings. In contrast to their earlier experience of education they saw the course, small group presentation and the opportunities for interaction, as refreshing. A by-product of this meeting was the team's observation of the ease with which the students (who all spoke in Italian) were able to engage in a free flowing dialogue with the team assisted by an interpreter.

34. Students at the Centro Studi in Florence expressed unreserved appreciation of the quality of their experience of the teaching and learning on the course. Apart from the high quality of face-to-face teaching they reported that they had ready access to materials at the Trust and could secure copies of published papers by electronic means or by post. A high proportion of students have access to university libraries through previous educational contacts or through their current place of employment. The *Commentary* drew attention to the fact that a proportion of recommended texts were not published in Italian; the University may therefore wish to assure itself, through the Trust, that students have access to equivalent study materials where necessary.

### Provision of information and support for students

#### The Course Handbook

35. The audit team found that the current UK Handbook for the programme in 2002-03 was comprehensive and helpful in many respects. It included aims and objectives, clear criteria of assessment and full reading lists for each module. However, students in Florence following the course received information directly from the Centro Studi, and the handbook prepared specifically for them (in Italian) seemed to the team to be considerably less informative. The administrator at the Centro Studi

informed the team that only certain sections of the Handbook had been translated into Italian, and that she explained the content of other sections to students both during induction and at other relevant points in the course. The Trust's Organising Tutor informed the team that she had expected the UK Handbook to be translated in full and had been surprised to see the reduced version. While the full English version is available to students, several of the Italian students have a poor grasp of English and might well find the English version inaccessible except with the assistance of English-speaking peers. Nor did there seem to the team to be a guarantee that the oral presentation would in all respects be accurate or that the information would subsequently be available to the student if need arose. Students did, however, in their meeting with the team, express confidence that there would be no difficulty in gaining information or in determining a course of action. Nevertheless, the team took the view that if the University wishes to ensure that students following the course in Italy have a comparable experience to students in the UK then it should review its policy in relation to the translation of handbooks where courses are not taught wholly in English.

36. The audit team considered that an omission from the handbooks was any reference to ethical considerations. The Observational Studies programme is concerned with children and their families and students have access, particularly during observation, to the private world of those whom they observe. In such circumstances, and given also that students make presentations to the course and their tutors on their observations, it might be considered appropriate for formal requirements to be in place governing issues such as anonymity, confidentiality, obtaining consent, the right to withdraw, and provision of feedback to participants. The team was able to scrutinise some of the tutors' written comments about the individual experiences of students in their interactions with families. These indicated to the team that ethical problems could arise during child observation and student preparation for such interaction might not be fully effective. When this issue was raised in discussion, staff at the Trust informed the team that there was a Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Ethical Committee but that it was concerned with research and not with teaching. The team subsequently found that tutors and students at the Centro Studi were aware of the potential difficulties which might arise, and they referred to instances where such matters could be dealt with during classes or in discussion with personal tutors. However, it appeared to the team that such issues arose after the fact while more formal guidance from the outset might be considered more appropriate. The University might therefore wish to consider whether its ethical practices are applied equally across the University and its partner institutions with regard

to the student experience; and whether it would be appropriate to include guidance on ethical considerations (extending where necessary to formal approval) in the regulation of the Trust programme and in the information given to students.

### Appeals and complaints

37. The Agreement covers appeals and complaints and states that the procedures will be those described in the University's Manual of General Regulations and Policies, but will be administered by the Trust. For complaints, the University will manage the final stages of the process. For appeals the Trust will be appropriately represented on the University's Academic Appeals Panel. Matters of non-academic discipline are covered by the regulations of the Centro Studi. There is a very clear section concerning complaints and appeals in the UK version of the course Handbook. The audit team found that students at the Centro Studi had only a limited awareness of the procedures for complaints and appeals, but were confident that their concerns would be addressed should the need arise. The University may wish to ensure that students have the necessary information to enable them to communicate directly with the University on matters of concern.

### Arrangements for termination

38. As noted above, the audit team had learnt that a separately managed but closely similar course had been validated by the University for delivery at a centre in Rome. Due to particular circumstances relating to student recruitment, a decision had been made by the Italian staff to close the centre. With the agreement of the University, the team met with former students of the course and a tutor in Rome with a view to gaining insight into the arrangements made to support students in the event of termination. The team noted that the Agreement declares that in the event of termination of the Agreement the University, the Trust and the Centro Studi will 'use reasonable endeavours to continue to honour and fulfil each of their respective responsibilities to the students enrolled in the Programme'. The Agreement then goes on to say that Centro Studi shall, 'if requested by the University continue to operate the Programme for the remainder of the period of the Programme...for which students are enrolled...on the same terms and conditions ...'. Such a formulation is consistent with the *Code of practice*, which expects a collaborative agreement to describe, in the event of termination, '...the respective responsibilities of the contracting parties for academic standards and quality' and '...to cover the residual obligations to students'.

39. The recent closure of the Centro Studi, Rome provided the audit team with the opportunity to explore the practical consequences of termination. The team took the view that since Centro Studi, Rome was no longer in existence, the University and the Trust must hold residual responsibility for the students' completion of studies in the absence of the third party. The team met with two of the current Rome students, together with a former graduate of the course. They also met separately with a tutor who had been assigned by the organising tutor at the Trust to provide continuing support for the residual students. She explained that half the group were previously unknown to her although she had occasionally taught in Rome, and that she had provided support for essays on seminar topics, but was not sufficiently experienced to supervise their MA dissertations. Her role included locating appropriate supervisors for this purpose at Florence or in London. Apart from paying their annual registration fee to the University the students paid her or other colleagues for instruction or supervision directly and not through the Trust.

40. The students expressed regret at the loss of their tutors and the fact that it was no longer possible to benefit from seminar discussions, which had been a key positive feature of the course. They informed the audit team that they had been frustrated by various administrative lapses at the Trust (including inaccurate examination result records) and that since the closure of the Centro Studi, Rome they had received no formal communication or reassurance either from the University or from the Trust. One student currently completing her dissertation was notified by the Trust of the name of a supervisor after the work was largely completed, and her dissertation proposal had only been approved after a delay of three months, some six weeks or so prior to the required submission date. The student understood that the Organising Tutor at the Trust had secured their current arrangements for support. In reflecting on their otherwise generally positive experience of the course in Rome they reported *inter alia* that there had been no student handbook, no opportunity to evaluate the course in the absence of the local organising tutor and no opportunity to use Trust facilities. They did not recall having received information relating to complaints or appeals. The students reported that throughout their course they had had little communication directly with the Trust or the University and were surprised to learn that the course was offered over so many centres. It was clear to the team that closure of the Rome centre had created great uncertainty for the students.

41. While recognising the value to the students of the appointment, negotiated by the Trust, of the support tutor, the audit team considered that the experience of the students in Rome with whom it met had been

considerably less than satisfactory. It also appeared likely that the University had not fully informed itself of all the circumstances affecting the students. The team noted that the Agreement relating to the link with Centro Studi, Rome had been signed by the University after the decision to cease recruitment had been taken. The University might wish to reflect on the situation outlined above, and consider whether it is discharging fully its responsibilities to its registered students. The University might also wish to consider whether the spirit, as well as the letter of the relevant parts of the *Code of practice*, has been satisfied. While the partnership with the Rome centre was not the primary focus for the present audit the above circumstances may have implications for other centres offering the Observational Studies course.

### Staffing and staff development

42. The audit team noted that there were joint appointments between the University and the Trust, including the Chair of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Quality Committee and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies. Recently a Professor of Child Psychotherapy has been appointed. With regard to the teaching of the Centro Studi programme, the Trust Quality Committee has the responsibility, on behalf of the University, for ensuring that tutors proposed for the Observational Studies programme have appropriate qualifications and experience. While the Centro Studi is responsible for appointing staff to teach the programme at Florence the Organising Tutor at Florence, in discussion with the team, confirmed that the Trust was free to raise objections about a particular appointment, although such circumstances had yet to arise. Staff are not formally appointed by the University. Staff CVs are retained by the Trust and these were scrutinised by the University during the revalidation process. At a meeting with senior University staff the team was told that a proposal for the validation of an overseas proposal (not with an Italian partner) had been declined following scrutiny of the CVs of staff. From the documentation made available to the team it seemed, however, that the University did not invariably require that staff CVs contain full information. The University might wish to review its requirements for the submission of CVs, to ensure equality of opportunity in the consideration of staff appointments.

43. As already noted, communication between the Trust and Centro Studi staff is facilitated by joint teaching and by delivery by UK tutors in Florence. There is also regular and frequent email contact between the organising tutors. There is an active staff development programme in the form of training days and seminars organised by the Trust. In the area of assessment, all markers are inducted and initially are paired with experienced markers working on the same

module. Course teams have annual meetings in London or Florence, and all tutors on the programme meet periodically. Many of the staff have themselves followed the programme or are otherwise trained by the Trust; they participate in the Journal of Infant Observation, and conferences are held involving centres offering the course where staff and students may make presentations. Peer observation of teaching has been piloted in Florence but at the time of the audit was still in its early stages. The University secures information on staff development and appraisal as conducted by the Trust, through the AQIP monitoring process. The audit team was able to conclude that there was good evidence of support for staff, with continuing personal development activity reinforced by frequent interaction between London and Florence, active discussion and debate and by the sharing of scholarly activity and academic publications.

### **The assurance of the standards of awards**

44. In its *Commentary*, the University confirmed that as the awarding body it was ultimately responsible for the academic standards of the award, and that all programmes leading to its awards must be comparable in standard. It took the view that the three key issues critical to ensuring such comparability were the assessment arrangements, the external examining arrangements, and the policies relating to language of assessment.

### **Admissions**

45. The audit team found that admissions to the course were the responsibility of the Centro Studi under the guidance of the Organising Tutor, working within the policy approved by the University at validation. However, given the open admissions policy designed to assist with professional development there is little consultation, so long as University minimum requirements (which include completion of undergraduate study) are met. Selection is by interview and references are secured. One of the organising tutors at Centro Studi described in some detail the admission procedures which she followed and the team was able to inspect sample student files, which included forms provided by the Trust designed to track the admissions process.

46. In meetings with University staff there seemed to be some confusion over responsibility for recording prior learning that might lead to credit in place of a course module. One view was that it was the responsibility of the Assessment Board to keep a record, while the other was that it was for local tutors to decide, given the need to have local knowledge of the Italian context. However, it was agreed that tutors at Centro

Studi would consult with colleagues in London if necessary. The audit team explored these issues with staff at the Centro Studi. So far, the situation has not arisen since no student has requested exemption from individual course modules. The University may wish to clarify its requirements in this respect.

47. The audit team noted that because the admission forms were devised primarily for recruitment in the UK they required confirmation of the student's status in relation to the Criminal Records Bureau. While similar requirements apply in Italy to individuals working as professional psychotherapists, they do not apply to students who come into contact with children and families during their training. The Trust Organising Tutor informed the team that the issue was under active consideration; it was thought that Italian students would be willing to provide appropriate references if the context was explained to them. The University may wish to explore its precise legal position in relation to courses which it offers in countries which do not impose UK requirements for ensuring the fitness of students who interact with children or other vulnerable groups.

### **Language of instruction**

48. In the *Commentary*, the University stated that its academic regulations make provision for the delivery, exceptionally, of programmes in a language other than English, provided that certain criteria are met. The criteria were clear and appropriate, and included: the requirement that all assessed work relevant to the final outcome of the award should include participation of a native speaker of the language of instruction acting directly on behalf of UEL; and the requirement that documentation for the programme should make clear the status of the award in the country in which it was delivered. For the Centro Studi course, the first of these requirements is secured by the appointment of an external examiner who is bilingual and also experienced in UK subject standards. However, the audit team was less clear that the second requirement was fully met by the current information given to students.

49. Students following the course are taught in both English and Italian, with approximately 50 per cent in each language. Professional interpreters are available for teaching sessions when appropriate. Assessment is in Italian, and the student assessed work is translated where necessary by independent translators. The audit team learnt that several members of the Trust staff were fluent in Italian and were able to monitor the standard of translation. The team understood that all staff and the external examiners have access to all work submitted by students, whether in English or Italian. Language issues were addressed in some detail in the report of the revalidation of 2001 and were clearly taken seriously by the University in its considerations.

Accordingly, the University will no doubt wish to check the inclusion of appropriate details regarding the status of the award in Italy in the handbook used by Centro Studi students, and to ensure that when the time comes to appoint new external examiners the requirement to include one with competence in Italian will remain a prime factor for consideration.

### The marking of student work

50. The *Commentary* outlined the assessment arrangements for the course. The assessment requirements for centres delivering the Observational Studies programme are identical, thus allowing comparability of standards. Criteria of assessment are published in the UK Handbook for each module (although these are not yet available in Italian). The Trust uses bilingual markers as part of the work of the Assessment Board. Markers are well-supported in the initial establishment of standards, and the assessment arrangements include the anonymous marking of pooled scripts, thus individual centres are not identified to markers. The Assessment Board includes members from all centres, including members of the Centro Studi tutorial staff. Examination scripts and other submitted work are anonymous and the administrative officer at the Trust distributes marking work, ensuring that no examiners assess work from their own centre. The audit team was informed that as far as possible, examiner comments, particularly in relation to the MA dissertation, were typed, not only to provide grounds for the marks awarded but also to provide feedback to the students. The team found the arrangements for assessment to be sound and commendable in their careful assurance of objectivity.

### External examiners

51. While, as noted above (see above, paragraphs 21 and 49) the University does not currently formally specify the need to appoint an external examiner who is fluent in the language of instruction, in practice this is recognised as necessary, and one of the current external examiners is bilingual. The Manual sets out very clearly the criteria and requirements to be satisfied in the appointment of external examiners and these appear to be largely consistent with the *Code of practice*. There are appropriate nomination procedures and restrictions on appointments. The external examiner is required to produce a report on a pro forma, including the invitation to make recommendations and to comment on whether previous recommendations have been addressed. The external examiner is also invited to communicate directly with the Vice-Chancellor should there be issues which cause serious concern.

52. The University stated that the report on the Observational Studies programme was sent initially to

the Head of School who was responsible for ensuring that it was seen by the course organiser as well as other key teaching staff. Reports are also scrutinised by the Head of Quality Assurance, who identifies institution-wide issues. There is a requirement for the AQIP statement to refer to the external examiner's report. From the reports sampled by the audit team it was clear that the external examiners were fully satisfied with the standard achieved by students following the programme. External examiners had also commented on the consistency of achievement across centres.

53. However, the University has itself expressed concern that there is little consistency in the manner in which reports from external examiners are acknowledged and the audit team received no evidence of communication between the Trust and the external examiners. While the Organising Tutor confirmed that all centres received copies of the external examiners' reports, copies of the letters of response from the Organising Tutor to the external examiners were not sent to all centres. The University will wish to ensure that communications with the partner institution following consideration of external examiners' reports are sufficiently informative.

### Comparability of standards

54. At meetings with the audit team, tutors stated that comparability of standards was secured by the work of the external examiners, the marking and cross-marking of student scripts by teachers from all the 10 centres delivering the course and through discussions held both during marking and at the Assessment Board. A single Assessment Board is convened annually, at the Trust, to record the marks on each module by every student, from all centres, on the Observational Studies programme. In 2002 the Board was convened by the Head of the School of Social Sciences. The way that student achievement data are presented on the marks spreadsheet permits comparison of achievement between centres; however the team was unable to establish that such a comparison had been made in a formal way. The team recognised that while the cohort following the programme is large overall, the cohort size at Centro Studi would not allow a fair statistical comparison. The team was not given the minutes of the Assessment Board but did receive an analysis of the award of distinctions across two masters programmes conducted by the Chair of the Board. It was not clear whether a comparative analysis, seeking to ensure consistency of standards across centres, had been undertaken at the time of the revalidation of the course. The team concluded that, in addition to the scrupulous management of the assessment process for the programme as a whole, there were useful opportunities for comparison of standards across the different delivery centres. Such comparison was already implicit

in the work of the single Assessment Board, but the University and the Trust may wish to consider the advantages of more formal comparisons of results across the centres.

## Conclusions

55. The collaborative partnership between the University, the Trust and the Centro Studi is based on the validation by the University of the Postgraduate Diploma/MA in Psychoanalytic Observational Studies at the Trust and its delivery at the centre in Florence. There have been close links between the University and the Trust for many years, and the University accredits the Trust's provision of the overall Observational Studies programme, delivered at 10 centres in the UK and Italy, of which this course is a part. At the time of the audit there were 242 students following the total programme, of which 11 registered students attended the Centro Studi, Florence. The audit also included discussions with a small number of students registered with the University to study at the Centro Studi, Rome, which had recently closed.

56. The University's *Commentary* generally provided the audit team with a fair and accurate account of the operation of the programme at Centro Studi, Florence and described the effective working relationship between staff of the Trust and the Centro Studi. It included some frank and self-critical evaluation of the operation and assurance of the programme and of difficulties that had been encountered. The University also provided the team with relevant and helpful background information and documentation from all three of the partner institutions.

57. The University expressed its confidence that the student experience on the course was good and that academic standards were comparable to those in the UK. In its *Commentary* it pointed to improvements which would be carried out with regard to the written agreement on collaboration, the certification of students and the administration of the course. The University indicated that this partnership was unusual because of its three-way relationship. Nevertheless, it was generally in accordance with wider institutional procedures and could be considered broadly representative of the quality assurance arrangements determined by the University of its overseas collaborative partnerships. Notwithstanding some difficulty in securing an explicit account of the quality arrangements in place at Centro Studi, Florence, the audit concluded that these were effective in practice. The implementation of quality assurance procedures within the University in relation to collaborative provision will be strengthened by the work of the recently appointed Collaboration Liaison Officer.

58. The University's Quality Assurance Manual sets out quality assurance procedures which in several respects are fully consistent with the various sections of the *Code of practice* and the audit found that the University has an established method for ensuring that it is generally in alignment with the precepts and guidance of the *Code*. The University will wish to ensure that the guidance in the *Code* is also understood by those actively involved in the delivery of the partnership. The University had recognised that there was a departure from the *Code* in the matter of certification of the award, and the audit confirmed that this was being addressed. The University should also check that its expectations regarding control of publicity are being followed fully in the context of this course.

59. The audit showed that there was a strong and constructive relationship between the three partners in the programme. While the University retains final authority for the safeguarding of quality and standards, a very substantial responsibility for quality assurance is delegated to the Quality Committee of the Trust. The Trust is also generally responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme, for liaison with Italy and for supporting programme delivery. Its staff contribute directly to the leadership and to the teaching of the course at the Centro Studi. Notable strengths characterising the manner in which the University has sought to manage the partnership have included: the well-defined validation and revalidation procedures involving all three partners; the support for students from the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff from the Trust and the Centro Studi, who form a collegial and mutually supportive team; the effective management of assessment and marking; and the procedures devised to deliver and assess the programme in two languages. Students were warmly appreciative of the opportunities offered by the programme, of its design, its teaching approaches, and of the support given by staff. The UK Handbook for the Observational Studies programme is excellent both in its content and its accessible style. However, more work needs to be done to ensure that students following the course in Italy have a comparable quality of information accessible to them.

60. In taking forward the collaborative partnership, the University will wish to ensure that the reporting through the annual monitoring process works effectively, that the requirements for the language competence of the external examiner are clearly specified, and that the positive opportunities within the programme for the checking of standards through comparative analysis are exploited. With regard to the formal collaborative agreement, and in the light of the experience of the closure of the course centre in Rome, the University needs to consider whether it is fully discharging its responsibilities to students who continue



to be registered with the University following such termination. In relation to the particular character and aims of the Observational Studies programme, the audit identified two wider issues which the University may wish to explore: firstly, to consider whether the ethical issues arising from observational interactions should be dealt with in a similar manner to that expected for comparable provision within the University; and secondly, also in relation to such interactions, to determine the legal requirements for students registering on programmes of this type in countries which do not have similar legislation to that of the UK regarding the protection of vulnerable groups.

61. Reviewing carefully the available evidence, the audit found that the University's collaborative partnership with the Trust and the Centro Studi Martha Harris, Florence was fundamentally sound and that there can be broad confidence in the way in which the University is exercising its stewardship of the quality and standards. In taking forward the collaborative partnership, the University will wish in particular to ensure that the relationship is genuinely three-way, and that staff and students at the Centro Studi, in addition to the strong relationship with the Trust, are fully aware of the University's role and of its authority and responsibilities as the awarding institution.

## **Appendix A**

### **Update since May 2003**

Since the audit, discussion has begun as to the impact of the process on the three institutions involved;

- The translation of the full handbook into Italian is under active discussion with a view to having it completed during the current academic year;
- Within the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, the Child Psychotherapy Training Advisory Group has begun to address the question of developing ethical guidelines with respect to Infant and Young Child Observation. These will be discussed at the discipline level and taken to the Tavistock Research and Ethics Committee. The Organising Tutor for the Postgraduate Diploma/MA in Psychoanalytic Observational Studies will be responsible for drafting the guidelines for discussion;
- The external examiner's report and the Organising Tutor's response to the report is now sent to all Outlying Centres.

## Appendix B

### Student numbers in Florence and Rome 2002-03

	Florence	Rome
Year 1	2	0
Year 2	3	1
Year 3	3	3
Year 4	0	1
Year 5	1	1
Intermitting	3	1 (ie: taking an agreed break for a specified period from study)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>

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