



Promoting higher quality

**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

Overseas Quality Audit Report

Loughborough University and
PSB Corporation, Singapore

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW DIRECTORATE

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Introduction

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

The process of audit of overseas collaborative arrangements

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

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

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

The context of collaborative provision with partners in Singapore

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

The background to the collaborative arrangement

5 This report considers the arrangement between Loughborough University (the University) and the PSB Corporation (PSB) for the delivery in Singapore of an undergraduate programme leading to the award by the University of a BSc (Honours) in Business Studies. The programme is based on, but not identical to, the BSc (Honours) Business Studies offered at the University's Peterborough campus, and is described as a part-time programme of three years' duration, but with the same overall content and student effort as a full-time programme of the same length offered in the UK. Teaching on the programme is shared between tutors appointed by PSB and visiting tutors, the latter mostly, but not exclusively, members of staff from the

University's Business School. The programme is taught and assessed in English, and the students are registered students of the University. Details of current student numbers are provided in Appendix B to this report.

6 The most recent QAA audit of the University at institutional level took place in May 1998. The quality of its business and management studies provision was assessed as 'excellent' by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in November 1994. The University's overseas collaborative arrangements have not previously been the subject of a separate QAA audit.

7 PSB (formerly the Productivity and Standards Board) is wholly owned by a government-funded statutory board charged with raising the productivity levels of Singapore's companies. Its business groups include a productivity training institution, PSB Academy, which offers a range of accredited diploma and advanced diploma programmes designed to be used as 'stepping stones' to further study, and several undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in partnership with a limited number of universities in the UK and Australia. The Academy is located in several buildings in Singapore, but has recently consolidated its degree programme provision onto a single site. The Academy is registered as a private school with Singapore's Ministry of Education.

8 The audit team members who conducted the visit to the University on 18-19 March 2002 were Ms S J Clark, Dr D H Furneaux and Mr K P Griffiths. The members of the team who visited PSB Academy on 21-22 May 2002 were Ms S J Clark, Mrs P K Day (audit secretary), Mr K P Griffiths, Dr S Jackson and Professor J H Phillips. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms S J Clark, Assistant Director, Institutional Review Directorate.

The University's approach to overseas collaborative provision

9 The *Commentary* prepared for the purposes of the audit set the partnership in the context of the University's long-standing involvement in the development of higher education in Singapore. It also referred to the Business School's wish to broaden the scope of its conventional provision to provide 'vocational education for mature students'. While the University's *Strategic Plan* is not specific about institutional policy for collaborative provision, its *Strategy for Teaching and Learning* includes a commitment to 'identify and develop opportunities for collaboration with international partners to deliver Loughborough University programmes to students overseas'.

10 Overall responsibility for learning, teaching, collaborative provision and the associated quality assurance procedures rests with the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), a committee of Senate chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching). LTC is supported in its work by the Academic Registry and a central Quality Enhancement Unit, and conducts its business with reference to an extensive and comprehensive *Academic Quality Procedures Handbook* (the *Handbook*). The *Handbook* contains a summary of the arrangements for collaborative provision and includes the University's own *Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision* (the University's *Code*). This provides a clear framework for all collaborative arrangements and is 'intended to ensure that the high reputation the University enjoys within the academic community and with industrial partners is not prejudiced by any collaborative arrangements and that its commitment to quality is maintained'. The University's *Code* is explicit that 'the University is accountable for the quality and standard of all programmes and awards offered or made in its name' and that the procedures for assuring quality and standards in collaborative provision 'must be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the responsibility of the University'. The *Commentary* stated that the partnership with PSB was 'conducted in accordance with' the procedures set out in the *Handbook*, 'augmented as appropriate for locational or logistical reasons'.

11 The *Commentary* made no reference to QAA's *Code*, but a statement provided for the audit team reported that the University's *Code* had been drawn up against the QAA document and was approved by Senate in 2000, thus meeting QAA's 'expectation that by Autumn 2000 all institutions would be able to demonstrate adherence to the precepts'. The statement also indicated that although the University's relationship with PSB predated both *Codes*, staff had 'been guided by them in all arrangements entered into since their adoption'.

12 The University's collaborative provision is relatively limited in size and scope, involving some arrangements for validation and joint delivery with partners in the UK, and a small number of links with institutions overseas, the majority of which do not involve a University award. The *Commentary* described the partnership with PSB as 'the only collaborative link of its kind at Loughborough University'.

The establishment and management of the link

The approval process

13 The *Commentary* described how the University's partnership with PSB was initiated in February 1998, when a delegation from PSB visited several UK

universities to discuss its desire to offer a generic business degree at undergraduate level and senior management programmes at postgraduate level. A second meeting between the University and PSB took place in Singapore in April 1998, after which the University was invited to work with PSB on the undergraduate development. The *Commentary* stated that the University had been chosen by PSB 'because of its strengths in business and engineering, its commitment to vocational education and its strong links with industry and commerce', a statement verified by PSB staff in their discussions with the audit team. The *Commentary* also indicated that the University, in considering PSB's invitation, was able to draw upon considerable knowledge of Singaporean higher education, one of its Pro Vice-Chancellors having acted for many years as an adviser to Singapore's Ministry of Education.

14 The University's *Code* indicates that proposals for new collaborative arrangements are subject to broadly the same approval procedures as internal programmes, as set out in the *Handbook*. Proposals must be discussed initially with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching) and the relevant Dean of Faculty; agreement to proceed results in the development of more detailed documentation by the relevant academic department or by a working group, and may also result in a visit to the partner institution; the proposal is then submitted to the relevant faculty committees and LTC's Curriculum Sub-Committee (CSC) for consideration and, if approved, is forwarded to LTC, Senate and Council for endorsement. Within the process, a key role is played by the Faculty's Associate Dean (Teaching) in providing advice at a strategic level and in ensuring that matters raised by central committees are addressed satisfactorily at local level. Current arrangements (not in place in 1998-99) for the development of collaborative links also require the preparation of a 'detailed submission', which includes scrutiny of the status of the proposed partner institution, and a 'Quality Assurance Statement' - 'a clear and explicit statement of the respective responsibilities of the University and the partner organisation' that takes close account of the precepts of QAA's *Code*.

15 From the documentation provided, the audit team was able to track the key stages of this process in respect of the proposed collaboration with PSB and it was clear that the requirements in place at the time had been followed. The team noted that the University did not appear to have made a formal assessment of all aspects of the suitability of PSB as a partner, such as its financial probity or experience of delivery at honours level, but it was clear that, in reaching agreement to collaborate, the two institutions had held extensive and wide-ranging discussions. Once agreement to proceed, in principle, had been reached, there were further detailed and

well-documented discussions on matters such as the structure and length of the programme, the means of delivery, staffing and learning resources, admissions and financial arrangements. The proposal was put to the Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, and a detailed submission document (including a report from an external assessor) was considered by CSC in April 1999 and, again in May 1999. CSC approved the proposal in principle, but sought clarification on several matters. In October 1999, an academic audit of PSB was undertaken by staff of the Business School, a process that included consideration of student support and library and information technology provision. Revised proposals were again the subject of detailed discussion at CSC in May 2000 and the proposal was approved in its final form by LTC and Senate in June 2000. The first students were admitted in September 2000. In the view of the team, this protracted approval process was indicative of the care the University had taken in approaching the new collaboration, described by CSC as 'untested waters', and had enabled the partners to resolve a range of important matters prior to the commencement of the programme.

16 During the discussions, one overarching matter concerned the University: the need to ensure that the standards of the Singapore programme were comparable to those of internal programmes. This imperative influenced its decisions in two key areas: the mode of delivery and length of the programme. It was agreed at an early stage that the programme would be 'based on the University's BSc Business Studies (at Peterborough) degree' but delivered on a part-time basis, partly through distance-learning. The University's preference was for a four-year programme, but a market survey conducted by PSB indicated that the majority of students would be in full-time employment and that a programme of this length was unlikely to be competitive. The University's own research indicated that the financial constraints associated with distance-learning delivery would be too great. As a result, and in a move that was 'unprecedented', the University agreed to deliver the programme part-time over three calendar years, using an equal combination of University and local tutors for intensive delivery in the evenings and some weekends. The University was in 'no doubt' that this arrangement would be 'demanding' for the students and, to take account of questions raised by the external adviser about the suitability of the PSB Diploma as an appropriate entry route, it increased the entry requirements for PSB diplomates. It also agreed that students holding the PSB Advanced Diploma in Business Administration would be given advanced standing to enable them to complete their studies in two years. The audit team was able to discuss all of these matters with senior staff of the University and it was evident that, although the arrangement had been

driven primarily by pressures of competition, the University had balanced this with a clear recognition of the issues involved and a genuine concern to safeguard academic standards and the good name of the two partners. It was also clear that the University was aware of the need to keep under close review the impact on students of its decision about the length of the programme (see below, paragraph 31).

17 The audit team noted that the University had also given particular attention to the nature of the library provision at PSB. While the initial proposal had described the library as 'most impressive and well-stocked', subsequent reports had suggested that it was 'poor' and in need of substantial augmentation. The *Commentary* indicated that moves by PSB to increase and consolidate the provision were still 'in the process of development' and that the situation was 'being closely monitored' (see below, paragraphs 25 and 26).

Formal arrangements

18 In November 1999, the Vice-Chancellor of the University and the Chief Executive of PSB signed a brief Memorandum of Understanding. The Memorandum, which states specifically that it is not 'legally binding', records the agreement of both institutions 'to work together to create an undergraduate degree proposal to be offered in Singapore' for an initial period of five years, and outlines the financial basis for the partnership. It also commits the parties to producing 'one or more specific agreements' covering the details of 'specific collaborations'. During its visit to the University, the audit team was informed that no specific agreement had in fact been produced for the BSc (Honours) Business Studies, but that a new contract, based on the template suggested by the Council of Validating Universities, was in preparation.

19 The audit team was provided with a draft version of this contract and noted that it made explicit reference to many, but not all, of the areas suggested in the guidance notes contained in QAA's *Code*; it did not, for example, mention external examiners, student numbers or complaints and appeals arrangements, referring instead to the *Handbook* and other general University documentation in which information on these matters is contained. The University informed the team that it expected to sign the new contract within 'weeks rather than months', but the contract remained unsigned by the time of the team's visit to PSB and its staff indicated that issues had yet to be resolved. It was evident that PSB had a thorough understanding of the respective duties of the two institutions and was clear that overall responsibility for the quality and standards of the programme rested with the University. Nonetheless, the University will recognise that, with

the first cohort of students shortly to graduate, its failure to put in place a formal contract detailing the responsibilities of both partners falls short of accepted good practice and the expectations of QAA's *Code*. It will wish to ensure that the new contract is finalised and signed without delay.

20 Both the Memorandum and the draft contract state that the partnership between the University and PSB may be terminated by either partner with 'at least 90 days notice...although existing commitments would be honoured'. This period appeared to the audit team to be shorter than normal for a three-year programme, given the arrangements that would need to be put in place in the event of notice being given. Although the draft contract states that the 'University will make arrangements to enable existing students to complete their studies...and the costs will be shared by both parties', the team's discussions at the University indicated that transferring to Loughborough was likely to be the only option and students would have to meet the costs. The nature of the programme and the fact that most students are in full-time employment would appear to make this option unrealistic. In finalising the contract, the University may wish to give particular attention to this aspect of its arrangements.

21 QAA's *Code* expects an awarding institution to record the name of its collaborative partner on either the certificate or the transcript provided for students who complete the programme successfully. The draft certificate and transcript provided for the audit team in relation to the BSc (Honours) Business Studies met the expectations of QAA's *Code*; the certificate did not mention PSB but made reference to the existence of the transcript, on which the name of PSB was recorded. The University's intention to adopt this practice was confirmed in the draft contract, which also made it clear that, consistent with QAA's *Code*, the University would retain control over the issuing of all certification. However, in its discussions with senior staff the team heard that, for other collaborative programmes, it was the University's practice to include the names of its partner institutions on the certificates. It appeared to the team, therefore, that a measure of inconsistency in the treatment of partners had been introduced. The University may wish to reflect on whether its rationale for establishing different arrangements for PSB is based on appropriate grounds.

22 The Memorandum makes no reference to responsibility for publicity and advertising, although the draft contract makes it clear that promotional materials relating to the programme require the prior approval of the University. It appeared to the audit team that, in practice, there was a shared understanding that the University's approval was

needed for all relevant advertising, and that responsibility for approving PSB publicity rested with the University's Programme Director (see below, paragraph 23). Beyond this scrutiny, the University did not seem to take a central overview of the accuracy of publicity materials emanating from PSB; the team noted that the *Handbook* outlined the University's approach to checking the accuracy of departmental publications, but did not mention collaborative partnerships. All of the publicity seen by the team in relation to the programme was both informative and accurate, although the University may wish to satisfy itself that the current practice of listing the entire academic staff of the Business School in the programme brochure does not give potential students the impression that all of the staff so listed will be teaching in Singapore.

Quality of learning opportunities and student support

Liaison and administration

23 The *Commentary* reported that, prior to the commencement of the programme, the University appointed a member of the Business School's staff as Academic Coordinator for the partnership. His initial job was to spend five weeks at PSB in early 2000, working with staff 'in various areas', with a particular concern to explain the University's quality assurance procedures and to discuss student recruitment and the appointment of local tutors. Following the postponement of the start of the programme (see below, paragraph 32), he spent a further four weeks in Singapore in May 2000. It was clear to the audit team that this significant commitment of resources by the University undoubtedly helped to prepare its new partner for the organisational, administrative and teaching tasks it would be required to undertake. In due course, the same member of staff succeeded a colleague as Programme Director and, as such, acquired very substantial responsibilities in relation to the link with PSB. In addition to his teaching allocation, the current Programme Director is responsible for the approval of publicity (see above, paragraph 22), the selection and induction of local tutors (see below, paragraph 28), oversight of admissions (see below, paragraph 32), and chairing the Programme Board (see below, paragraph 39). The evidence available to the team suggested that these wide-ranging duties were being undertaken meticulously, with admirable administrative support. It was clear that the quality of the liaison between the Programme Director and the two key members of the administrative staff at PSB had done much to ensure the success of the partnership to date although, in the view of the team, the concentration of responsibilities in one individual

might render the University vulnerable should that individual become unavailable, for whatever reason, in the future.

Monitoring and review

24 In approving the programme as an 'unprecedented' move for the University, CSC had emphasised that 'the need for vigilant monitoring would be paramount'. The audit team was informed that the University was 'relatively relaxed' about how its constituent parts organised their academic management and learnt that, when the programme commenced, the then Programme Director established a management group within the Business School to oversee its operation; in due course, this group evolved into an Academic Board. The team heard that the Board had been viewed as an anomaly and discontinued by the current Director of the Business School; to make the programme management arrangements consistent with those for all other School programmes, it was to be replaced with a Programme Committee, chaired by the Director. The team concurred with the University's view that this development, which had yet to take effect at the time of the team's visit, would provide a clearer focus for the management and continuous monitoring of the programme.

25 The University's *Code* places responsibility for the 'regular evaluation...and monitoring' of collaborative provision with the appropriate Faculty Board. Faculties are expected to discharge their monitoring obligations through the standard procedures for annual and periodic programme review, with the Associate Dean (Teaching) responsible for scrutinising the resulting reports and ensuring that any matters of concern are drawn to the attention of the appropriate central committees. In respect of the BSc (Honours) Business Studies, and in accordance with standard practice within the Business School, an annual review report on the programme's first year of operation, produced by the then Programme Director, was considered by a Programme Review Board in September 2001. The report appeared to the audit team to be a very thorough document that identified a number of matters likely to be critical to the further development of the programme: these included the need to review the design of certain modules; continuing concerns about the adequacy of library provision; some unevenness in assessment; the operation of the student representative system; and staffing improvements. The team noted, however, that the Academic Board was identified as the forum for considering the majority of the action points from this first review. Given that the replacement Programme Committee had yet to be established, the team was unclear as to how the various actions were being taken forward, other than through the individual efforts of the Programme Director.

26 The *Handbook* indicates that the University places considerable emphasis on student input to quality assurance matters and prescribes a combination of staff/student committees 'to provide two-way feedback on academic issues', and the use of questionnaires to collect feedback on individual modules. In terms of the latter, the audit team heard that standard University forms were in use for the BSc (Honours) Business Studies: they were issued and collected by PSB staff, then forwarded to the Director of the Business School for analysis alongside the forms for internal programmes. Matters of concern regarding the performance of local tutors were progressed by the Programme Director; any more general difficulties, together with an overall summary of results, were fed into the programme review process. The team noted that one such difficulty, identified in the 2000-01 feedback, was the adequacy of library resources and that the suggested response by the University was to make a further, 'supplementary enquiry asking students for more detail on the nature and extent of apparent dissatisfaction'. Given that the quality of library provision at PSB was identified by the University itself as a matter for attention at an early stage in the partnership, the team believed that it would find more benefit in acting promptly to bring about a resolution of this long-standing concern.

27 The University's normal expectation is that staff/student committees should meet three times a year (twice for part-time programmes), with the minutes submitted to the relevant dean and the key points arising fed into programme review. The audit team noted that these arrangements had yet to take full effect at PSB, although student representatives had been appointed for each year of the programme and a visiting member of the Business School's staff had held meetings with them on an annual basis. The team noted that the meetings had generated some useful information which the University was using appropriately in developing the programme. The University will no doubt be working with PSB to build upon these existing arrangements and to establish a staff/student committee on the more formal footing suggested in the *Handbook*.

Staffing and staff development

28 QAA's *Code* expects an awarding institution to ensure that effective means exist to review the proficiency of staff delivering collaborative programmes. The *Commentary* made it clear that, from the start of its negotiations with PSB, the University had given high priority to its involvement in the screening and selection of staff to teach on the programme. It had also made a formal commitment, in the submission for approval from Singapore's Ministry of Education, to provide 'staff development and

training and clear written guidelines' to ensure consistency of teaching and learning outcomes in the UK and Singapore. Across the programme as a whole, 50 per cent of the teaching is undertaken by visiting lecturers, largely but not exclusively from the University, who play an increasing role as the students progress through the programme; in the third year, University staff are responsible for 75 per cent of the teaching. Local tutors are screened initially by PSB, interviewed by both PSB and the University, (where possible) observed teaching by the Programme Director and, finally, required to attend an induction programme run by the Programme Director. Those selected at the end of this process are recommended for approval by the Associate Dean (Teaching) and formally appointed as University Teachers. The documentation provided for the audit team indicated that both PSB and the University had been rigorous in observing these procedures and that not all applicants had been selected for appointment; those who had were generally experienced higher education teachers, some with posts in local universities.

29 Normally, delivery is shared by assigning to each module one local tutor and a University tutor. The latter visits Singapore for intensive periods of teaching and also acts as the internal examiner. In addition, three modules are taught solely by two local tutors, with the role of internal examiner undertaken by a member of staff of the Business School. It was clear to the audit team that these arrangements had led to genuine opportunities for academic interaction that had been well received and supported by the local tutors. While the *Commentary* reported that the introduction of formal staff development sessions was under active consideration, it was already evident to the team that the University was engaging the tutors in various forms of development from their first letter of appointment, for instance, by providing examples of previous student assessments, on-line access to teaching and learning materials, and general encouragement to develop interactive teaching styles. The team concluded that the University's approach to the selection, approval and development of local tutors was a model of good practice and that its prudence and thoroughness had enabled it to achieve a clear and continuing oversight of the proficiency of those delivering the collaborative programme.

Student information and support

30 QAA's *Code* expects awarding institutions to approve the information provided for students on collaborative programmes and to ensure that it is comparable to that provided for internal students. The students on the BSc (Honours) Business Studies at PSB are registered students of the University and, notwithstanding the matter raised above, paragraph 20,

the evidence available to the audit team suggested that the University made every effort to treat them as such. The *Commentary* reported that all new entrants were invited to a one-day induction programme, conducted by the Programme Director, at which they were briefed about what was expected of them as Loughborough students, and received their University registration card, a computer identification number to enable them to access the University's web sites, and their *Programme Booklet*. The latter document, produced by the Business School, contains a wide range of useful information, including module specifications, programme regulations, assessment information, student responsibilities and entitlements, and the contact details for staff at the University. A more general University *Student Handbook*, which includes details of how to make a complaint or an academic appeal, is accessible on the University's web site - an arrangement that is identical for students studying in Loughborough. The students who met the team were extremely positive about the quality of this information and the usefulness of the induction they had received.

31 The *Commentary* indicated that the University had been aware, from the outset, that the intensity of the programme and the pedagogical change from diploma to degree level studies would require particular care to be taken in the provision of appropriate student support. In addition to the academic support provided by local tutors and the University's visiting staff, the two key administrators at PSB act as Personal Advisers. The students who met the audit team gave several examples of the ways in which they were supported in their studies, and spoke appreciatively of the work of the Advisers in helping them with various personal matters. The team was satisfied that the University was alert to, and monitoring, the impact of the length of the programme on its students and had ensured that appropriate support mechanisms were in place.

Assurance of the standards of awards

Admissions

32 QAA's *Code* expects awarding institutions to determine the admissions requirements for programmes leading to its awards and to monitor the application of those requirements. The standard entry requirement for year one entry to the BSc (Honours) Business Studies is the PSB Diploma with a grade B average and work experience, or the PSB Advanced Diploma or Polytechnic Diploma (in non-business areas) with a grade B/C average. Decisions on diplomates from other institutions are made with reference to a University list of acceptable qualifications. Holders of the PSB Advanced Diploma in Business Studies or a business-related Polytechnic

Diploma may be considered for direct entry to year two. The *Commentary* indicated that the University had been strict in observing these requirements: the proposed start date of the programme had been moved from March to September 2000 because, although a large number of applications had been received, the number satisfying the entry requirements was insufficient. The audit team heard that only about 30 per cent of PSB Diplomates achieved high enough grades to enter the three-year programme.

33 The entry requirements were agreed as part of the initial approval process and, in accordance with standard University practice, were reviewed in the light of student performance and progression at the Programme Review Board in September 2001. The audit team noted that the University had decided not to alter the requirements on this occasion; it was satisfied that the high entry standards had enabled it to recruit and retain only students who were able to cope with the considerable demands of the programme. The evidence available suggested to the team that this strategy had proved successful, with student withdrawal rates low and the programme's reputation high.

34 The University has devolved to PSB responsibility for vetting applications against the approved guidelines, but the applications of all possible candidates are then forwarded, with recommendations, to the Programme Director. The Programme Director has authority, on behalf of the University, to reject or accept applicants or accept them subject to language or numeracy tests. The audit team was informed that 'special case' admissions had, to date, been passed to the Business School's admissions tutor for consideration, but that these too would now be considered by the Programme Director. The University may wish to reflect further on the appropriateness of this change, given the responsibilities already carried by that member of staff, and the desirability of retaining oversight of the admissions process at institutional level. The team was satisfied, however, that the University's approach to admissions fully met the expectations of QAA's *Code*.

Assessment of students

35 The *Commentary* stated that, for each module, 'responsibility for all assessment resides with the appropriate internal examiner, a member of Loughborough University's academic staff'. All coursework and examinations are set, marked and moderated 'in accordance with standard University procedures'. Where local tutors participate in marking, their work takes place within a framework of guidance and procedures and is moderated by the University. Other formal procedures govern matters such as the movement of coursework between the two institutions.

It was clear to the audit team, from documentary evidence and its discussions with local tutors, that the University had approached its responsibilities for assessment, including the administrative requirements for the conduct of examinations, with great care and that this approach had been rewarded with a shared understanding of its expectations. The local tutors felt engaged on matters of curriculum development, delivery and assessment, and appreciated their involvement in the setting of high academic standards by the University. The team considered that the University's general approach to assessment, and specifically its framework for moderation, were exemplary.

36 The first cohort of students, those admitted with advanced standing in 2000, will graduate in summer 2002. The *Commentary* reported that student performance had, to date, 'conformed well to Loughborough University norms', but that few direct comparisons with modules delivered in the UK had been made as yet; the intention was to look in more detail at this matter in the light of the performance of the first graduating cohort.

External examiners and examination board arrangements

37 QAA's *Code* indicates that external examining procedures for collaborative programmes should be the same as, or demonstrably equivalent to, those used for internal programmes and should remain under the control of the awarding institution. The *Commentary* reported that the external examining arrangements for the programme conformed to the University's standard arrangements, as detailed in the *Handbook*. The University makes a distinction between external examiners and external programme assessors (although these roles may be fulfilled by the same person): external examiners approve results at module level; external programme assessors approve the awards made. The reports of both are submitted annually to the Vice-Chancellor, using a standard template and are then forwarded to the relevant department for consideration; the procedures require that a response must be sent to the author of each report.

38 The audit team noted that these procedures had been applied fully in respect of the BSc (Honours) Business Studies. Initially, the University had appointed to the programme external examiners who were already involved in examining undergraduate modules in the Business School, but it had been agreed, for reasons of workload, that a parallel team would be required. Four external examiners, one of whom acts as the external programme assessor, now deal exclusively with the Singapore programme. The team noted that this change, while perhaps desirable for logistical reasons, had effectively removed a significant opportunity for

making direct comparisons of standards across the Singapore and Peterborough programmes, a matter that the University may wish to consider further in the light of its own emphasis on comparability (see above, paragraph 16). The team had access to the reports produced by the external examining team to date and noted that, although the external programme assessor had commented that his appointment had been too late to enable him to approve the relevant examination papers, his and the other reports were generally very positive about the academic standards set and achieved. The reports had been considered as part of the annual programme review and discussed with staff at PSB. Thorough responses to the external examiners had been made by the Business School's Undergraduate Programmes Director.

39 The assessment results for the programme are considered by Programme Boards, appointed in accordance with the University's standard procedures and chaired by the Programme Director. The first such Boards met at the University in July 2001 to consider first and second-year results. The audit team noted that the external programme assessor had been present and that the Boards' decisions, including some relating to claims for impaired performance, were recorded clearly. As the partnership continues to develop, the University will no doubt be considering how best to provide opportunities for PSB's staff to engage with the work of the Programme Boards and the external examiners, without reducing its own, commendable control over the assessment process.

Conclusions

40 Loughborough University (the University) established its partnership with the PSB Corporation (PSB) in 1998 and has been delivering at PSB an undergraduate degree programme, leading to the award of its BSc (Honours) in Business Studies, since September 2000. The programme has the same overall content and student effort as a three-year full-time programme in the UK, although the students at PSB are studying on a part-time basis and most are in employment. Current student numbers total around 150.

41 The University's approach to the partnership has been characterised by a determination to ensure that it retains control over the programme leading to its award and that the processes adopted in Singapore, and the academic standards achieved by students, are comparable with those of its internal programmes. As a result, its arrangements have major strengths that provide, in many ways, a model for how standards can be safeguarded when a programme is delivered at a distance. The investment made in the preparatory and planning stages of the development allowed sufficient

time for several difficult issues to be resolved and for the partners to develop a common agenda and a shared understanding of each other's expectations; it also provided an opportunity for the future Programme Director and administrative staff at PSB to establish the close working relationship that has been fundamental to the success of the programme in operational terms. The University's control over the appointment of local tutors, its efforts to ensure that those tutors are well briefed about the University's expectations and its own considerable teaching input, have provided a secure framework for the delivery of the programme. The University has also taken care to ensure that students are treated as registered students of Loughborough, and are provided with equivalent levels of support and comparable entitlements to its students studying in the UK. Its approach to assessment and moderation has been exemplary. In all of these matters, the University has been able to draw upon sound and comprehensive institutional quality assurance procedures that apply to all of its provision, wherever delivered.

42 As it continues to develop its partnership with PSB and to strengthen the arrangements it has established to date, the University may wish to give attention to several matters. Of these, the most significant is the absence of a formal, detailed contract or memorandum that sets out the respective responsibilities of the partners and their obligations to students. Other matters include reflecting on its rationale for permitting inconsistency in the provision of certification for different partners; ensuring that an appropriate forum is established in the Business School to support the Programme Director and take forward the actions resulting from annual reviews of the programme; working with PSB to ensure that staff/student liaison is placed on a formal footing; considering how it might best use assessment and progression data, and employ its external examiners, to compare the standards and achievement of students in Singapore with those in the UK; and continuing to keep under close review the impact on students of delivering the programme on a three-year part-time basis.

43 The *Commentary* prepared for the purposes of the audit gave a clear and open account of the University's partnership with PSB. The partnership is the only collaborative link of its kind at Loughborough and it is not possible, therefore, to draw any conclusions from this audit about the University's management of its collaborative provision more generally. In relation to this partnership, however, the findings of this audit would support a conclusion of broad confidence in the University's stewardship of quality and standards.

Appendix A

Commentary on the overseas quality audit report supplied by Loughborough University

Loughborough University and PSB Corporation welcome the thorough and comprehensive nature of the QAA audit and its final report, and are particularly gratified by the conclusions concerning the high quality of the academic standards; administration; selection, approval and development of local tutors; student support; assessment and moderation; and the sound and comprehensive institutional quality assurance procedures.

As part of the continuing development of its partnership with PSB, the University acknowledges the importance of the audit team's helpful suggestions for improvement summarised in paragraph 42, some of which have already been addressed and the remainder of which are currently under discussion.

Appendix B

Students registered on programmes leading to Loughborough University awards at PSB Corporation

2000-01

Part A 53 registered
48 passed
(three withdrew; one took leave of absence; one failed)

Part B 29 registered
28 passed
(one withdrew)

2001-02

Part A 37 registered
34 passed
(three resitting August 2002)

Part B 84 registered
82 passed
(two resitting August 2002)

Part C 28 registered
28 passed
(Degree classifications: 1st - one; 2:1 - 13; 2:2 - 14)

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