QAA Audit of overseas provision

Introduction

1   This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of Wolverhampton and TEG International College, Singapore.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

2   The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in UK higher education rests with individual universities and colleges. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) checks how well they meet their responsibilities, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. QAA also publishes guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems to ensure students have high quality experiences.

3   Many universities and colleges in the UK offer their higher education programmes to students wishing to study outside this country. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that over 388,000 students were studying for UK HE awards entirely outside the UK in the 2008-09 academic year either at overseas campuses directly run by UK institutions or through collaborative arrangements that UK institutions have made with foreign partners. QAA reviews both collaborative arrangements and programmes delivered on overseas campuses through a process called overseas audit. We conduct overseas audit country by country. In 2010-11 we conducted an overseas audit in Singapore. The purpose of the audit was to provide information on the way in which a group of UK universities and colleges were maintaining academic standards and the quality of education in their provision in Singapore. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

4   In November 2009 QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information about their provision in Singapore. On the basis of the information returned, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with provision in that country. These institutions produced briefing papers describing the way in which their provision (or sub-sets of their provision) in Singapore operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which they assured quality and standards. In addition, each institution was asked to make reference to the extent to which the provision was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas activity. Institutions were also invited to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice of the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), particularly *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning),* published by QAA in 2004. An 'amplified' version of the latter section was published by QAA in October 2010.

5   As well as providing a briefing paper to a common format, which provided the starting points of the audits, all UK institutions also made extensive documentation available in paper and electronic forms. Audit teams visited each of the 10 UK institutions to discuss their provision in Singapore between September and November 2010. The same teams visited Singapore in January 2011 to meet some of the staff responsible for managing and delivering the provision, and to meet students. The audit of the University of Wolverhampton was co-ordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Mrs M Drowley and Professor D Timms (auditors), with Mr M Cott, acting as audit secretary. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Singapore for the willing cooperation that they provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in Singapore

6   In Singapore, responsibility for higher education resides with the Higher Education Division (HED) of the Ministry of Education (MOE). HED oversees the provision of tertiary and technical education as well as registration of private schools, including foreign providers. The Singapore higher education landscape currently comprises: four publicly- funded autonomous universities, a private institution offering publicly-subsidised part-time degree programmes, five polytechnics, an institute of technical education, an institute of technology, two arts institutions, several foreign universities' branch campuses and a number of private education institutions.

7   In September 2009 the Singapore parliament passed the Private Education Act to strengthen the regulatory framework for the private education sector. Under this Act the MOE has established an independent statutory board, the Council of Private Education (CPE), with the legislative power to implement and enforce the new regulatory framework. The new regulatory regime overseen by the CPE includes a strengthened registration framework called Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF), and a quality certification scheme called EduTrust.

8   The ERF spells out the strengthened legal requirements in the areas of corporate governance, provision of quality services, student protection and information transparency that all private education institutions (PEIs) operating in or from Singapore must meet. While PEIs were previously required to obtain one-time registration with MOE and could be de-registered only under extreme circumstances, the PE Act has introduced a renewable validity period for registration with the CPE, which can range from one year up to six years, and has provided the CPE with the powers to impose a range of graduated penalties on errant PEIs, including suspension, nonrenewal or revocation of registration or EduTrust certification.

9   EduTrust is a voluntary certification scheme which provides a trust mark of quality. It replaces the previous CaseTrust for Education scheme, which was mainly focused on protection of fees paid by students, adding a number of student welfare and academic standards for all students, whether local or foreign, as well as soundness of finances and school administration requirements. As with CaseTrust, EduTrust is mandatory for PEIs wishing to enrol foreign students. EduTrust certification is one of the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority's prerequisites for the issue of a Student's Pass. Further information on higher education in Singapore is contained in the overview report.

Section 1: The background to the collaborative link

Nature of the link

10   The University of Wolverhampton (the University) and TEG International College, Singapore, (Tyndale) entered a legally binding partnership agreement in 1997. Tyndale offers two University courses: BEng (Hons) Mechatronics which has been operating since 1997 and currently has 37 registered students; and BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering which has been operating since 2002 and currently has seven registered students. Both courses are part-time 'top-up' awards providing the opportunity for diplomates from one of the four Singapore polytechnics to study locally in Singapore for a UK engineering degree. The same awards are also offered at the University's UK campus and at CINEC in Sri Lanka. An application has been made for accreditation by the UK Professional Engineering Board, the outcome of which was anticipated in 2010-11.

11   Tyndale was founded in 1990 to promote English language teaching and provision of UK higher education in Singapore. From modest beginnings, trading as a business with just 500 square feet in a shopping centre, Tyndale now occupies a new, fully resourced 30,000 square feet campus in Tanglin Road, Singapore and also has a campus in Vietnam. Categorised by the Ministry of Education as a Private Education Institution, Tyndale is a multi-disciplinary institution with a subject base that includes English, Engineering, Business and Computing. It is one of a growing number of overseas partnerships the University is developing in Singapore, the South East Asia region and world-wide as part of planned growth and diversification in transnational education (TNE) provision. Regarded by the University as a strategic, multi-dimensional partnership, Tyndale offers the potential for joint projects in Vietnam. Until recently the link typified the University's procedures and practices involving 'flying faculty'. Since revalidation in 2009, Tyndale has moved to 'supported delivery', an increasingly common model for the University. Under this régime, University staff provide learning and teaching materials, while Tyndale staff deliver the courses.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaboration

12   The University takes full responsibility for academic standards and the quality of the students' learning experience. It applies the same quality assurance framework to both home and collaborative provision. The University retains responsibility for: curriculum development; course validation; setting of assessments; and the appointment of external examiners. Tyndale takes responsibility for: delivery of teaching; student support; teaching and IT facilities; administrative support; and some learning resources.

13   The International Strategy Statement 2006-2011 outlines the University's strategic approach to collaborative provision. Internationalisation of the University is a key theme affecting the curriculum, teaching and learning, student life and staffing. The strategy prioritises student recruitment and transnational education with an emphasis on building in-depth relationships and maximising the contribution of international links to the University's research, consultancy and knowledge partnerships. The evolving relationship with Tyndale illustrates the gradual shift in the University's strategy over the last decade. An initial focus on forging links with partners who might generate overseas recruits for the UK campus has been superseded by an emphasis on transnational education. The strategy addresses principles and strategic objectives as well as operational matters such as geographical targets, marketing approaches, quality assurance and management. The Collaborative Handbook contains a range of other relevant policies and procedures addressing such matters as agreements and contracts; planning and approval of new courses; quality assurance; management of provision; student matters; and operational procedures. Appendices provide an equal opportunities statement and a guide to University contacts and sources of information.

14   Academic Board, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, is responsible for academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement. The University has recently amended its committee structure and processes in order to render more manageable an increasingly burdensome workload. Oversight of academic standards and learning opportunities is delegated to the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC). The University Academic Strategy Committee (UASC), which has dual responsibility to Academic Board and the Executive, oversees development of academic strategy for the University. Both UQEC and UASC are chaired by the PVC Academic. UQEC submits two reports to Academic Board annually. The first of these is a report on its own work and that of its sub-committees and working groups. The second is a report on outcomes and recommendations from annual monitoring. UQEC devolves to school quality enhancement committees (SQECs) operational responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement at school level.

15   In 2009-10 UQEC established a new Partnerships and Collaborative Sub-Committee (PCSC) to oversee quality assurance for the University's UK and overseas collaborative provision. Since 2009, the University Quality Panel has subsumed the membership and responsibilities of the Overseas Standing Panel, thus bringing together validation expertise in home and overseas collaborative provision. The Committee Handbook seen by the audit team did not contain membership and terms of reference for PCSC, nor had the Overseas Standing Panel been removed from the organisation chart. In its first year of operation, the University considers that the Partnerships and Collaborative Sub-Committee has succeeded in providing an enhanced level of vigilance over provision regarded as higher risk.

16   The PVC Academic is responsible for: the academic portfolio; curriculum development; quality systems and academic standards; learning and teaching; the student learning experience; e-learning; and for making decisions concerning the approval of academic planning proposals. The PVC Student Affairs line manages the Director International and the International Centre. A Deputy Vice Chancellor has overall responsibility for Education Partnerships including the production of memoranda of understanding and co-operation.

17   The audit team concluded that the University has a framework of policies and procedures underpinning the management of overseas collaborative arrangements that builds upon tried and tested systems that have served the University and its partners, including Tyndale, well in recent years. Although changes made to governance and committee structures in 2009-10 have not yet had enough time fully to embed themselves, the indications are that they have been carefully designed to enhance effectiveness in a changing environment.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

18   Initial proposals for a new partnership may come from a school of the University, the International Centre, or from a direct approach by a potential partner. In the case of Tyndale, an approach was made by the institution to the Dean of the University's School of Engineering and the Built Environment. At the time Tyndale hoped to expand its BTEC/Diploma engineering portfolio to include degree level courses in engineering.

19   The International Centre is involved in the development of all overseas partnerships. The process of approving a new partner begins with an evaluation undertaken by the school and verified by the Director International. The business and financial case for the partnership is first considered in the context of the University's strategic plan and the school's academic plan and capacity. Secondly, the academic standing of the potential partner is evaluated using various indicators of quality and market research. Thirdly, the profile and reputation of the partner is scrutinised taking into account financial standing, legal status and experience. Finally, financial arrangements for the proposed partner and any resource implications for the school are examined. The school includes its outline proposal in the annual school plan for approval by the University Executive.

20   Having passed initial evaluation, the potential partner is then visited either by representatives of the school and International Centre or by members of one of the regional offices of the University (see paragraph 25 below). A risk assessment is undertaken by the Director International. A partner audit report is produced in consultation with the Director International, recommending approval or non-approval of the partner to deliver or participate in the delivery of awards. Where the outcome of the risk assessment is low or medium risk, the Director International can forward a recommendation for approval directly to the University's Executive. In high risk cases, further discussion must take place with the PVC

(Academic) before the proposal can be referred to the University's Executive for final approval.

21   Curriculum development is undertaken jointly by the school and the partner institution with a nominated individual acting as advocate for the provision within the school. Following programme approval, the process of institutional approval culminates in the signing of a memorandum of co-operation by the Vice Chancellor.

22   The structures and procedures that applied when Tyndale was first considered as a potential partner in 1997 prevailed until 2009. The Planning Approvals Sub-Committee (PASC) was responsible for granting planning approval for all new proposals to progress to validation via a curriculum development process. The PVC Academic now carries the responsibilities of PASC. As a potential overseas partner, the Tyndale proposal was subsequently forwarded to the Overseas Standing Panel. The University was unable to provide the documentation relating to initial approval of Tyndale, considered by PASC and the Overseas Standing Panel. The audit team did, however, see the original, generic validation proposal outlining the arrangements for offering a number of programmes with a range of overseas collaborative partners.

23   Subsequent extensions to the level of delivery a partner is permitted to undertake require further planning approval by the PVC Academic and may or may not necessitate a further partner audit. In Tyndale's case, a request to move from direct delivery to supported delivery in 2008-09 triggered such a process, though a tour of resources during the validation visit was deemed sufficient to assure the University of Tyndale's overall viability, without a full partner audit.

24   Tyndale is regulated by the Council for Private Education (CPE) in Singapore and is approved under the mandatory Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF). At the time of the audit visit in January 2011 Tyndale's application for EduTrust certification had been turned down and the institution was preparing to resubmit at the earliest opportunity. Although voluntary, the achievement of EduTrust is likely to affect Tyndale's reputation and will determine whether it can recruit overseas students.

25   The University does not employ the services of agents, but described in the Briefing Paper how the role of its regional offices in China, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Cyprus and Poland has evolved and expanded considerably beyond their initial remit. In addition to facilitating student recruitment and providing in-country student support, the heads of regional offices now facilitate initial partnership audit and support potential and established partners through the processes of validation, re-validation and partner re-approval. The audit team heard that the Head of the Malaysian Regional Office plays a significant role in the Tyndale partnership, valued by both partners, visiting Tyndale several times a year.

26   The audit team concluded that the University has in place a carefully constructed process for selecting and approving potential partner institutions which makes provision for appropriate levels of scrutiny at every stage. Insofar as the extension of Tyndale's authority in 2008-09 triggered a process similar to initial institutional approval, the team saw evidence that the partnership with Tyndale had benefited from this scrutiny. The team did not, however, see sufficient documentation relating to initial approval of Tyndale to be able to comment on this phase of the development of the partnership.

Programme approval

27   Programme approval can begin once the academic planning process is complete. When Tyndale was first approved as a partner of the University in 1997, all academic provision had first to be validated and delivered as home campus provision. This is still the

norm though exceptions can be made. As provision at Tyndale was to be delivered directly by 'flying faculty' from the University, attention was primarily focused on Tyndale as an additional site of delivery, and on its capacity to supply appropriate learning resources and student support.

28   Under current arrangements, the programme approval process is managed by a designated Academic Standards and Quality (ASQ) officer. A panel is established, with delegated authority from UQEC to approve programmes. Members are drawn from the University Quality Panel, together with an external member with appropriate subject specialist expertise. The panel takes responsibility for verifying academic standards and ensuring the quality of learning opportunities. The chair of the panel and the ASQ officer meet the validation team leader, who takes overall responsibility on behalf of the school for the validation process and the person who is leading the curriculum development on behalf of the school, known variously as the key proposer or the developmental team leader (hereafter referred to as key proposer). Guided by the validation handbook, they agree what documentation is required and how the process will be conducted.

29   During the next stage, the key proposer co-ordinates the submission of documentation to the panel, ensuring that it receives external advice, a report on the resource visit report and further information as required. The panel and the key proposer work together until all issues have been addressed. Once the final version of validation documentation has been agreed at the validation event, a final report, known as an academic approval record (AAR) is produced by the ASQ officer and submitted for approval to UQEC. The ASQ officer is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the validation panel have been addressed. As well as providing a record of the process, the AAR is designed to provide UQEC with information about areas of good practice and issues requiring further consideration by the University, though few such matters were highlighted in the Tyndale AARs seen by the audit team. Items to be followed up through annual monitoring were more prevalent. Actions are specified, deadlines set and SQEC is given responsibility for monitoring and sign-off. The period of validation and the next review date are also set. At the end of the process, the memorandum of co-operation is amended and reissued to reflect the changes brought about by the validation event.

30   Minor modifications to programmes are undertaken through SQEC, under the management of the appropriate AQS officer. All such changes are subsequently reported to UQEC.

31   The University was unable to provide the audit team with documentation relating to the initial approval of the BEng Mechatronics programme at Tyndale in 1997. However the team was able to scrutinise documentation relating to the subsequent initial approval of the BEng Mechanical Engineering in 2001-02. On this basis, the team concluded that the University has in place comprehensive arrangements for programme approval which appear to have been applied assiduously with attention to detail in the partnership with Tyndale, except in one respect. The University was unable to explain to the team why no external advisor was included on the validation panel for the approval of the BEng Mechatronics award in 2001-02.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

32   The Memorandum of Co-operation between the University and Tyndale covers key aspects of the partnership but the audit team concluded that it could be strengthened in a number of respects. Firstly, a differentiation between institution and programme should be made as the memorandum tends to treat them as if they were coterminous. Secondly, it would be helpful to specify the role of the external examiners vis-à-vis the University's responsibilities for academic standards. Thirdly, given the increasing involvement of the

regional offices in quality matters, it might also be helpful to define their role within the Memorandum. The team noted that legal jurisdiction is not specified except in respect of copyright. The updated version contains a contradiction in respect of student support. Under Operation and Management it states that Tyndale staff, in consultation with (School) staff, provide academic counselling, whereas under Resource Provision and Financial Arrangements it states that student support, including academic counselling on the programme will be undertaken by (School) staff. This ambiguity is perpetuated in the Course Guide where it is unclear whether academic counselling is to be provided by the University or Tyndale Programme Manager. Of greatest concern is the absence within the Memorandum of what procedures are in place should either party wish to terminate the agreement, including those pertaining to residual obligations. The audit team heard that, although these arrangements are described in the Memorandum as being contained in an exchange of letters by signatories, they are not in fact drafted until such time as they are needed. As this may well be at a time when a partner relationship is already impaired, the team considered this a matter requiring attention by the University.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

33   Responsibility for overseeing the day-to-day operation and management of the award and the student experience is vested in the Tyndale Programme Committee, membership of which includes the University programme manager and the Tyndale programme manager and administrators together with Tyndale staff and student representatives. Programme committees are required to meet at least once each semester. The Programme Committee is responsible for organising and supporting staff student liaison meetings. The audit team saw no documents relating to the Tyndale Programme Committee and heard from the University staff that its functions are carried out via SQEC, supported by one-to-one liaison between administrators. SQEC minutes seen by the team included regular reports on Tyndale but provided no evidence that the Tyndale Programme Committee is functioning effectively. During the visit to Tyndale, the team saw evidence that a staff student meeting takes place each semester in addition to the annual staff student forum, but was informed that the minutes of these meetings are not forwarded to the University.

34   Routine communication between the University and Tyndale is conducted via regular e-mails, Skype sessions and occasional phone-calls. This primarily involves the University programme manager or the school administrator and their counterparts, as appropriate. The responsibilities of the University and Tyndale programme managers and administrators are set out in the Collaborative Handbook and the Memorandum of Co-operation respectively, though the audit team found these contained conflicting information about responsibility for academic counselling, as noted in paragraph 32 above.

35   In addition, the University programme manager, who carries overall management responsibility for courses and administrative functions, visits Singapore annually. During this visit, the annual staff-student forum is normally held, at which the University programme manager (or nominee) should meet with student representatives; the Tyndale programme manager; the Tyndale Senior Administrator; and a cross-section of lecturing staff. In the sample minutes seen by the audit team, however, no lecturing staff were recorded as having attended the forum. A certain amount of discussion took place about issues raised by the student representatives. Actions generated by the forum are recorded in the minutes which are forwarded to SQEC and are monitored via the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). The team was informed that the University is currently considering whether one meeting of the forum per annum is sufficient, especially since the move to supported delivery has significantly reduced the amount of face-to-face contact between University and Tyndale staff.

36   The Tyndale programme manager is regarded by the University as pivotal to the effectiveness of student support in Singapore. In a culture that resembles a family-run business in certain respects, students tend to turn first to this person when they need guidance or support. Student support systems, including the VLE and online advice and guidance, enjoyed by the University's UK students, are also made available to Tyndale students, with certain local exceptions.

37   In the UK, the University Programme Manager is supported by a departmental administrator and a nominated member of registry staff; in Singapore this support is provided by the Tyndale Programme Manager and the Tyndale Head of Academic Programmes. Any matters arising during module delivery are conveyed by the Tyndale Programme Manager or Administrator to the University Programme Manager and reported under standing agenda items to SQEC. The Director Finance is responsible for the financial accounts and liaises directly with the School accounts officer. Student records in respect of progression and achievement are maintained by the University but can be accessed online by Tyndale staff and students.

38   The audit team concluded that the arrangements in place for day-to-day management operate effectively and facilitate the smooth-running of the programmes in Singapore. The team was concerned to note, however, that the Tyndale Programme Committee, prescribed again in the recently updated Memorandum of Co-operation, appears not to meet. The annual staff-student forum, that should be organised and supported by the Tyndale Programme Committee, seems instead to be substituting for the parent committee, without fulfilling its terms of reference.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual monitoring

39   Annual monitoring operates at the level of the course. The School prepares an annual quality report for UQEC focusing on the academic health of its courses, best practice, and areas of concern. Annual monitoring of courses offered through collaborative partners is also reported to PCSC to enable the University to learn from collaborative provision as a whole. The University issues guidance to schools concerning the form and content of annual monitoring reports, including an indication of the sources of information on which they are expected to draw. These routinely include SQEC minutes; staff and student feedback; module evaluation questionnaires; student progression and achievement data; module results and award reports; and external examiners' reports and responses. As an overseas partner, Tyndale is also required to review the Memorandum of Co-operation annually confirming that it is up-to-date and error free. University external examiners, who cover both the UK campus and Tyndale, play a key role in ensuring the comparability of academic standards, student achievement and student experience between the partners.

40   A Risk Assessment Tool was introduced to annual monitoring for the academic year 2008-09 and is currently being evaluated. Early indications are that the tool has been effective in reducing workload and identifying salient issues but may benefit from more explicit references to the evidence base and the provision of opportunities to add brief commentaries to elucidate quantitative reports. Both courses offered at Tyndale tend to fall into the medium risk category. As collaborative provision without a PSRB, the score can range from 9-22. Provision scoring 12-14 is classed as medium risk unless a score of 3 has been recorded against the external examiner views. In such cases the provision is categorised as high risk regardless of the overall score. To mitigate any additional risk Tyndale's move to supported delivery might pose, a full standard annual monitoring report was produced to evaluate the first year of operation under the new regime.

41   The terms of reference for the Tyndale Programme Committee include responsibility for contributing to the required annual monitoring report for transmission to the relevant bodies within the University and Tyndale. The audit team heard that Tyndale staff have sight of the draft report and are invited to comment. Student contributions are gathered via the annual staff-student forum. Senior staff at Tyndale informed the audit team that they are expecting to play a more active role in annual programme monitoring in the future.

42   The audit team concluded that the University's robust procedures for annual monitoring are currently being enhanced to increase effectiveness and efficiency. They make specific provision for the consideration of collaborative provision. The effectiveness of these procedures as applied to the partnership with Tyndale could be improved, however, if the University operated the Tyndale Programme Committee, as specified in the Memorandum of Co-operation (see also paragraph 39 above).

Periodic review and institutional review

43   Tyndale courses in Mechatronics and Mechanical Engineering were routinely reviewed and revalidated in 2004-05, 2005-06 respectively. No significant changes were made on these occasions, so no additional academic planning approval was required. However, Tyndale's application in 2008-09 to change from direct delivery by 'flying faculty' to supported delivery by Tyndale lecturing staff was regarded by the University as a significant change, as it involved an extension of Tyndale's delegated responsibilities. This necessitated a new application for academic planning approval, akin to the process undertaken at initial partner approval, though without a full partner audit.

44   The unit of review at the University is normally the programme rather than the institution. When periodic review of a UK course is due, the University takes the opportunity to check that collaborative partners are fit to deliver the revalidated provision. Review and revalidation, typically carried out after a six-year validation period, are intended to enable the University to reflect critically on the quality of the student experience and consider how academic courses could be enhanced. The process is similar to initial validation but abbreviated and varied according to the degree of change proposed to established provision.

45   The University's procedures and processes for periodic review of courses constitute the final stage of its process of planning and approval of new provision with collaborative partners. The audit team concluded that they are as thorough as earlier stages of the process. They have also, in the main, been applied with considerable attention to detail in the partnership with Tyndale. The team was concerned to note, however, that there was no external member on the review panel for BEng Mechatronics in 2005-06. The team formed the view that dwindling student numbers and the prospect that the course might have to close constituted good reasons for including rather than excluding external expertise, especially when the course had not had the benefit of such external input at validation (see paragraph 31 above).

46   The audit team noted that the University is currently considering the introduction of a discrete process of partner re-approval at five year intervals and would encourage the University in this development, which should render more explicit the distinction between institution and programme.

Staffing and staff development

47   Tyndale part-time staff are now largely responsible for the delivery of the University's programmes at Tyndale. Full-time staff oversee the delivery, act as personal tutors and deliver some specialist modules. Applications for part-time work at Tyndale are generated by

networking. The creation of a pool of part-time staff in each subject specialism is intended to ensure continuity within the student learning experience. Short-listed candidates are interviewed by the University programme manager or an alternate, and submitted to SQEC for final approval. CVs are held by the University.

48   The University is committed to providing appropriate staff development, in conjunction with Tyndale, to enable the effective delivery and administration of the courses offered. Since moving to the supported delivery régime, however, opportunities for University staff to deliver staff development sessions to Tyndale staff, face-to-face, have diminished. Induction of new staff is now undertaken either by University staff during their annual visit or by Tyndale staff using materials provided by the University. A comprehensive rolling programme of staff development sessions is delivered by University staff either face-to-face during the annual visit or by video conferencing at other times of the year. Key Tyndale staff are expected to deliver local seminars to brief staff unable to attend such events. Discussions at revalidation in 2009 about Tyndale generating its own staff development have not yet resulted in any formal annual programme. University module leaders communicate with their Tyndale counterparts prior to the start of delivery each semester. Contact is rare during teaching periods.

49   The audit team heard that the University considered it necessary to provide additional staff development, particularly in respect of blended learning and assessment criteria, to ensure that Tyndale staff were fully prepared for the transition from direct delivery to supported delivery. Implementation of the new régime was delayed from January 2009 to March 2009 to accomplish this. Since this period of intensive support little formal staff development has been provided by the University. The team concluded that Tyndale might benefit from the University offering a more systematic approach to staff development to underpin the transition to supported delivery.

Student admissions

50   The entry requirement for both courses at Tyndale is a Singapore Diploma in a relevant engineering discipline. Applicants who wish to apply for advanced standing on the basis of accreditation of prior learning and assessment of prior experiential learning are advised to approach the University School for information and guidance. Those who are non-native speakers of English are required to demonstrate proficiency in English to the level of an IELTS score of 6.0 or the equivalent and to take a University English Language Proficiency Exam Assessment as part of their induction. The University informed the audit team that this requirement rarely presents an obstacle as most Tyndale applicants have already completed two years of higher education through the medium of English. The team was therefore concerned to note the low level of oral English language proficiency displayed by the group of students met in Singapore. Tyndale recruits and filters applications prior to sending them to the University Programme Manager who makes a decision on whether or not to offer a place. Once made, the decision is communicated, via the University Administrator, to the University Academic Registry which is responsible for informing both the Tyndale Administrator and applicants.

51   The audit team concluded that the University maintains an appropriate level of oversight of admissions to Tyndale, thus safeguarding standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Assessment requirements

52   Identical regulatory frameworks and examination procedures apply to both home and collaborative provision and the Singapore assessment strategy is closely aligned with the UK strategy. Unseen examinations, set for Singapore students by University academic staff,

closely resemble those set for home provision. Examinations are invigilated by Tyndale academic or senior administrative staff. The papers are marked by University academics and moderated by University academics and external examiners. Coursework, including group work and practical work is generated in consultation with Tyndale academics to ensure a fit with local context. External examiners confirm that the assignment is appropriate before it is given to students. Originally all coursework was marked by University academics but the transition to supported delivery saw the start of a phased transfer of responsibility to Tyndale academic staff, beginning in May 2009. Coursework is now marked by Tyndale academics and moderated by University academics. Tyndale academic staff provide students with written and oral feedback on coursework assignments. All coursework is made available to external examiners at assessment boards.

53   Tyndale's cohorts are normally considered alongside UK cohorts at assessment boards held in the UK. Although differences in the structure of the academic year complicate matters, the performances of Tyndale, UK and Sri Lankan students are compared and demonstrate that Tyndale students are performing well. Tyndale academic staff are invited to attend assessment boards in person but are not normally able to do so. Students receive information about their results via the University's online systems.

54   The audit team concluded that the University has in place an effective assessment process in its partnership with Tyndale. The team noted that the arrangement anticipates gradual change as Tyndale moves through a transitional phase and operates with an increasing degree of delegated authority. The team formed the view, however, that Tyndale could have benefited from the University offering a more systematic staff development plan, extending beyond the initial intensive input and providing appropriate support at each stage of the transition.

External examining

55   Responsibility for the appointment and management of external examiners is devolved by UQEC to the External Examining Sub-Committee (EESC), though the audit team found that membership and terms of reference for this committee do not appear in the Committee Handbook. The same external examiner is appointed by the University to cover both home and overseas provision. It is a condition of appointment that external examiners covering overseas collaborative provision are prepared to visit the partner institution and meet students at least twice in a four year term. The external examiner covering provision at Tyndale has fulfilled this responsibility. Partner institutions are invited to nominate external examiners and to comment on nominations before they are processed by SQEC.

56   The template for annual reports requires external examiners to comment specifically on collaborative provision and to indicate whether or not they have visited the partner during the year. The reports covering Tyndale provide succinct but informative and positive commentaries on the partner institution. The University's Head of Quality Management Division receives all external examiner reports as they come in and is responsible for alerting the PVC Academic to any concerns and their potential implications for the University, and for producing an annual overview report for UQEC. Reports are forwarded to the Dean of School and to nominated School staff alerting the School to any problems requiring a prompt response. A summary of observations and emerging themes is reported through SQEC and the External Examiner Sub-Committee to UQEC. The audit team heard how comments by the External Examiner covering Tyndale resulted in the dissertation being replaced by the log book, a mode of assessment regarded as more relevant to engineering students.

57   The audit team concluded that the University operates an efficient and effective system of external examining which ensures that the standards of UK and collaborative

courses are considered equally and in relation to each other and to other comparable UK provision.

Certificates and transcripts

58   Certificates bearing the name of the University and transcripts bearing the names and locations of both partners are all issued by the University. The comprehensive transcripts, which include clear references to prior learning, where relevant, comply with European Diploma Supplement requirements.

Section 4: Information

Student information

59   Tyndale's website features the University prominently and proudly. Prospective students are provided with written details of the course. Induction at Tyndale mirrors and contextualises induction at the University. Students meet Tyndale staff, receive course information and find out about the University. Students are informed about University policies and procedures concerning academic misconduct. This is reinforced in course and module guides. There are no references to appeals procedures in either the course and module guides or on the Tyndale website. The audit team heard that students are informed about appeals in a presentation given during induction. Tyndale's complaints procedure mirrors that of the University and is readily found on Tyndale's website. The team heard that students who have exhausted Tyndale's procedures have recourse to those of the University though this does not feature in the Dispute Resolution Procedure Flowchart on Tyndale's website. In respect of student discipline the regulations of either the University or Tyndale apply according to the circumstances. If a problem of a local nature arises, it would be dealt with locally under Tyndale's regulations. A disciplinary problem of an academic nature would be referred to the University Programme Manager and the School Student Charter would apply. The team found references to the University procedure in the course and module handbooks and details about Tyndale's procedures in its own student handbook.

60   The audit team concluded that the information given to students is clear, accurate and reliable in relation to the student experience. To make it comprehensive, the University needs to ensure that information is also provided on appeals, and on the possibility of taking unresolved complaints to the University.

Publicity and marketing

61   The Dean of School carries responsibility for checking the accuracy and completeness of publicity and marketing materials but delegates this to the University Programme Manager. Responsibilities that are specified in the Memorandum of Co-operation are explained in practical detail in the Collaborative Handbook. External advertising is agreed jointly by the University and Tyndale Programme Managers. The Briefing Paper stated that the University lists collaborative provision of courses in all publicly available documents but the audit team was only able to find information about the Telford campus provision of Mechanical Engineering and Mechatronics on the University website.

62   The audit team concluded that arrangements for checking publicity and marketing materials are sound and working effectively, with the exception noted above.

Section 5: Student progression to the UK

63   The link does not include a formal arrangement for students to undertake part of their studies in the UK.

Conclusion

64   In considering the partnership, the audit team identified the following positive features:

- a sound framework of policies and procedures underpinning the management of overseas collaborative arrangements built upon tried and tested systems that have served the University and its partners well (paragraph 17)
- a carefully constructed process for selecting and approving potential partner institutions which makes provision for appropriate levels of scrutiny at every stage (paragraph 26)

65   The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by the University as it develops its partnership arrangements:

- ensuring that it draws on external expertise for all institutional approval, re-approval, validation and review events regardless of anticipated outcomes (paragraphs 31 and 45)
- reviewing memoranda of co-operation to ensure comprehensive and accurate coverage of all pertinent issues and, in particular, to specify responsibilities for residual obligations in the event of the termination of the agreement (paragraph 32)
- operating the Tyndale Programme Committee as specified in the Memorandum of Co-operation to ensure that students and staff have the opportunity to contribute fully to the quality assurance and enhancement of the programmes, especially though annual monitoring (paragraphs 33, 38, 41)
- introducing a process of institutional review separate from programme review and revalidation (paragraph 46)
- adopting a more systematic approach to planning staff development for partner staff (paragraphs 48-49, 51)
- update its Committee Handbook (paragraphs 15 and 55)
- providing students with readily accessible information on appeals, and on the possibility of taking unresolved complaints to the University (paragraph 60).

66   The audit team considered that the University was operating the partnership with an appropriate regard for the advice contained within the *Code of practice.* Where the team found aspects of the University's practice that could be improved in the context of the *Code* these are identified in the main report and the points for further consideration

67   The audit confirmed the University of Wolverhampton's view of the link as set out in the Briefing Paper. The audit team noted the University's view that this link is typical of its overseas collaborative partnerships. Of particular interest was the way in which this partnership illustrated the transition from the University's former emphasis on direct delivery in mono-dimensional partnerships to its current focus on supported delivery in multi-dimensional partnerships. The team concluded that the link between the University and Tyndale is well-founded on long-standing mutual respect with clear understandings of the respective responsibilities and obligations of each partner shared at each stage of the development of the partnership. The University has in place sound processes and procedures for the approval, management and review of its partnership with Tyndale which safeguard academic standards and quality. It therefore provides evidence to support a positive conclusion on the effectiveness of the University's management of overseas collaborative arrangements in general.