



Audit of overseas provision

University of Manchester and Sotheby's Institute of Art, Singapore

January 2011

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2011

ISBN 978 1 84979 333 9

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Introduction

1 This report considers the collaborative arrangement between the University of Manchester and Sotheby's Institute of Art, 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 the UK. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that over 408,000 students were studying for UK higher education awards entirely outside the UK in the 2009-10 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 Audit of overseas provision. Audits are conducted country by country and in 2010-11 we conducted an Audit of overseas provision 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 subsets 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 for 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)*, originally published by QAA in 2004. An 'amplified' version of Section 2 was published by QAA in October 2010.

5 Audit teams visited each of the 10 UK institutions between September and November 2010 to discuss their provision in Singapore. 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 Manchester was coordinated for QAA by Ms M A McLaughlin, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The audit team comprised Dr N Casey and Professor A Cobb (auditors), with Ms M A McLaughlin, 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 of the Ministry of Education. The Higher Education Division 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 Ministry of Education has established an independent statutory board, the Council for Private Education, with the legislative power to implement and enforce the new regulatory framework. The new regulatory regime overseen by the Council for Private Education includes a strengthened registration framework called the Enhanced Registration Framework, and a quality certification scheme called EduTrust.

8 The Enhanced Registration Framework 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 operating in or from Singapore must meet. While private education institutions were previously required to obtain one-time registration with the Ministry of Education and could be de-registered only under extreme circumstances, the Private Education Act has introduced a renewable validity period for registration with the Council for Private Education, which can range from one year up to six years, and has provided the Council with the powers to impose a range of graduated penalties on errant private education institutions, 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 overseas, as well as soundness of finances and school administration requirements. As with CaseTrust, EduTrust is mandatory for private education institutions wishing to enrol overseas 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 link between the University of Manchester and Sotheby's Institute of Art, Singapore (SIA Singapore) was formally approved in August 2007 and provided for the delivery by SIA Singapore of validated programmes in MA Art Business (MAAB) and MA Contemporary Art (MACA). The link is built on a professional relationship between the School of Arts Histories and Cultures (SAHC) at the University and Sotheby's Institute of Art London (SIA London), dating back to 1995, originating in split-site PhD arrangements, and, from 2006, a partnership with Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York.

11 The first cohorts from SIA Singapore were admitted on to MAAB in September 2007 and MACA in September 2008. Since then, the MAAB has had four student intakes and the MACA has had three; in 2009-10, 18 full-time and four part-time students were admitted across the two programmes.

12 SIA Singapore delivers the postgraduate programmes in the context of the reputation and success of the Sotheby's London and New York initiatives. Since 2004, Sotheby's has been owned by Cambridge Information Group (CIG), a US-based, private management and investment firm, primarily focused on education, research and information services companies. The audit team was told that Sotheby's has franchised its brand name - as 'Sotheby's Institute of Art (SIA)' - to CIG for the purposes of its delivery of higher education provision. The team also heard that this had placed SIA on a sounder financial footing and had helped facilitate the expansion into Singapore.

13 Reflecting its commercial ownership and the 'Sotheby's' label, the University views SIA for the purposes of formal contractual partnerships as a single entity which does not elaborate on the individual site-specific arrangements. The audit team was advised that the University has a direct relationship with CIG as the parent company and works with an executive manager at CIG who maintains oversight of the business activities of the three locations, and the University. As noted in the University's Briefing Paper and given the complexity of the arrangements, the team agreed that this has the potential to cause confusion and it did not see documented evidence of how the relationship operated in the three distinct environments.

14 The Briefing Paper reports that the SIA Singapore link sits within a 'portfolio' (resting across several schools) of collaborative provision in Singapore, and notes that SAHC has identified Singapore as 'a strategic territory for the development of overseas links.' The audit team noted from the Register of Collaborative Provision that the University currently has three partnerships in Singapore and these cross three distinct academic areas and institutions. SAHC, however, with its involvement in 10 of the University's 29 listed partner institutions, has a significant involvement in collaborative provision more generally. The team also heard that Singapore was now considered a 'major target' for the University due to the high value it places on education and also for its position as a 'gateway to south east Asia'.

15 In June 2010, the University was notified that CIG had made the decision to close the SIA Singapore campus and terminate the partnership because it no longer judged it to be commercially viable. The 2009-10 intake was therefore the last to be admitted with the cohort of students scheduled to complete by June 2011. In Singapore, the audit team heard that the grounds for termination were, indeed, financial in that recruitment on the two programmes had been lower than expected. However, it emerged that the decision also related to CIG's assessment that better market opportunities lay elsewhere in Asia. Finally, the team heard that CIG's actions had been influenced by the experience of SIA Singapore

engaging with the Singaporean Council for Private Education's processes relating to the Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF). Although the team heard that the University had been supportive of the partner's ERF application, nevertheless the bid for EduTrust status had been viewed by CIG as requiring 'too much bureaucracy' and the team learnt that this had been a significant factor in CIG's decision to close the operation.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

16 In the Briefing Paper, the University stated that its strategic approach to the development and management of overseas collaborative provision flows from its strategic plan, Advancing the Manchester 2015 Agenda, and that consideration of new partners takes account of 'strategic compatibility'. Further, the University avers that it seeks to avoid engagements that might compromise its reputation. The audit team also heard that, at the time of the audit, the University was introducing a new internationalisation strategy and was intending to make a senior appointment to lead the strategy. While it was evident that the University has a strategic position with respect to international development and had identified Singapore as a market of particular potential, the opportunity for the SIA Singapore partnership had emerged as an outcome of an existing relationship with SIA in London. The team also heard that the setting up of the partnership predated the current strategic plan.

17 The Briefing Paper did not explicitly comment on the extent to which the SIA Singapore partnership is representative of the University's normal procedures and processes for overseas collaborations. However, at various points it reveals that the approval of the partnership and the programme, and the continuing management of the relationship, is governed largely by the University's documented quality assurance procedures.

18 The guiding principle in the University's approach to the quality assurance of collaborative provision is to treat it 'as far as possible in the same way as the rest of our provision'. Key quality assurance mechanisms with regard to programme approval, annual monitoring, periodic review and external examining follow those for the University's internal provision. Additionally, the University has a separate document, the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision, which enables it to fulfil its responsibilities for management of the standards of its collaborative provision. As well as setting out policy and procedures, the document defines types of collaborative provision including 'validation', 'the process by which the University judges that a programme developed and delivered by another institution...is of an appropriate quality and standard to lead to a University award.' The guidance identifies the responsibilities of the University with respect to approving entry standards to the programme, the design of the programme, arrangements for its delivery, and mechanisms for quality assurance and enhancement. It also defines the responsibilities of the partner, around recruitment, selection and registration of students, design of the programme, learning resources, student support, and the quality of the student learning experience.

19 SAHC also produces its own Validation Handbook which summarises and references the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision, setting out the respective responsibilities of School, Faculty and University, but also providing information on arrangements specific to the School. The audit team heard that the design of relevant university procedures took appropriate account of the precepts and guidance of the Academic Infrastructure.

20 The University does not operate a formal, central committee structure for the oversight of collaborative provision. Executive responsibility for collaborative provision, including approval of international partnerships, lies with the Vice President (Teaching and Learning) (VP T&L) who is supported and advised by the Teaching and Learning Support

Office (TLSO). The TLSO has a responsibility to monitor adherence to University regulations and procedures, and reports to an executive Teaching and Learning Group (TLG). Although schools and faculties are expected to have their own structures for managing collaborative provision, the audit team heard that ultimate responsibility lies at institutional level with the VP (T&L) who ratifies arrangements on behalf of Senate. The team was told that this structure facilitates key issues and good practice to flow up to the TLSO and then to the VP (T&L).

21 The audit team formed the view that the University's management of the SIA Singapore collaborative partnership was broadly in line with institutional policies and procedures. However, it also noted that the University allows a considerable degree of variation across faculties and schools so that management of the SIA Singapore link may not be entirely representative of the approach taken in other parts of the University. The extent to which this was problematic, or indeed beneficial, was unclear to the team in that, despite the operational work of the TLSO, the University does not operate a single, accountable and minuted committee which evaluates the oversight of the SIA Singapore partnership in the context of the operation of other collaborative partnerships. To that end, the team advises that the University might wish to revisit its organisational arrangements for collaborative provision to ensure that there is an opportunity for more systematic, comparative and recorded reflection.

Section 2: Arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner organisation

22 Policies and procedures for approving a partner organisation are set out in the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision and Procedures. Ordinarily, an initial proposal for collaboration must receive preliminary approval from the Head of School, the Dean of Faculty and, for overseas partnerships, the Director of International Development. Schools and faculties are expected to have their own processes in place to deal with the consideration of proposed links and their approval, prior to any institutional process. Proposals, which should include a rationale, a list of programmes, the type of collaboration, student numbers, the business case and a risk assessment, and pre-approvals are submitted to the TLSO for consideration by the VP (T&L). With the support of the TLSO, the VP (T&L) nominates a panel for an 'approval in principle meeting', which considers the partnership's alignment with Advancing the Manchester 2015 Agenda, the business case and any risks. Approval by that panel triggers the institutional approval process; this requires the partner to produce a self profile and the School to collect additional evidence on the legal, financial and cultural environment of the partnership and on previous relationships the partner has had with other UK awarding institutions. Section 2 of the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision indicates that, where the risk assessment is rated as medium or high, the VP (T&L) will direct a review team to visit the institution. The review team provides a report to the Dean of Faculty who then recommends to the VP (T&L) whether to proceed to a full institutional approval and final panel event. The panel, ideally including the same members who made the decision to approve in principle, considers all documentation, whether due process has been followed, and relevant criteria met as published in the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision. If the panel is satisfied, it recommends approval of the collaboration to the VP (T&L) who makes the final decision.

23 The Briefing Paper states that the approval process followed routine procedure in considering existing university links with SIA London and New York, strategic alignment with Advancing the Manchester 2015 Agenda, financial analysis and risk assessment. In discussions, the audit team heard that the process for the approval process for SIA

Singapore differed in some ways from the current process in that it predated the development of the University's current risk analysis tool. Moreover, the approval in principle process is evidently orientated to the approval of a new link with an existing partner. The further development of a programme with SIA therefore was perceived by the University as being of lower risk than with an entirely new partnership. The minutes of the approval in principle meeting (April 2007), chaired by the VP (T&L), confirm that statements of support from SAHC and the Faculty of Humanities were received, that the panel considered the strategic alignment of the partner and that it recommended that a visit to Singapore take place, particularly because further information was required about the precise location of delivery.

24 The initial approval visit was undertaken by the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and a TLSO representative in August 2007. The audit team found that the report of the visit is thorough and addresses all of the 'Areas for agreement with prospective partner institutions' listed in the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision; for example, financial information, quality assurance arrangements, regulatory and assessment matters, and student support and guidance. Shortly before the visit, the University had been made aware of a breakdown of relations between SIA and the proposed supplier of teaching and office space. While SIA Singapore was able to secure temporary accommodation, the report records a series of conditions and 'areas for development and consideration'. The partnership was therefore approved for only one year in the first instance. During this first year, and in line with the conditions of the visit report, the University conducted a number of 'institutional level' liaison visits (see Section 3, paragraphs 35-43) and required the partner to provide summaries of all students' feedback. One year after the initial approval, and on the basis of the response of SIA Singapore to the visit report and evidence including student feedback and liaison visit reports, the agreement was extended for a further four years. From its reading of documentation for the course of the protracted approval process and from meetings in Singapore, the audit team confirmed that the University had applied its procedures effectively and rigorously to assure the management of the current and likely future of the partnership with SIA Singapore.

25 The procedure for the withdrawal from a collaborative agreement is set out in the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision. It lays out the University's responsibilities 'to ensure that academic standards and the quality of experience are maintained for remaining students' and requires that an action plan is produced by 'the appropriate Associate Dean, one or more senior representatives of the partner institution, the Academic Adviser...and the Head of TLSO'. The audit team saw drafts of a withdrawal agreement and an operational exit plan drawn up between the University and SIA Singapore. This document also laid out plans for examination boards, external examining and student support as the partnership closes. The team heard that progress against actions would be monitored in Singapore by the Academic Panel during 2010-11 and the University would be kept aware via liaison between the school-based Validating Officer (VO) and the TLSO. In Singapore, the team learnt that the lease on the building used for delivery was due to end in June 2011 and that arrangements were in place to transfer any remaining students' registration to either SIA London or SIA New York. The students met by the audit team, both of whom were yet to complete, were uncertain about the arrangements for the 'teach-out' of the programme and noted that they were unaware of any University involvement in the process. While SIA staff assured the team that plans for the teaching and assessment of these students were in hand, the team concluded that the University should ensure that students are informed of the specific arrangements in place as the programmes close.

26 In discussions with the University, the team heard that any reflection on termination of the partnership would be undertaken by the TLSO 'in due course' and that there are multiple opportunities for reflection on practice across the three tiers of school, faculty and

institution. While the audit team noted that the annual monitoring process and meetings of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee both offer documented opportunities for reflection, it also heard that, at the institutional level, any evaluation would take place in the executive Teaching and Learning Group on an annual basis. This, coupled with the fact that neither approval nor termination of partnerships is routinely reported at Senate, meant that it was not clear to the team where any systematic, institutional review of partnerships might regularly take place. Accordingly, the team reached the view that it would be beneficial for the University to develop processes which would enable it to reflect more deliberately and systematically on its experience of overseas and other collaborative provision.

27 From consideration of institutional processes and approval documentation specific to the SIA Singapore link, the audit team was able to ascertain that the University has effective procedures which, in this instance, enabled it to exercise firm oversight over the approval process. Nevertheless, the University is encouraged to think about ways in which it might systematically reflect on partnership approval at an institutional level, both to address generic issues and to enhance partnership activity.

Programme approval

28 Programme approval of collaborative provision follows the University's standard quality assurance procedures. Collaborative partners are required to complete the paperwork with school support, as required. Proposals are then approved at faculty level. The documentation is checked by the TLSO on behalf of the VP (T&L) and the approval outcome reported to Senate.

29 In the case of the two SIA Singapore programmes, it was decided that full programme approval was not required because they were to be based on the 'core' programme which had been in operation in London and New York for some time. Accordingly, SIA Singapore was advised to submit programme amendment documentation detailing proposed variations in the delivery and structure. In May 2007, a programme amendment form outlining changes to content, especially with respect to Asian art, and including full programme specifications (that for MAAB covering variations in all three sites), was approved by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee and signed off by the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. The audit team heard that TLSO staff check for regulatory adherence, and accuracy and completeness of paperwork. From there, the TLSO report to the VP (T&L) who reports new programme approvals to Senate. Since the initial approval, a further programme amendment has been negotiated with advice from the school-based VO. Key elements of this role are described in paragraph 35.

30 From its consideration of relevant documentation and evidence gained in meetings, the audit team confirmed that the programme amendment process followed by the University provided a proportionate and effective means of introducing programmes for the SIA Singapore partnership.

Written agreements with the partner organisation

31 The TLSO supplies a template memorandum of agreement as defined by the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision. The audit team was able to confirm that the specific agreement relating to the partnership adhered to university guidance and that it encompassed all the areas identified in the relevant precept of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), Section 2, *Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. However, while the approval of the partnership relates specifically to SIA Singapore, the subsequent contractual agreement,

dated December 2007, is not site-specific but covers the relationship between the University and Sotheby's Institute of Art as an entity. The University acknowledged that the contractual arrangements had the 'potential to cause confusion', but pointed out that it had taken steps across the SIA partnership of appointing collaborative academic advisers for each of the three sites, and that SIA facilitates an informal network of the three programme directors in London, New York and Singapore.

32 However, the audit team was of the view that the reliance on one contract had led to some ambiguities. For example, there was a degree of uncertainty surrounding the often informal relationship between the three SIA sites and CIG. The team heard that on a practical level the University may liaise with the director of each SIA branch and the Director of CIG separately. This was compounded by an element of ambiguity within the formal agreement which approved the partnership with SIA, as an entity, for five years from December 2007, although the partnership agreements at each site had different start dates. The University informed the team that, if the partnership agreement had been continuing, it had intended to address this issue in the context of periodic and institutional review of the overall link with SIA scheduled for 2012 (although the differences between the programmes on the three sites had been mentioned as an issue of concern in a SAHC report for 2008-09). Given the potential for confusion surrounding one contract for three sites, and particularly given the potential volatility involved in working with a commercial organisation, the team would urge the University to clarify the contractual arrangements relating to its relationship with SIA as the partnership runs out.

33 The audit team also noted that the agreement with SIA was signed on 1 December 2007 to cover a period of five calendar years. The University had indicated that teaching had begun in September 2007, and so there was no formal agreement in place to cover the specific operation at SIA Singapore between September and December. Although the team was assured that the risk associated with delivering one course without an overarching formal agreement was relatively low, it urges the University to ensure that all collaborative operations are covered by a valid agreement which is in place by the time the associated programmes are running.

Section 3: Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Day-to-day management

34 The Briefing Paper explains that The University's management of academic standards and quality for collaborative provision operates across the three tiers; first, the University, in the person of the VP (T&L) with support from the TLSO, second, the Faculty, via the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) with support from the Faculty of Humanities Teaching and Learning Office (TLO), and third, the School through the Head of SAHC. However, the audit team learnt that each faculty and school is, to some extent, permitted to develop its own means of meeting university expectations of the management of collaborative provision.

35 The University pointed to the significance of three posts in SAHC. The first, a standard university appointment, is the Collaborative Academic Adviser (CAA), who visits the partner on an annual basis. The CAA is a subject specialist who provides each collaborative partnership with academic advice and guidance on the development, content and approval of new programmes and units, the design and implementation of assessment, the appointment of external examiners, and the operation of examination boards. According to the Briefing Paper, the CAAs 'ensure the maintenance of quality and standards'.

The second is SAHC's Director of External Relations (DER), who provides 'academic leadership for validation within the School' and works closely with the Validation Officer (see below), CAAs, the Faculty TLO and the University TLSO. The third is a dedicated Validation Officer (VO) who provides administrative oversight of, and support for, relationships with the School's collaborative partners, offers advice and guidance on relevant policy and procedures and also liaises with the Faculty TLO and the TLSO. Both the DER and the VO are appointments unique to SAHC.

36 In discussions with university staff, the audit team heard about a network of regular meetings within the University between these post-holders and their respective teams. Liaison with SIA Singapore is framed by an annual validation calendar, produced by SAHC, listing key dates within the academic year and specifying the content and format of the two scheduled visits. The team learnt that both the VO and the CAA had been heavily involved in providing guidance and advice on regulatory, procedural and general administrative issues via email, Academic Panel meetings (see paragraph 37) and site visits (eight separate visits by university staff had taken place since the start of the partnership in 2007). It was noted that one condition of the initial approval had been the appointment for 2008-09 of a CAA specifically for SIA Singapore rather than SIA in general. This communication had been particularly relevant during 2007-08 with the partnership's conditional approval, and 2008-09, as staff at SIA Singapore sought to amend their programmes. While staff at SIA Singapore were appreciative of the liaison work undertaken by the VO and the CAA, they did note that the latter post had been filled by a number of individuals in the life of the partnership and that, on occasions, this had led to what they had perceived as inconsistent advice.

37 The key forum for formal liaison between SIA Singapore staff delivering the programmes and SAHC is the Academic Panel. The audit team heard that the Academic Panel had originally covered all three SIA sites, but that this was reviewed in 2008 when it was decided that a panel meeting would be held at each site. In the case of SIA Singapore, this was conducted first by videoconference and then in Singapore. SIA Singapore staff who attend include the Institute Director and the programme directors, while the University has been represented by the CAA, the DER and the VO. The team read minutes of the meetings and established that the Academic Panel mechanism provided the University with a potentially useful means of monitoring developments in the partnership. However, it was evident that, on occasions, it had taken some time for issues to be formally addressed, for example, late submission of annual monitoring documentation.

38 Expectations with respect to the maintenance of student records and the production of progression and achievement data are set out in the Partnership Agreement. In line with university guidance, students are registered by the partner institution, although at SIA London rather than SIA Singapore (paper records are kept in Singapore). Relevant data is then communicated to the School in the person, in this case, of the VO who confirmed to the audit team that the process had worked well.

39 The Partnership Agreement and the SAHC Validation Handbook reflect university guidance in requiring SIA Singapore to provide 'adequate resources for the support and guidance of the students.' The quality of arrangements was addressed during the Partnership Approval visit and had since been monitored by meetings with students in the course of CAA visits and via the VO providing year-round advice by email and telephone. While CAA reports averred that the students' academic and pastoral needs had been carefully considered by Sotheby's staff in Singapore, the audit team learnt that during 2007-08, despite efforts to forestall this in the approval process, there had been some unease expressed by SIA Singapore students at the use of 'flying faculty' to deliver blocks of teaching; in fact, the University acknowledged that this approach was 'not conducive to a sense of continuity'. The situation had been dealt with via the appointment of local Singapore

staff, including programme directors for both courses, who have also acted as personal tutors. At the time of its visit to Singapore, and in the context of the phasing out of the partnership, the team noted that only two members of staff remained in post.

40 The University monitors the adequacy of student support arrangements through its schedule of visits and especially that undertaken by the CAA, the reports of which are received by the Academic Panel. Perusal of those reports reveals that the University has consistently paid attention to the quality of student support arrangements and has prompted SIA Singapore to address issues ranging from the provision of library facilities to the experience of living in Singapore. Discussions with staff and students in Singapore revealed that the small size of cohorts, while not always conducive to enhancement of the learning experience because of the more limited opportunities to share experiences, had allowed a more informal, but nevertheless effective, mode of support to flourish.

41 The audit team heard that the majority of the students on the programmes had come from outside of Singapore and are of diverse, international origins. The report of the 2007 Approval Visit revealed that there was an intention to mirror operation in SIA London by introducing the same feedback and representation mechanisms, that is, students electing their own representatives to the Programme Committee and the Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC), and completing module evaluation forms. In the light of the concerns about facilities which emerged during the partnership approval, the SIA Singapore site was required to provide summaries of all student feedback and responses to the TLSO during the first six months of the programme. More general expectations about 'the student voice' are laid out in the Postgraduate Student Handbook, although it was not clear to the team the extent to which a new Handbook had been produced for each cohort. The team saw various examples of feedback on modules and individual sessions from this period, as well as the minutes of staff-student liaison committees which revealed that students could readily raise issues which appeared to be subsequently addressed. Since 2007, SIA Singapore has reduced the number of SSLC meetings to two a year, although the team noted that students now also have representation on programme committees and the Library Committee as other means to raise specific issues.

42 The adequacy of student feedback mechanisms is again monitored via discussions with students and staff during CAA. Discussions with staff and students in Singapore revealed that the formal mechanisms for feedback have existed, but that, again, the small class sizes had also facilitated a more informal means of communication to operate successfully. From its analysis of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the audit team found that the University promotes effective student representation and feedback mechanisms at SIA Singapore.

43 Generally, the audit team could confirm that there had been regular and valuable liaison between the University and SIA Singapore and that this had been particularly sensitive to risks that emerged as the partnership was approved and initially developed. The posts of VO and the CAA are at the hub of this relationship and are pivotal in ensuring sound liaison and the effective management of quality and standards.

44 However, while the effectiveness of these arrangements for the SIA Singapore partnership was evident, the audit team noted that university faculties and schools have a degree of liberty to adopt and develop other arrangements. Thus, despite their apparent usefulness, the VO post and the Validation Handbook are unique to SAHC. Accordingly, it was not clear to the team where good practice with respect to collaborative provision might be systematically identified by the institution. In this context, the team would encourage the University to consider its approach to identifying and promulgating good practice and the implications for the enhancement of its collaborative arrangements across the University.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual monitoring

45 The University's expectations of annual monitoring of collaborative provision are described in the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision and the Validation Handbook. The Briefing Paper states that monitoring culminates in an annual report from the partner to the School and this is discussed by the Academic Panel. The audit team saw minutes of SSLC meetings at SIA Singapore for 2007-08 to which action plans and summaries of good practice are appended. The team also read some recent examples of the minutes of the annual SIA Singapore Academic Panels, noting that the SSLC minutes had been submitted late and were not discussed until early in 2010. The Academic Panel minutes did discuss proposed programme amendments as well as relevant external examiner reports and the CAA's report. The latter for 2007-08 covered all three SIA partnerships, but the team noted that the two most recent examples focused specifically on SIA Singapore.

46 In the first year of the partnership and because of the provisional approval, SIA submitted action plans after each programme meeting and this helped address issues relating to, for example, learning resources. However, as the Academic Panel noted, no other annual monitoring documents were received by the University. In 2008-09, SIA Singapore also produced a 'Programme Level Annual Review Action Plan and Summary of Good Practice', but it was not clear if this report was discussed more widely at SIA Singapore or at the University. Although the audit team confirmed that the Academic Panel had access to potential sources of evidence for annual monitoring, such as student feedback and external examiner reports, it could not establish that these resources had been effectively scrutinised, nor could it find evidence that other resources, such as full data on student admissions, progression and achievement, were utilised to full effect in annual review. Overall, it was not possible to confirm that arrangements in the partnership met University expectations. Therefore, the team took the view that the University might wish to consider means by which it might strengthen its mechanisms for scrutiny of annual monitoring of SIA provision more generally.

47 The Briefing Paper states that, at the University, the annual report is considered firstly by the School and then by the Faculty, with generic themes being identified for the University. However, minutes of SAHC Annual Monitoring Review meetings, even a set which deals specifically with SAHC's collaborative provision, reveal limited discussion of the SIA Singapore partnership. Accordingly, the audit team came to the view that the University should revisit its arrangements for monitoring the quality of learning opportunities on the SIA partnership.

Periodic review

48 The University's procedures combine periodic review of the programme with institutional review of the partnership after five years. The audit team heard that the SIA Singapore partnership and the two programmes were scheduled for periodic and institutional review in 2012, but this would not take place in the light of CIG's closure of the link. However, review of the wider SIA partnership would go ahead at that time and the University's experience of SIA Singapore would be fed into that process. The team noted that this would provide an opportunity to reflect on the partnership within the context of periodic and institutional review, but would encourage the University to evaluate the experience prior to 2012.

Staffing and staff development

49 The Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision and the SAHC Validation Handbook set the University's expectations regarding approval of staff (including those with non-standard qualifications), qualifications of teaching staff, and submission and recording of CVs. New staff at SIA Singapore are approved by the VO, the CAA and the DER. The audit team saw approval forms and CVs lodged with the SAHC VO, although it heard that some of the staff had been previously approved in the context of employment at SIA London. SIA Singapore staff described a bespoke, one-to-one induction process for new staff, which includes programme leaders observing and evaluating teaching. The University claims that the quality of staffing at SIA Singapore is then monitored at Academic Panels. However, the team found no mention of staffing in relevant minutes and would, accordingly, recommend that the University takes steps to ensure that it is more able to demonstrate alignment with its own guidance in respect of appropriate oversight of staffing at the partner organisation.

50 Provision of staff development was considered when the partnership was approved, although at that time it was envisaged that programmes would be delivered primarily by existing SIA London staff (who were able to access some of the University's staff development opportunities) coming to Singapore to deliver teaching. It had been felt that '[m]ost issues concerning staff development are therefore covered within the existing arrangements validated at SIA [London].' It was not entirely clear to the audit team how the staffing situation had changed to encompass more locally-based staff, and CAA reports make little mention of staffing and staff development. The team read that training is available through the University's Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU), but that SIA Singapore staff had not availed themselves of opportunities, something that the University had been intending to discuss at a next visit to Singapore.

51 In the light of some uncertainties over how the quality of staffing and levels of staff development are monitored at SIA Singapore, the audit team would encourage the University to consider the means by which it adheres to its own guidance in the provision of staff development opportunities at its partner organisation.

Student admissions

52 In line with university guidance, the Partnership Agreement specifies that SIA Singapore is responsible for the recruitment and selection of students, including via accreditation of prior learning (APL) (although no APL requests had been made in Singapore). Criteria for admission, including with respect to 'equivalence' and English language proficiency, are included in the two programme specifications. The Briefing Paper sets out the minimum English language requirements for all postgraduate programmes, which were confirmed as operating in Singapore. However, the audit team noted that the admissions requirements listed in the programme specifications are considerably less stringent (TOEFL 100 rather than 250) and would therefore urge the University to ensure that approved admissions requirements reflected in its documentation meet wider University expectations.

53 SIA Singapore's adherence to the University's requirements for admission to master's provision and English language proficiency is monitored by the CAA as a routine aspect of liaison. Where applicants do not meet standard entry requirements, SIA Singapore seeks advice from the CAA, the VO and SAHC's Director of Postgraduate Education, who makes the final decision. With regard to English language proficiency, the audit team read that this is confirmed via consideration of students' achievement by external examiners and

in examination boards. Given that this might be too late to rectify any difficulties arising, the team came to the view that it was prudent for the University to focus on ensuring that students admitted to programmes are sufficiently qualified.

54 From its consideration of documentation, the audit team was able to establish that admissions processes are overseen by the University. However, it would encourage the University to ensure that University admissions expectations are reflected in validated programme documentation and consequent processes.

Assessment requirements

55 The University claims that assessment regulations and procedures, including those relating to external examiners and examination boards, follow those in the University's Assessment Framework which, in turn, are reflected in the SAHC Validation Handbook. The original programme amendment process looked at assessment requirements in programme units, while the approved programme specifications included basic information on assessment regulations, the assessment strategies required to meet programme outcomes and information on specific assignments (in module descriptors). However, at the original approval visit it was noteworthy that plans for some essential assessment procedures, including marking and moderation, were signalled as being 'under development' at SIA Singapore. The partner had been advised by the University to adopt good practice already followed on the SIA London provision, as well as to use its own procedures.

56 Recent evidence seen by the audit team, however, would suggest that SIA Singapore has aligned its documentation more closely with university expectations. The Postgraduate Handbook provides students with information on grading, criteria, 'special circumstances', late work and the consequences of failure, while the 2010-11 MAAB Programme Handbook describes specific assignments, as well as criteria and award regulations.

57 The University points to the significance of the VO, the DER and particularly the CAA in securing academic standards, claiming that assessment units are reviewed by the officers whenever amendments are proposed or new units submitted for approval. Moreover, any changes to assessment regulations are communicated to SIA Singapore by the VO and the CAA, while staff at the partner also receive the TLSO newsletter. Although CAA reports consistently highlight assessment issues (including adherence to University criteria for allowing late submission due to special circumstances, timeliness of assessment feedback and sufficiency of marking), the examples of the minutes of Academic Panels seen by the team revealed little or no specific discussion of unit assessments or general regulatory changes.

58 Students had been appraised of assessment criteria and appreciated the advice they had received on avoiding plagiarism. They felt that, in the main, assessment feedback was clear, constructive and helped them to improve performance.

59 The audit team also saw the first two external examiner reports for MAAB, both of which highlighted 'Matters for Urgent Attention', including a recommendation in 2009 that '[c]lear procedures regarding marking work, providing samples to the external examiner and the level of information provided to the external examiner should be established in line with the guidelines of the University'. The team heard that such issues were addressed by the CAA in the year following the report. However, while the CAA Report for 2009-10 covered a number of issues, it did not provide any follow-up on the 'urgent' matters raised the previous year. Furthermore, the external examiner's report for 2010, while noting some improvement, reiterated concerns about their involvement in assessment.

60 After a first year in which a joint examination board was held to cover SIA Singapore and London for the MAAB, SIA Singapore had moved to holding an interim examination board in June and a final award board in February. The final board was due to be held in February 2011. Boards are chaired by the Managing Director of SIA Singapore and attended by the programme directors and other teaching staff. There had been a shift to external examiners participating in all examination boards via telephone conference rather than actual attendance, having previously received and reviewed the assessment documentation and a sample of students' work. The CAA and VO attend the final board to monitor adherence to university regulations, but had not attended the June board, a decision which was under review at the time of the audit. The audit team read one set of minutes for a summer MAAB Board, attended by SIA Singapore staff and an external examiner. The minutes offered evidence of uncertainty around approaches to plagiarism, double marking and normative grades, as well as the external examiner seeking advice in the absence of university staff on Manchester assessment regulations and procedures. In the light of this evidence, the team would encourage the University to reconsider its representative presence at collaborative partners' examination boards.

61 The audit team was made aware of comprehensive advice and guidance on assessment available to SIA Singapore and noted the work of the VO and the CAAs in seeking to communicate expectations and promote alignment with university regulations. However, from consideration of CAA reports, external examiner reports and examination board minutes, the team came to the view that the University should heighten its vigilance in seeking to confirm that SIA Singapore adheres to expectations and thus confirms the standards of University awards.

External examining

62 The University's procedures for nomination and appointment of external examiners are the same as for home provision and this is emphasised in the SAHC Validation Handbook. At the time of the partnership's approval, it was decided that for MAAB, SIA Singapore should share an external examiner with SIA London. A bespoke appointment was put in place for 2008-09 together with a search for a MACA-specific external examiner. As in other contexts, the CAA plays a central role in confirming arrangements; for example, in 2008-09, checking on the outstanding MACA appointment at the Academic Panel.

63 Both the VO and the CAA, as well as the Managing Director, receive a copy of the external examiner's report from the TLSO which elicits a response from the course team. The audit team did not see a response from SIA Singapore but noted the receipt of reports and the absence of a response (for the 2008-09 report) were reported by the CAA and discussed at the relevant Academic Panel. Students met by the audit team were aware of the external examining system but had not seen reports.

64 The audit team was aware that the partnership's arrangements for external examining were comparatively new to SIA Singapore. However, from consideration of the resources to which they had access, the team would encourage the University to ensure that the external examiner system is able to play a full role in maintaining standards.

Certificates and transcripts

65 In line with the Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision, the University sets out its expectations with respect to the University's production of certificates and the partner's production of transcripts in the approval visit report. The audit team saw an example of both a certificate and a transcript and, while the former

referred to SIA London rather than Singapore, could confirm that both aligned with University guidance and the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* (although not with CPE requirements, which would have been of significance had the partner continued with a pursuit of EduTrust status). The team read that the University issues certificates on receipt of an 'examinations grid' signed by the Chair of the Board and the external examiner.

66 The audit team heard that the adequacy of the format of transcripts is undertaken in quinquennial periodic review where a sample of transcripts is requested from the partner. Other than this, transcript production is not sampled or monitored by the University in a systematic way. To ensure the continuing accuracy and propriety of transcripts, the University is advised to revisit its means of monitoring SIA Singapore transcripts.

Section 4: Information

Student information

67 The main prospectus issued by SIA covers all three sites. The University approves the documents prior to print and also discusses issues relating to accuracy with students during the annual monitoring process. The Faculty checks website changes on an annual basis and whenever amendments have been agreed.

68 SIA Singapore produces its own prospectus, which is checked by the VO prior to publication. The same officer has responsibility for checking the accuracy of information relating to University programmes on the partner website. In line with the requirements of the Singaporean Council for Private Education, students are provided with a Postgraduate Handbook and programme handbooks. Between them, they include information on registration; staff contact; student feedback; student support and guidance; student discipline, complaints and appeals (there had been no incidences of either at the time of the audit); modules; award and assessment regulations; and life in Singapore. Expectations about what student information should be provided were addressed at the initial approval visit and, in the light of the one-year approval of the partnership at that time, closely monitored by the University throughout 2007-08.

69 The template for the CAA report requires comment on the adequacy of student information, and the three reports seen by the audit team confirm that the quality of programme information has been regularly discussed with students and staff. Students commended the quality of documentation they had received and the induction process which introduced it. They also confirmed that they had useful guidance on learning resources in Singapore. Thus, the audit team concluded that information available to students was clear, accurate and reliable.

Publicity and marketing

70 The Guidance and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision and the SAHC Validation Handbook provide guidance on the means by which the accuracy and completeness of the information on its awards and programmes published by partner organisations should be checked. Attentiveness to the guidance was evident in the report of the original approval visit, which marked up the need to monitor publicity. While in discussion SIA Singapore staff were uncertain about the monitoring arrangements, the audit team was able to confirm that the CAA, when visiting, audits publicity and marketing materials and the VO also checks the website and the prospectus. Consideration of pertinent documentation enabled the audit team to confirm that the University has effective oversight of the checking of publicity and marketing materials.

Conclusion

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

- the University's effective and sensitive use of its partnership approval procedures, to assure and underpin the academic standards and quality of the partnership with SIA Singapore in its early phase (paragraph 24)
- the programme amendment process followed by the University which provided a proportionate and effective means of introducing programmes for the SIA Singapore partnership (paragraphs 29 and 30)
- the University's consistent attentiveness to the quality of student support arrangements (paragraph 40)
- the promotion of effective student representation and feedback at SIA Singapore (paragraph 42)
- the regular and valuable liaison between the University and SIA Singapore and the sensitivity to risks that emerged as the partnership was approved and initially developed (paragraph 43)
- the pivotal roles of the VO and the CAA in affecting sound liaison and effective management of quality and standards for the partnership (paragraph 43)
- the clarity of information relating to the student experience (paragraph 69).

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

- consider the development of processes which would enable it to reflect more deliberately and systematically on its experience of overseas and other collaborative provision, both to address generic issues and to enhance partnership activity (paragraphs 21 and 26)
- ensure that remaining students are informed of the specific learning opportunities and assessment arrangements in place as the programmes close (paragraph 25)
- consider ways in which the University might systematically develop oversight of partnership approval at an institutional level (paragraph 27)
- given the scope for uncertainty surrounding one overarching contract for three sites, and particularly given the potential volatility implicated in working with a commercial organisation, the University should clarify the contractual arrangements relating to the individual strands of its relationship with SIA (paragraph 32)
- ensure that all collaborative operations are covered by a valid agreement by the time the associated programmes begin (paragraph 33)
- revisit arrangements for monitoring the quality of learning opportunities on the SIA partnership (paragraph 47)
- in the light of uncertainties over how the quality of staffing and levels of staff development are monitored at SIA Singapore, the University should consider the means by which it adheres to its own guidance on staffing (paragraph 49)
- ensure that the University's admissions expectations are reflected in validated programme documentation and consequent processes (paragraph 52)
- following the audit team's consideration of CAA reports, external examiner reports and Examination Board minutes, the University should heighten its vigilance in seeking to confirm that SIA Singapore adheres to expectations and thus confirms how it upholds the standards of University of Manchester awards (paragraphs 60 and 64)
- ensure the continuing accuracy and propriety of transcripts and revisit its means of monitoring SIA Singapore transcripts (paragraph 66).

73 Although the University makes comparatively few explicit references to the *Code of practice* in its guidance on collaborative provision, the audit team was able to establish that, in general, the provision takes appropriate account of, and meets, its expectations.

74 The Briefing Paper guided the audit team to an understanding of the origins, management and termination of the partnership with SIA Singapore. The findings of the audit are that in most areas the programmes are operating in accordance with the procedures set out in the Briefing Paper and associated documentation. The team identified good practice at the level of the School, particularly with respect to documentation and the role of the Validation Officer.

75 The audit team found it more difficult to confirm the extent to which the link is representative of the principles governing the operation of the institution's overseas collaborative arrangements. The University does not operate a single model for the management of overseas collaborative provision in faculties, nor does it have institutional, accountable committees which maintain generic oversight of overseas collaborative partnerships. In that light the audit team would recommend that the University develop a means by which it can demonstrate a documented and systematic oversight of its overseas collaborative provision, both to enable it to address thematic issues and to allow it to identify and disseminate good practice in the management of the academic standards and quality of its overseas collaborative provision for the wider benefit of the University.

Appendix A

University of Manchester's response to QAA's report on its collaboration with Sotheby's Institute of Art, Singapore

We are surprised by some of the points for consideration detailed in the report, particularly when read alongside the positive report of the University's hybrid Institutional audit which took place in April 2011. We will consider these points alongside the Institutional audit report and action plan accordingly.

RG 761 07/11

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk