



Audit of overseas provision

**Liverpool Hope University and the Institute of Management and
Entrepreneurship of Southeastern Europe, Greece**

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Introduction

1 This report considers a collaborative arrangement between Liverpool Hope University (the University) and the Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship of Southeastern Europe (the Institute).

2 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is a United Kingdom (UK) organisation which seeks to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded. It provides public information about quality and standards in higher education to meet the needs of students, employers and funders of higher education. It does this mainly through a peer-review process of audits and reviews, conducted by teams of auditors and reviewers comprising academic staff from higher or further education institutions. The most recent institutional audit of the University was conducted by QAA in 2005.

3 One of QAA's activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative links between UK higher education institutions and their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2008, QAA conducted audits of selected partnership links between UK higher education institutions and institutions in Greece and Cyprus. The purpose of these audits was to provide information on the way in which the UK institutions were maintaining academic standards and the quality of education in their partnerships. The reports on the individual audits will be used in the preparation of an overview report on the collaborative arrangements for the management of standards and quality of UK higher education provision in Greece and Cyprus.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

4 In June 2007, QAA invited all UK higher education institutions to provide information on their collaborative partnerships in Greece and Cyprus. On the basis of the information returned on the nature and scale of the links, QAA selected for audit visits seven UK institutions with links in Greece and Cyprus. Each of the selected institutions produced a commentary describing the way in which the link(s) operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which the institution assured quality and standards. In addition, each institution was asked, as part of its commentary, to make reference to the extent to which the link was representative of its procedures and practice in all its overseas collaborative activity. Institutions were also invited in their commentaries to make reference to the ways in which their arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, particularly *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA in 2004.

5 In spring 2008, audit visits were made to each of the selected UK institutions to discuss their arrangements in the light of their commentary. In May 2008, an audit team visited the partner institutions in Greece and Cyprus to gain further insight into the experience of students and staff, and to supplement the view formed by the team from the institutions' commentaries and from the UK visits. During the visits to institutions in Greece and Cyprus, discussions were conducted with key members of staff and with students. The full audit team conducting audits of institutions with collaborative links in Greece and Cyprus comprised Emeritus Professor B Anderton (UK visits only), Dr R Davison (UK visits only), Professor P Hodson, Professor A Holmes, Professor P Maher, Professor D Meehan, (auditors), and Ms C Smith (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group, and Mr D Greenaway, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in Greece and Cyprus for the willing cooperation they provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in Greece

6 Under the Greek constitution, higher education is the exclusive responsibility of the State and may be provided only by State institutions. Public higher education is divided into

universities or higher educational institutes, known by the acronym AEI, and technological education institutes. Both types of institution award their own degrees and can also take part in collaborative activity to deliver awards of other providers, including UK providers. Technological education institutes are considered as vocationally oriented higher education institutions. At the time of the audit four technological education institutes had collaborative partnerships with UK institutions of which two were visited as part of the audit.

7 While there are no recognised private higher education institutions in Greece, local legislation permits private organisations offering post-school education to exist as liberal studies centres. At the time of the audit, 18 of these centres had collaborative arrangements with UK higher education institutions for the delivery of programmes leading to UK awards.

8 UK awards delivered through collaborations with private institutions are not recognised by the Greek State, which limits the opportunities for employment within the public sector and in regulated professional sectors. In the case of collaborations with public institutions the opportunity exists for submission to the government authorities for recognition.

9 Two months after the completion of the audit visit in Greece, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs announced a new legal framework for the operation of private colleges, which included specific provision for collaborating with foreign degree awarding institutions.

The background to the collaborative link

General background

10 The University developed from a federation of Roman Catholic and Church of England teacher education colleges, which became a single ecumenical college and a fully accredited institution of the University of Liverpool. It expanded its range of degrees and student numbers and gained its own taught degree awarding powers in August 2002, and university title in July 2005. The University's website states that 'The next natural stage in the University's development is to apply for research degree awarding powers and it is intending to do this in the next few years. In the meantime, the University will continue to build its profile as a teaching-led, research informed, Mission focused University'.

11 The audited link was between the University and the Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship of Southeastern Europe (the partner Institute) in Thessaloniki, Greece. It involves the delivery at the partner Institute of the last 120 credits of a 180-credit Master of Business Administration (MBA) or International MBA (IMBA) programme offered by the Business and Computer Science Deanery. The first 60 credits are derived from accreditation by the University of the prior certified learning of the level 7 Chartered Management Institute Executive Diploma in Management delivered at the partner Institute. For the remaining 120 credits, University staff travel to Greece to deliver two 30-credit taught modules on an intensive basis, after which a 15-credit Dissertation Proposal module is delivered in Thessaloniki by Institute staff who also supervise a 45-credit Dissertation. The partner Institute collaboration was initially run through what are described in the Commentary as two 'Pilot Groups' on the MBA with entry dates of May 2005 and March 2006. The collaboration was extended to include the IMBA after this was validated by the University. The first entry to the IMBA at the partner Institute was in March 2007, with a second cohort entering in April 2008. The Commentary noted that recruitment since 2006-07 has been on the IMBA only.

12 The partnership originally developed from personal links established between staff at the Institute of Management Development in Larissa, Greece, and the Chartered Management Institute's external verifier, a member of University staff. The Institute of Management Development was formerly called North European Studies and is a privately funded partnership established in 1997. The Academic Director of the Institute of Management Development is also

the Academic Director of the training provider referred here as the partner Institute, which is described on its website as a 'non-profit educational organisation, in which the Federation of Industries of Northern Greece and twenty of the largest companies of Northern Greece are partners'. It is a training provider whose stated aim is to further the personal and professional development of established executives, and to educate 'young talented people' in business and management. It provides in-house training and consultancy, open seminars and postgraduate-level programmes, and the two partners with which it works as shown on its website are the University and the Chartered Management Institute, which is represented in Greece and the Balkans by the Institute of Management Development.

13 According to the University, at the time of the audit, there was a total of 116 students on either the MBA or IMBA programmes at the partner Institute, with 69 students on the MBA and 47 students on the IMBA, of which 17 students enrolled in April 2008. All the partner Institute-based students are part-time and all teaching and assessment is in English. A full-time version of the IMBA is offered at the University. Information supplied by the University showed one student from the 2005 pilot cohort had successfully completed the MBA and the other 30 were at some point in the dissertation stage. Of the 2006 cohort, 27 of the 38 students had progressed to the dissertation stage.

14 In relation to the near halving of recruitment on the IMBA between 2007 and 2008, the audit team was told by University staff that the likely cause was the discovery that the University was not registered as a 'recognised' University with the Greek authorities, and that this would have deterred students from enrolling. The University was now seeking such recognition by the Greek authorities. However, this was not considered by staff at the partner Institute to be a major deterrent to potential candidates, given the recognition difficulties associated with any UK degree delivered in Greece. Most MBA/IMBA students at the partner Institute are already in employment and their studies are financed by their employers.

15 The MBA/IMBA collaboration was the first and, is still, the major overseas collaborative provision entered into by the University. In its Commentary, the University described its approach to collaborative provision as 'cautious and focused' with any partnerships initially based, as in the case of the partner Institute, on 'existing staff's close academic links with and personal knowledge of the partner institutions'. Within what the University describes as its 'modest' overseas provision, the Institute is the dominant partner, providing three-quarters of the University's students who are taught and assessed at overseas partner institutions. However, the University confirmed that the partnership was not representative of its current approach to such collaboration following further development of the University's mission and international strategy (see paragraph 22).

The UK institution's approach

16 The University's Corporate Plan identifies goals in eight key areas, one of which is the development of international partnerships. It seeks to do so by building strategic partnerships with high-quality overseas institutions that share the University's mission and values. It is supported in this through its Guide to Collaboration and Partnership, which contains a statement of 'guiding principles', and covers University procedures for approval of partner institutions, programme validation, agreements, quality assurance and periodic review, and the definition of various roles associated with collaborative provision. The University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit is responsible for the Guide. The University's position on locus of responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in the context of collaborative provision is set out in the Guide which states that, 'All collaborative ventures involving award-bearing taught programmes are ultimately the responsibility of the Senate and overseen by its Partnership Committee'. In relation to the Institute partnership, this is reinforced in the legal agreement drawn up to underpin the partnership, which states clearly that 'The responsibility for the oversight and maintenance of academic quality and standard of its programmes delivered in IMESE lies with Hope'.

17 Senate set up the Partnership Committee in the academic year 2004-05 and for its first two years it reported directly to Senate. It now reports to the Planning and Strategic Support Committee (itself a subcommittee of Senate), since the University now regards its policies and procedures to be embedded. The Partnership Committee has both a strategic and operational role, and the University lists its principal functions as:

- advising on the future strategic direction of the University's regional, national and international partnerships
- responsibility for quality assurance of all collaborative arrangements, including validation and review, annual monitoring, and outcentre approval
- responsibility for maintenance of the University's collaborative partnerships register
- monitoring national trends and developments relating to collaboration, and monitoring the implications of changes in the development of external reference points (for example, the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA)
- developing and promoting a framework of good practice relating to the student experience in collaborative provision
- ensuring effective communication channels are in place and appropriate documentation to provide guidance on partnership issues.

18 The audit team saw evidence in the minutes of the Partnership Committee of its oversight of the development of the partner Institute collaboration, and also reflection on lessons learned from the validation and approval process. There was also evidence of the presentation and discussion of the Moderator's report at the Committee (see paragraph 50).

19 The University also has an international management group. This predates the formation of the Partnership Committee, which has taken over its responsibilities in relation to international collaborative provision. The Group is said to be undergoing a process of revision to its title, remit and membership, and the audit team formed the view that it was not now part of the management of overseas collaborative provision.

20 In terms of roles, the Dean of Business and Computer Science makes an annual visit to the partner Institute, and it was clear in discussion with the audit team that the Dean takes a proactive role in the management of the collaboration, including monthly email exchanges with the Principal of the Institute concerning developments within the collaboration. Both the MBA and IMBA have curriculum coordinators, who have responsibility for the operation of the programmes. This includes planning and organisation of curricular delivery, responsibility for assessment data and its presentation to the Examination Board, and ensuring student feedback mechanism are in place and operational. The IMBA Curriculum Coordinator was the originator of the partnership within the University and has played a major role in sustaining it. He makes four visits each year to Greece, twice to deliver the programmes and to engage in the management of the collaboration, including chairing the staff-student liaison committee and twice in his role as the Chartered Management Institute external verifier.

21 In addition, a moderator is appointed by the University to act as the link between the partner and the University. This role was undertaken by the IMBA Curriculum Coordinator until last year when the current postholder stepped down to avoid any conflicts of interest with their other roles, and another member of the programme team took over with a schedule of two visits each year to the partner Institute. The role of moderator is comprehensive, and a detailed specification of the role and responsibilities is contained in the Guide to Collaboration and Partnership. The functions of the moderator are to act as the principal liaison person with the partner institution; to monitor academic standards on the collaborative programme; and to foster the development and implementation of appropriate quality assurance processes on collaborative programmes run with the partner institution.

22 The partnership with the Institute was the University's first substantial involvement in overseas collaborative arrangements and was built some years ago on an existing, well-established academic link between partner and University staff. The partnership developed from the firm foundation of an existing Chartered Management Institute programme, relied on the commitment of individual staff in both partners and was several years in gestation. The University acknowledges that this approach is no longer representative of the way in which it would develop an overseas partnership and reflects the change in the University's mission, international strategy, and the lessons it has learned from the development and management of the link with the partner Institute.

Public information, publicity and promotional activity

23 A register of the University's collaborative partnerships is publicly available on its website. Apart from the Institute partnership, the University's only other approved and operational arrangements for overseas provision are two partnerships for outcentre delivery of an MA Education in the United Arab Emirates.

24 Responsibility for checking publicity concerning the IMBA programme produced by the partner Institute lies with the Dean of Business and Computer Science, in consultation with the University's Director of Marketing. Scrutiny of publicity is also one of the duties of the Moderator. The audit team was told that the Dean approves publicity materials available in hardcopy, and that he is assisted in this by both the Curriculum Coordinator and Moderator. The team was not able to find evidence of any systematic arrangements for regular checking of publicity material or of the Institute's website; the University relies on the partner Institute presenting its publicity material for approval. It was also confirmed that some of the publicity material was in the Greek language, and it was not clear what checks 'if any' were made on this.

25 The audit team also identified that material relating to the collaborative programme was present on the website of the Institute of Management Development in Larissa. The team was told that there is an ownership link between the Institute of Management Development and the partner Institute, but the University's formal relationship is with the partner Institute alone. The University did not appear to be fully aware of the material presented on the Institute of Management Development's website, and the team could find no evidence that it had been approved by the University. The team also noted that on the partner Institute website, an introductory section included an inaccurate reference to the relationship between the University and another UK higher education institution. In addition, although the only MBA award now available through the partner Institute is that of the University, a section of the website contained quotes dated 2004 from former students of an MBA for Law Practitioners, which predated the MBA partnership with the University. It should be said that current students whom the team met at the partner Institute were very clear about the provenance of their programme and felt that their expectations had been fully met. However, the University may wish to reconsider its arrangements for scrutinising publicity material.

26 The University's own online information about the IMBA only refers to the full-time, on-campus provision and makes no reference to the partner Institute link and, as far as the audit team could ascertain, there is no reference elsewhere on the University's website to the partnership with the Institute apart from an entry in the Partnership Register.

Formal procedures for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner institution

27 The current University Corporate Plan to 2011 has a clear statement on developing partnerships with overseas institutions that share the University's mission and values. According to its Commentary the major objective of the University's international strategy is 'to increase international links through the development of sustainable, strategic partnerships, normally with

institutions which share its Christian Mission and scholarly objectives'. The Commentary goes on to give several examples of the types of partnership the University is now pursuing. However, at the time the partner Institute link was developed, the University was willing to develop partnerships where staff of the University had close academic links with, and personal knowledge of, the partner institution. In its meetings with University staff, the audit team was told about this change in emphasis and the University's clarification of its mission with regard to overseas collaboration.

28 When the issue of mission compatibility was raised with the senior staff of the partner Institute, it was pointed out that the University was ecumenical rather than doctrinal and that its mission was helpful in considering issues of business ethics and corporate social responsibility, which were high on the agenda in business forums and provided a shared agenda and foundation for future development of the partnership. Institute staff also valued their strong personal relationships with University staff and the support they had received at all levels from the Business and Computer Science Deanery. Institute staff saw the University as a relatively small and flexible institution that was willing to cooperate with the partner Institute to contribute to its development agenda, including developing a research base in partnership with the University.

29 The University provides guidance on the procedures to be adopted in respect of the approval of a collaborative partner. Applications are coordinated by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit. Applicants are required to provide a detailed statement covering the profile and status of the collaborative partner, and including annual reports/audited accounts for two years; existing academic portfolio including student numbers and a summary of award results; plans for development of its academic portfolio; details of sites and premises; library, information and communication technology and other learning resources; staffing; research and consultancy activities; and existing collaborative links with other academic organisations.

30 The information is presented using a University pro forma, 'Proposals for Strategic Planning Approval', which is signed by the applicant institution. The proposal goes forward to the Rectorate Team for consideration. The University Guide to Collaboration and Partnership lists the criteria which the Rectorate Team will consider. These include complementarity of mission with the University, and congruence of the provision with that of the University; risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis of the proposed partnership; and assurance that the language of tuition and assessment is English. If the Rectorate gives approval in principle to the proposed collaboration, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit will then commence planning the process for formal approval process of the provision. In relation to the partner Institute collaboration, the audit team saw evidence of the completion in 2004 of a 'Proposal for Strategic Planning Approval for New Collaborative Provision' and was able to track its consideration and approval in principle by the Rectorate in 2005, and a 'Learning Resource Audit' completed after a visit to the partner Institute in April 2006.

31 This was the University's first venture into overseas collaborative provision, and it is clear that it would not enter into a similar arrangement in the same way in future. Discussions about the collaboration with the partner Institute commenced in the academic year 2000-01 but it was not until 2005 that the first cohort of 59 students was enrolled onto the MBA programme. Prior to this, there had been no formal approval of the collaborative arrangements or outcentre approval with the partner Institute, and only a rudimentary 'Initial Financial Agreement' (dated 16 September 2005) appears to have been in place. The audit team was told by University staff members that procedures for the quality assurance of partnerships had been strengthened in the light of experience and that the option of a 'pilot' period, as applied to this partnership, would not be adopted again in future collaborative arrangements.

Programme approval

32 The first two cohorts on the MBA programme (2005 and 2006) are referred to by the University as 'pilot groups'. Formal approval of the MBA/IMBA did not take place until 2006. To support this approval process, the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit

produced a bespoke document, Partnership Arrangements Articulation with Outcentre Approval. This was derived from the University's Guide to Collaboration and Partnership, but was tailored to the specific circumstances of the partner Institute collaboration.

33 The document Partnership Arrangements Articulation with Outcentre Approval contains a timeline for conducting approval of this type of collaborative provision. This involves a two-stage validation process: in stage 1 a visit to the outcentre location is undertaken by staff from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit and the Deanery link tutor, and a visit report produced. In the case of the partner Institute this visit took place in April 2006, and visiting University members, together with an external adviser member of the validation panel, met both staff and students at the partner Institute. The outcentre visit report identifies various issues and makes a number of recommendations in relation to approval of the collaborative provision. The visit also resulted in the production of a learning resource audit report, which provides a detailed consideration of both information technology infrastructure and support, and library resources for the MBA/IMBA collaboration, and identifies a number of issues for further consideration. In stage 2 a validation panel, held at the University, considers the articulation and outcentre arrangements. In the case of the partner Institute, this approval panel took place on 22 May 2006 at the University and included the external adviser. There was no involvement of staff from the partner Institute.

34 The approval panel identified seven conditions of approval. One condition, which does not appear to have been met, is 'ensuring that details of the partner Institute staff team contributing to the award are reported annually to the Deanery Board through the annual monitoring report' (see also paragraph 57). Programme-related staff members whom the audit team met at the University thought the validation conditions would have been met and signed off, but they were not certain of this. The team did not see any evidence that the University had subsequently reconsidered this condition and the University may therefore wish to revisit its validation report and ensure that all the conditions are being met.

35 Another condition of approval was that Chartered Management Institute modules matched the University's Global Business Management module for which accreditation of prior certified learning was being claimed. Documentation provided to the audit team included a mapping of the Chartered Management Institute Executive Diploma in Management against the University IMBA modules at the postgraduate certificate stage, and which was approved by the Deanery Board.

36 Documentation prepared for the validation also included a customised programme specification for the MBA/IMBA to be delivered in collaboration with the partner Institute. This identified exceptions to the existing on-campus MBA (2003) and IMBA (2005) programme specifications, and was designed to take account of the accreditation of prior certified learning of the Chartered Management Institute award, and to reflect local arrangements for course delivery and management in Greece. In the case of the IMBA, on-campus students are full-time and largely from overseas, whereas at the partner Institute they are part-time students. IMBA students, both on-campus and at the Institute, follow the same curriculum, although the Institute students are exempted from the postgraduate certificate stage because of the accreditation of prior certified learning against their Chartered Management Institute qualification.

37 Responses to conditions set by the approval validation panel are considered by the Chair of the Validation Panel and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Formal signing off and completion of the validation process are expected to be reported to the Partnership Committee. A formal report of the findings of the Validation Panel is presented to the Partnership Committee which is authorised, on behalf of Senate, to grant formal approval. The Partnership Committee received the Validation Panel Report for the partner Institute collaboration at its meeting on 31 May 2006. It reflected on the lessons to be derived from the process, and formally approved the report. Initial validation is for a period of five years. The University has a process of

periodic review which it describes as much the same as for initial approval. The partner Institute collaboration has not formally been in place long enough to experience periodic review.

38 The audit team took the view that the IMBA programme approval procedures designed for this partnership were robust. They were specially adapted for this partnership from the Guide to Collaboration and Partnership, included both an outcentre visit and approval and a validation event, and resulted in a comprehensive report with seven conditions. However, the team was not able to confirm that all the validation conditions had been met and signed off by the relevant authority at the University.

39 The approval event took place in 2006, some two years after the partnership to deliver the MBA had been set up as a 'pilot', without the full range of quality assurance procedures that were subsequently adopted in 2006. The University has reflected on the evolution of this partnership, its first example of major overseas programme delivery and which was initiated before the University gained taught degree awarding powers and title. The University's Partnership Committee, in considering the results of the approval process, heard that what was considered appropriate quality assurance practice in the UK could have been seen at the partner Institute as overly burdensome and lacking in trust. The audit team was told that the approach of operating a pilot arrangement in advance of normal approval procedures was not one the University would wish to follow in any future overseas arrangements.

Written agreements

40 Following the IMBA validation approval process, the University drew up a full and comprehensive agreement between itself and the partner Institute that was intended to operate from 1 September 2006. However, at the time of the audit the agreement had not been signed and there was no formal legal agreement governing the operation of the provision with the partner Institute. Subsequent to the audit, the University confirmed that such an agreement had been signed. The University will wish to ensure, in its own interests and those of the students, that in future a formal legal agreement be in place before any collaborative arrangement is implemented and that such agreements be reviewed and renewed periodically.

Quality management of the link

Management of the link

41 The Partnership Committee oversees all areas of academic collaboration and partnership, and has both a strategic and operational role. The collaboration is managed by the Business and Computer Science Deanery in the following ways. The Dean makes an annual visit to the partner institution, and maintains an overview of the partnership keeping in regular email contact with the Academic Director of the partner Institute. The Curriculum Coordinator for the IMBA programme makes four visits to the partner Institute each year. Two of these relate to delivery of modules at the Institute, and the postholder also conducts meetings with students in the role as Staff-Student Liaison Officer. The other two visits are in the capacity as external verifier for the Chartered Management Institute programme at the partner Institute. The formal duties of the Curriculum Coordinator include planning and organisation of the curricular delivery both on-campus and through the partner; responsibility for assessment data and presentation of this to the Examination Board; and ensuring course evaluation and student feedback takes place.

42 The Moderator acts as the main liaison between the University and the partner. The role focuses on the monitoring of academic standards on University programmes at the partner institution, and the development and implementation of quality assurance processes at the partner institution. The Moderator has an extensive list of specific duties which include receiving an annual report from the programme leader at the partner institution and also submitting an annual report relating to the provision to the University's Partnership Committee; scrutinising

publicity relating to the collaborative programme; and sitting on appointment panels for staff on programmes that lead to University awards; and meeting with the programme team and students.

43 There is a programme administrator at both the University and the partner Institute. The dedicated administrator in the Business and Computer Science Deanery is responsible for liaising with the University's Registry, Admissions and Finance Departments, to ensure international students are correctly registered.

44 Students admitted to the IMBA programme at the partner Institute all enter with advanced standing based on the Chartered Management Institute Executive Diploma in Management award. The University verifies that they have this qualification by enquiry to the Institute, but an additional verification is possible because the Curriculum Coordinator is also the Institute's external verifier.

45 Student assessment data is presented to the Examination Board by the Curriculum Coordinator. The Board is able to disaggregate the results in each module for those students from the Institute collaboration and those from the on-campus provision.

46 Teaching of modules is undertaken by University academic staff during visits to the partner Institute, and by staff based at the Institute (see paragraph 11). In addition to these inputs, students are also supported at the Institute by seminars, tutorials and individual/group tutor-student meetings. The Academic Director of the Institute provides inputs on study skills and writing assignments. Students have a student handbook for the programme and module handbooks, which together contain supportive material, and they are also introduced to the University's electronic support systems at induction.

47 Each programme should have a formally constituted staff-student liaison committee with a minimum of one student representative for each level and chaired by a member of staff. Full minutes of the Committee should be kept and made available to all students electronically. In the case of the partner Institute, the Curriculum Coordinator, who is also the Staff-Student Liaison Officer, meets with student representatives during his visits to the partner institution (see paragraph 72).

Annual monitoring and review

48 The programme team at the University holds reflective meetings at the end of each academic year as part of the annual monitoring process. The audit team was told that partner Institute staff members do not directly engage with these meetings, but their views are represented by the Curriculum Coordinator who then produces an annual monitoring report using a standard University report template. The annual monitoring reports for the MBA include a section on the partner Institute collaboration. The team saw a range of annual monitoring reports for the MBA and IMBA. The reports for the IMBA programme have little reference to the partner Institute collaboration, but this may be because the first cohort at the partner Institute was not recruited until early 2007. The Business and Computer Science Deanery believes it is preferable to have a single annual report covering both the on-campus and Institute provision rather than separate reports.

49 The annual monitoring report pro forma has a section for discussion of external examiner comments and to indicate what action is proposed in response to them. There is also a section in which data relating to recruitment and to pass rates, retention, progression and completion rates may be analysed. The audit team saw no evidence in either the MBA or the IMBA programme annual reports of an attempt to review the performance of on-campus and Institute students separately (although the first results for the IMBA would be reflected in the programme annual report for the academic year 2007-08, which was not available at the time of the audit). The annual monitoring report is also expected to include an analysis of the main issues raised through student feedback and actions proposed. The reports for the academic years 2005-06 and

2006-07 for the MBA programme comment in general terms on student feedback, and have no indication of the analysis of student feedback from the partner Institute provision.

50 The Moderator also produces an annual report, which goes to the University's Partnership Committee. The report is expected to 'draw particularly on the annual monitoring portfolios produced by the subject teams in the partner institution'. However, this was not evident in the Moderator reports for the academic years 2005-06 and 2006-07 to which the audit team had access. The team was told by the partner Institute's Academic Director that there was an ongoing process of feedback throughout the year, not a 'one off annual process'. The partner institution should receive copies of both the programme annual monitoring report and Moderator's report; the Institute's Academic Director confirmed that this was the case and that issues he had raised had been taken into account.

51 All of the annual monitoring reports for programmes within the Business and Computer Science Deanery, together with external examiner reports, are summarised by the Dean into an overall Deanery annual report to the Quality and Academic Standards Committee. Issues and good practice, as indicated by external examiners, are summarised in the report. The Dean also has the Moderator's report available when producing this summary. The audit team had access to the Dean's annual reports for the Business and Computer Science Deanery for the academic years 2005-06 and 2006-07. In both cases these reports had a section relating to collaborative provision, where reference was made to the partner Institute. However, the commentary was brief and indicated the partnership was progressing well and that the collaboration was low risk. The report for the academic year 2006-07 noted that the external examiner had seen a considerable improvement in student performance at the partner Institute as compared to the previous year. This view that the partnership was running well and effectively and represented a low risk to the University was also expressed to the team in its meeting with staff from the Business and Computer Science Deanery.

52 The audit team took the view that while the annual monitoring process as specified should provide the University with sufficient information on the quality and standards of the Institute-based provision, the resulting reports provided relatively little evidence on which the University could base informed judgements. Notwithstanding the monitoring that occurred through the ongoing contacts between staff at the University and the partner Institute, the University may wish to consider the advisability of paying greater formal cognisance to the partnership in its annual reporting process.

Periodic review

53 Initial validation of programmes is for a period of five years. The University has a process of periodic review, which is described in the Guide to Collaboration and Partnership as 'much the same as for initial validation of the programme'. As with initial validation, the Periodic Review Panel Report goes forward to the Partnership Committee, together with a recommendation on whether approval should be renewed and, if so, whether conditions should apply. The IMBA was validated for delivery at the partner Institute in 2006 and is therefore not due for periodic review until 2011.

54 There is no separate process for periodic review of the partnership. The legal agreement between the University and the partner Institute that was due to come into effect on 1 September 2006 was designed to 'remain in force until further notice, unless terminated earlier in accordance with the terms of this Agreement'. However, the agreement also stated that 'the terms of this Agreement shall be reviewed at intervals of not more than three years from the date of completion of the Agreement'. That period will presumably start when the agreement has been signed by both parties. Given that the partnership is now based on a single programme, a five-yearly review of that programme, drawing on the partner's experience of delivery, appeared to the audit team to be an appropriate periodic review process.

Staffing and staff development

55 The delivery of the programme is shared between a small team of University full-time staff and five members of partner Institute staff appointed as associate lecturers of the University. There are also regular visits by the Curriculum Coordinator, the Moderator and the Dean (see paragraphs 41-42 above). Programme team members at both institutions felt that there was no difficulty in communications between the University and the partner Institute. Institute-based staff reported that there were good and well-used channels for providing feedback and input both on interpretation and revision of the curriculum.

56 The legal agreement between the University and the partner Institute states that 'delivery of Hope's programmes at IMESE will be undertaken by staff who have an employment contract with Hope Recruitment in relation to teaching, supervision and assessment duties' and that 'recruitment for Associate Lecturers will follow the same procedures as those outlined in the University's Recruitment & Selection Policy'. Appointments were originally approved by deans, but the audit team was told that the procedure has now become part of the University's normal human resources processes. The team was also told that no appointments had been made since the new procedures had come into force, but that the process would be for the partner Institute to suggest a potential associate lecturer. The Curriculum Coordinator would then review the curriculum vitae of the candidate and would probably also conduct an informal interview. If this was satisfactory, the Coordinator would make a recommendation for appointment to the Deanery Board and, if it was satisfied, the Board would ask Human Resources to issue a contract. Institute staff confirmed that they would suggest potential associate lecturers from the pool of staff who had been successfully appointed and a good track record in the delivery of the Chartered Management Institute Executive Diploma.

57 A condition set by the Validation Panel was that details of the staff team based at the partner Institute should be reported annually to the Deanery Board through the annual monitoring report for formal re-approval. There is no evidence in the reports seen by the audit team of this happening. It is therefore not clear how the University ensures, as required by its own Legal Agreement document, that there are staff available at the Institute 'in such numbers and with such qualifications as are satisfactory to Hope to provide the appropriate quality of teaching for students registered on the IMBA'. When the team visited the partner Institute it was told that in addition to the Academic Director, one other member of Institute staff was currently providing academic support to students on the MBA and IMBA, but had not yet been formally approved by the University as an associate lecturer although the process was apparently underway. It was not clear to the team whether the form of academic support being provided would necessarily be defined by the University as requiring associate lecturer status, but the University will wish to ensure that it meets the requirement of its own proposed agreement that all staff delivering its programmes at the Institute have been through the University's selection procedure, and that the Deanery Board should have an annually updated list of the partner Institute staff team.

58 The Commentary stated there is an 'expectation' that associate lecturers will be subject to procedures such as mentoring, peer observation and staff development. At the same time, the Commentary stated the University recognises it could do more in terms of staff development. The audit team was told that, in practice, staff development and peer review are seen as responsibilities of the partner Institute, and the Dean checks on an annual basis that the Institute is discharging this responsibility. In addition, University staff may provide one-off specific staff development inputs. The Curriculum Coordinator asks each associate lecturer at the partner Institute to reflect on the staff development they have undertaken and how that has impacted on the IMBA programme. Institute-based staff commented that they had continuing professional development processes in place that were appropriate for the institutions that they worked with.

59 The audit team asked whether the high dependence on a relatively small number of individuals at the University and the partner Institute to manage and deliver the outcentre aspects of the programme created a vulnerability for the University. The University noted that

there were other members of staff in the Business and Computer Science Deanery who were involved with the IMBA programme and who would be able to provide cover if needed. While this may be the case at the University, the team noted the important role in course delivery of the Academic Director at the Institute and the heavy reliance on that person's input, particularly at the dissertation stage. As stated above, at the time of the audit, the Academic Director was one of only five members of staff linked to the provision, and the only designated associate lecturer currently providing direct support to the programme in Greece: the remaining four members of staff were associate lecturers with a more limited role. Given the obvious key roles of the IMBA Curriculum Coordinator and the Academic Director of the partner Institute in setting up and sustaining the programme, the University may wish to reconsider the potential risk of its heavy reliance on a relatively small number of staff members to support an overseas programme with a substantial number of students (see paragraph 13).

Student admissions

60 Students who are admitted to the IMBA programme at the partner Institute all enter with advanced standing based on the Chartered Management Institute Executive Diploma in Management award: there is no alternative entry route. Checks are undertaken by the University to ensure students have the experience required for entry to an MBA programme. The Institute promotes the programme in Greece but potential students are required to complete a University application form, in order to register as students of the University. The Institute collates the forms and sends them to the University for consideration. There is no formal English language requirement for entry. The fact that students have taken and passed the Executive Diploma in Management is regarded as providing evidence of competence to undertake learning and assessment in English. Students whom the audit team spoke to at the partner Institute felt that the programme had met their prior expectations while recognising the differences from their previous academic experience in the requirements of assignment work and independent learning. The students had found that the Executive Diploma course had adequately prepared them to undertake the MBA and appreciated the mix of practical and theoretical study that the two programmes provided. The students were more concerned about the higher level of English language skills that the MBA level required. They reported that some of their fellow students had encountered difficulties, but that support for English language skills was available at the Institute and used by some of their peers.

Assurance of academic standards

Assessment

61 Students at the partner Institute are assessed in the same way as on-campus students on the MBA or IMBA programmes and within the same regulatory framework. They undertake the same assessment tasks as on-campus students, all of which are set by the University. There are no examination assessments on the programme. The audit team was told by University staff that there might be timing differences between an assessment for on-campus students and for Institute students in relation to assignments and not examinations; Institute-based staff were not aware of any such differences.

62 The Commentary stated that first-marking of dissertations is undertaken by the partner Institute's Academic Director with second-marking by a member of University staff. This arrangement was confirmed by Institute staff at the partner visit. Subsequently to the visit, the University informed the team that the Commentary had been incorrect on this matter and that University tutors had responsibility for first-marking. In the light of this misapprehension by the staff at the partner institution, the University may wish to ensure that both University and Institute staff are clear about their respective responsibilities in relation to the first and second-marking of dissertations.

63 Assessment results are taken to the Examination Board for the MBA and IMBA programme by the Curriculum Coordinator. The Examination Board considers results for students at the partner Institute and the on-campus students together. The results then go on to the University's Postgraduate Awards and Progression Board. Institute-based students whom the audit team met felt that they had been supported well in undertaking assignment work, a previously unfamiliar form of assessment, and were well briefed about potential problems such as plagiarism. They were generally content with both the speed and content of feedback on their assignments.

External examiners

64 The arrangements for external examining between the UK institution and the partner institution are fully consistent in that the same external examiner covers both the on-campus and the partner Institute provision. The University argues this allows the results of the Institute provision to be benchmarked against the on-campus provision. Although there was not a specific comparison of the results between the on and off-campus provision in the external examiner reports seen by the audit team, there was comment on student performance at the Institute in the MBA external examiner reports for the academic years 2005-06 and 2006-07, with the second report noting an improvement in performance. External examiner reports are returned to the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit and a copy is sent to the Academic Director at the Institute.

Certificates and transcripts

65 Neither the specimen certificate nor transcript seen by the audit team indicated that the award had been obtained by study in Greece at the partner Institute. Members of staff whom the team met confirmed that the location of study did not appear on either the certificate or transcript. In addition, the legal agreement indicates that transcripts and certificates will be the same irrespective of location of study. This is not aligned with the expectation of precept A24 in the *Code of practice, Section 2* on collaborative provision, which states that the certificate and/or the transcript should record the name and location of any partner organisation engaged in delivery of the programme of study. It is also not in line with the University's own guidance in its Handbook of Partnership and Collaboration where it states that 'Certificates and transcripts, however, should record at which institution the student pursued his or her programme of study'. The University will wish to consider this apparent disparity in its approach to the wording of transcripts and certificates. It was not clear to the team whether transcripts for graduates at the partner Institute will refer to the credits gained from the Chartered Management Institute Executive Diploma in Management, detail that is needed for a full understanding of the student's achievement. The University may also wish to consider this and might find the explanation in relation to precept A24 of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, helpful in this context.

Quality of information for students

Student information

66 Student representatives told the audit team that they had heard about the programme from a variety of sources including radio and magazine advertisements and word of mouth, and felt that in general it had met their expectations and they would recommend it to others: indeed, some already had. All the students had started with the Chartered Management Institute course and had then applied to the University for a place on the MBA/IMBA. On acceptance, students receive from the University a letter of confirmation, a welcome pack and a comprehensive student handbook. For the IMBA programme, students were also provided with module handbooks.

67 The University has a comprehensive complaints and academic appeals procedure. The Commentary stated that it sees no reason to introduce separate procedures for students at outcentres. The audit team asked whether any particular support mechanisms were in place to allow for the fact that students were remote from the University, and not able to access

on-campus support facilities, such as the Academic Progression and Advisory Service, and Students' Union. It was told that complaints and appeals advice was available through the University's website for students, and that students could email the Dean if they had problems which were not resolved. Reference to the appeals procedure on the University website is included in the Student Handbook but the complaints procedure is not. In practice, Institute-based students felt that they were well informed about appropriate procedures and would be well supported should they need to use them.

68 It is University policy to send important information to students electronically using the University's email system and Information Portal, which students at the partner Institute can access readily. Student representatives appreciated particularly the personal contact with staff from the University and the Institute.

Student support arrangements

69 Induction of students to the IMBA programme at the partner Institute is undertaken by a range of University staff including the Dean and Curriculum Coordinator, and also by the Institute's Academic Director. Students who met the audit team also spoke favourably about induction material available on CD. The Student Handbook for the IMBA programme at the Institute identifies a range of sources of student support. In practice, students at the Institute feel very well supported by local staff in both academic and pastoral roles.

70 Information and communication technology and library resources were considered as part of the approval process when a team of University staff plus the external validation panel member visited the partner Institute. The team completed a learning resources audit which provided a comprehensive review of the learning resource base available at the Institute and identified issues for further consideration.

71 Students have the right to access all the learning resources available to on-campus students. This includes access to the University's virtual learning environment, the University's Information Portal and Hope Virtually Daily, the University's daily electronic newspaper. Students at the partner Institute also have full access to the electronic information resources of the University's library. The University does not monitor levels of access to University resources by students at the Institute. However, the Moderator's report for the academic year 2006-07 had noted that Institute-based students were making little use of the University's virtual learning environment, preferring to use the Chartered Management Institute library resources to which they have access as Institute members. This was confirmed by Institute staff, who noted that students had become familiar with the Institute's resources in their initial studies and reported their continuing use of the library and other forms of locally based support, including an Institute discussion forum. Continuing support for students at the dissertation stage is readily available from Institute staff and is considered particularly important and well appreciated by students, given that they are part-time, studying over a relatively long period and often in demanding employment. The audit team took the view that student information and support arrangements were comprehensive, clear, accurate and reliable, and provided a sound basis for a good student learning experience.

Student input into quality management

72 The IMBA Curriculum Coordinator, who is also the Staff-Student Liaison Officer for the Business School, meets student representatives during visits to the partner institution. The audit team saw evidence of these meetings in the form of handwritten minutes signed by the student representatives. The team was told that these notes are discussed by the IMBA course team, and are also made available to other students, although it was not clear to the team how this was done. In addition, the Curriculum Coordinator issues and collects module evaluation forms during the visit. The point was made to the team that the IMBA students are mature managers, and are not diffident about raising any concerns they may have. The team was also told that the 'loop was

closed' in relation to student feedback either by providing a response through the Academic Director at the partner Institute or by going directly back to the student representatives.

73 The group of students that the audit team met at the partner Institute included several course representatives. The team asked them about their experiences of the programme and the effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms. They were generally enthusiastic about the programme and the support they received. They felt that the programme had met their expectations, although they recognised the adjustment they had to make to an approach to assessment through assignments, and the demands of independent learning that differed from their previous academic experience. They reported that there were ample opportunities, both formal and informal, to represent their fellow students with whom they kept in touch by email about matters they had discussed with the University and Institute staff. They were not able to recall seeing notes of the staff-student liaison meetings and, while aware of the module questionnaires, they did not know what subsequently happened to the completed forms. However, in general, the team was able to confirm the view of programme staff that students were well aware of the processes for feeding back their views and, if necessary, making complaints and appeals, and would use them as and when required.

Conclusions

74 This was the University's first major venture into overseas collaborative provision and it has recruited well over 100 overseas students to the MBA and IMBA programmes in four years. The student representatives whom the audit team met in Greece were generally both enthusiastic and complimentary about the programme and their learning experience to date.

75 Discussions about this partnership began before the University had acquired its own taught degree awarding powers and university title, and before it had redefined its strategy in relation to international partnerships to concentrate more on its faith-based mission. The University has learnt lessons from the development of the partnership and the quality assurance procedures it adopted and would not use the same approach again. The University allowed two cohorts of students to be recruited in 2005 and 2006 to what it describes as a 'pilot' delivery of its MBA in conjunction with the partner Institute. Prior to this, there had been no approval of the collaborative arrangements, and only a rudimentary financial agreement appears to have been in place. The University then undertook a formal validation of the IMBA programme in 2006. This resulted in a set of conditions but it was not clear to the audit team whether all of these were being met. Following the validation approval, the University made available for signature a formal written agreement for the partnership to operate from 1 September 2006. However, at the time of the audit visit, the agreement had not been signed, although the University believed that it and its partner were operating within the spirit of the agreement.

76 Given these findings, the audit team took the view that the University was not operating within the expectations of the precepts the *Code of practice, Section 2* on collaborative provision. The more notable exception is to precept A10 regarding a written agreement. As outlined above the University may not have a legally binding agreement with the partner Institute because it has not yet been signed on behalf of that Institute. Secondly, in relation to precept A24, the guidance suggests that the name and location of the partner organisation should be included on the certificate and/or transcript but the team understood that the University's intention was not to do so.

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

- the long-term commitment to, and support for, the partnership by the University's IMBA Curriculum Coordinator and other members of the Business and Computer Science Deanery (paragraphs 20, 43, 55, 58, 72)
- the regular, continuing and productive programme of visits to the partner Institute by key contacts at the University (paragraphs 20, 21, 55, 72).

78 The audit team also identified the following points for consideration:

- reconsideration of its processes for checking publicly available material about the University and its programmes provided by its partner in Greece (paragraph 25)
- the advisability of the University being able to assure itself that validation conditions for collaborative provision have been, and are being, fully met (paragraphs 34, 57)
- ensuring that, in future, a formal legal agreement is in place before any collaborative arrangement is implemented, and that such agreements be reviewed and renewed periodically (paragraph 40)
- the desirability of assessing the current and likely future staffing requirements of the programme, and the risk to the academic integrity of the programme and students' learning experience of the current reliance on a small number of key staff to deliver the taught modules and supervise dissertations (paragraph 59)
- ensuring that both University and partner Institute staff are clear about their respective responsibilities in relation to the first and second-marking of dissertations (paragraph 62)
- reconsideration of the information recorded on the certificates and transcripts issued to graduates, to ensure that it includes the name and location of the partner organisation involved in the delivery of the programme and to consider the possibility of including information about the accreditation of prior certificated learning (paragraph 65).

Appendix A

Update on the partnership since the audit

The University welcomes the report on the collaborative link between the Business and Computer Sciences Deanery at the University and the Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship of Southeastern Europe, Thessaloniki, Greece, for the delivery of the International Master of Business Administration.

The University welcomes affirmation that its approval and review procedures are robust and appropriate and that student information and support arrangements provide a sound basis for a good student learning experience. The University welcomes in particular the recognition of the long-term commitment to and active support for the partnership by programme team members in the Deanery and by other key contacts at the University.

The University has responded to the points for consideration. The partnership agreement has now been signed by both parties. In addition, clarification of the responsibility of the University's Moderator for ensuring compliance with validation conditions, for ensuring that procedures for the approval of publicity material about the University are adhered to and for ensuring that updated records of staff contributing to the programme at the partner organisation are approved by the Deanery Board will be formalised through revision of the role specification of the Moderator. All existing partnership Moderators at the University will be supported through staff development activities organised centrally by the University. Finally, the Certificates and transcripts awarded hereafter will present information on name and location of the partner organisation involved in the delivery of the programme and information about the accreditation of prior certificated learning.

Appendix B

Student statistics as at October 2008

Cohort 1 January 2005 - six students started the MBA programme, one is still registered and five withdrew.

Cohort 2 May 2005 - 53 students started the MBA programme, three have graduated, 23 are still registered and 27 withdrew.

Cohort 3 March 2006 - 42 students started the MBA programme, one graduated, 33 are still registered and eight withdrew.

Cohort 4 March 2007 - 32 students started the IMBA programme, 23 are still registered and are preparing for the dissertation phase and nine withdrew.

Cohort 5 February 2008 - 20 students started the IMBA programme and there are currently 20 still registered on the programme.

All the students are part-time. There are currently 100 students registered on either the MBA or the IMBA.

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