

Overseas Quality Audit Report

University of Abertay Dundee and
Nanchang University, People's Republic of China

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University of Abertay Dundee overseas collaborative audit

1 This report considers the collaborative arrangement (the link) between the University of Abertay Dundee (UAD) and Nanchang University (NCU) in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to deliver two UAD postgraduate awards, the MSc Information Technology (MSc IT) and MSc Internet Computing.

Introduction

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. These are conducted by teams of auditors and reviewers comprising academic staff from higher or further education institutions, but with some members drawn, where appropriate, from industry and the professions. The most recent institutional audit of the University of Abertay Dundee was conducted by QAA in April 2002.

3 One of QAA's activities is to carry out quality audits of collaborative links between UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and their partner organisations in other countries. In the spring and early summer of 2006, QAA conducted audits of selected partnership links between UK HEIs and institutions in the PRC. 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 mainland China.

The audit process for overseas collaborative links

4 In July 2005, QAA invited all UK HEIs to provide information on their collaborative partnerships in PRC. On the basis of the information returned, QAA selected for audit visits 10 UK institutions with links that were representative of UK provision in mainland China. Each of the selected institutions produced a commentary describing the way in which the link operated, and commenting on the effectiveness of the means by which it 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 the section on *Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA in 2004.

5 In spring 2006, audit visits were made to each of the selected UK institutions to discuss its arrangements in the light of its commentary. In April-May 2006, one of three separate audit teams (based respectively in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province) visited the partner institutions in PRC 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 PRC, discussions were conducted with key members of staff and with students. The full audit team based in Shanghai were Dr P Garnsworthy, Professor D Meehan, and Professor D Punter as auditors and Mr G Clark as audit secretary. Dr A J Biscoe coordinated the audit on behalf of the QAA. QAA is particularly grateful to the UK institutions and their partners in PRC for the willing cooperation they provided to the team.

The context of collaborative provision with partners in PRC

6 In PRC responsibility for higher education planning and policy resides with the Ministry of Education, which is the State Council's executive body for education. It also has direct responsibility for a number of universities and for the evaluation of bachelor and master's level programmes. However, responsibility for the majority of provision, including vocational education, is devolved to the relevant regional and municipal authorities. China has a comprehensive set of laws covering the provision of higher education, notably the current Higher Education law, 1998. Of specific relevance to collaborative arrangements, are the Regulations on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools, 2003, which apply to higher education institutions and cover matters relating to the management of overseas partnerships and the level of student fees. As part of the continuing process of modernisation of higher education, two state programmes have been introduced: Project 211, which aims to create 100 first-class Chinese universities and a number of key fields of study for the twenty-first century; and Project 985, which aims to develop world-famous research universities. Both these projects channel funding selectively to designated universities. China has been progressively developing its quality assurance system for higher education since 1985, when the evaluation of institutions was first implemented. Current arrangements entail the evaluation of tertiary colleges by provincial education authorities, according to a national plan introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2003; the evaluation of bachelor degree programmes by the Ministry's Higher Education Evaluation Centre, established in 2004; and the evaluation of graduate education (master's and doctoral programmes) by the Academic Degree Committee of the State Council. Further information on higher education in China is contained in the overview report.

The background to the collaborative link

General background to the link

7 The partnership between UAD and NCU was formally established following the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) in Nanchang in September 2002. The MoA is valid for five years and expresses the intention that the agreement should continue thereafter. The supplementary Co-operation Agreement was signed in May 2004.

8 The collaboration is an articulation agreement into two existing master's programmes: MSc IT and MSc Internet Computing (the latter, until 2002, being named Software Engineering), offered by UAD through the School of Computing and Creative Technologies (the School), the programmes having evolved from postgraduate diplomas (PgDip) established in the 1980s, into MSc programmes in 1992 and 1989, respectively. Both programmes follow the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Students at UAD can exit with a postgraduate certificate (PgCert) on completion of 60 credits or a PgDip on completion of 120 credits, with the MSc comprising 180 credits. The Commentary stated that the School would be seeking British Computer Society (BCS) accreditation and exemption for both programmes in autumn 2006.

9 The MoA terms semesters 0 and 1 as the 'Course of Study', semesters 2 and 3 as the 'Programme of Study' and the two together as the 'Combined study programme'. In semester 0 students at NCU undertake a programme of English language and in semester 1 students study NCU modules relevant to their chosen programme of study. Successful completion of the relevant NCU 'Course of Study' enables students to have direct entry with advanced standing on to the corresponding MSc programmes in Internet Computing or IT. Regardless of which programme they enrol on students from NCU follow a two year, four semesters (0 to 3) programme, initially enrolling on a one-year 'course', only becoming

UAD students when they formally enrol for semester 2 having successfully completed semesters 0 and 1. The audit team established that during semester 1, in accordance with the MoA, classes at NCU are generally taught in Chinese, while the assessment is in English.

10 The report of the advisory team which visited NCU in January 2002, (see paragraph 28) noted that, 'in terms of admission into the programme at Abertay...it was proposed that students receiving the NCU PgCert would be eligible for entry with advanced standing and as a result would be awarded four module credits (corresponding to 60 MODCAT points). Hence in effect UAD recognises the NCU Course of Study as accredited prior learning (APL), equivalent to the PgCert stage of the MSc at UAD. The audit team was advised that the NCU PgCert exists solely to enable students to enter UAD with advanced standing. The team also learnt that for some students on the MSc IT programme the articulation has involved transfer into the second part of several 'double modules'. The Commentary defined a double module as a '30 credit module which runs over two semesters'. In order to facilitate the transition into the double modules UAD initially approved a programme specific regulation, which has subsequently been rescinded (see paragraph 55).

11 To date there have been five intakes to the two Combined study programmes. For the MSc IT 23 students started the NCU course of study in April 2002, of whom 19 progressed to UAD for semester 2 and 14 achieved the full MSc. For the fourth cohort 25 students were admitted to NCU in April 2005, with 24 of these students progressing to semester 1. For the MSc Internet Computing, 33 students started the NCU course in April 2002, of whom 26 progressed to UAD for semester 2 and 26 achieved the full MSc. 29 students were admitted in Cohort 4 with 26 progressing to semester 1. In total across both programmes, 50 students progressed to UAD in January 2006.

12 NCU is located in Nanchang, the capital city of Jiangxi province. Founded in 1940 it operates within the regulatory framework laid down by the Ministry of Education of China

and the provincial government of Jiangxi Province. NCU is one of the Project 211 universities selected for priority funding. It has over 2,800 full-time teaching staff and more than 42,000 students at various levels including master's and doctoral levels. Spread across five campuses there are 15 schools with 63 departments covering a range of specialities including arts, science, engineering, agriculture and medicine. NCU has over 20 research centres and a number of well-established international relationships, cooperating with around 30 HEIs in over 20 countries. There was evidence of significant capital development at NCU and at the time of the audit visit the Course of Study was being re-located to a new campus. The Commentary stated that prior to the establishment of the link, 'an evaluation of the courses already taught at NCU showed that the necessary subject expertise was well established'.

13 Outside Europe UAD has one other overseas collaborative arrangement in Malaysia. In the Commentary, UAD stated that this articulation is 'slightly unusual' as the Course of Study was created specifically for the purpose of articulation and the students transfer mid-session. Senior staff at the University told the audit team that this link is in keeping with UAD's International Strategy and is now regarded by UAD as 'best practice' on which to base future collaborative agreements. Hence, this model of 'enhanced articulation' was being adopted in other areas of the University.

The UK institution's approach to overseas collaborative provision

14 UAD maintains a comprehensive record of its collaborative arrangements in the form of a register. At a meeting with senior staff the audit team was informed that it is the responsibility of the Deputy University Secretary to keep this record up to date. The MoA states that UAD, 'retains full and ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of the programme of study...', and that NCU, 'retains full and ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of its Course of Study...'. Both MSc

programmes are subject to UAD's Academic regulations, quality assurance and quality enhancement procedures.

15 In terms of the Course of Study, the Commentary stated that UAD 'has no direct qualitative or academic control over the Course of Study offered at NCU'. However, the English language component of the course (semester 0) is assessed and certified by UAD, with its successful completion being necessary for entry to semester 1. The supplementary cooperation agreement specifies that in order to strengthen and support the programme during the NCU delivery stage, UAD will arrange for tutors to provide academic support and teaching and to assist with the preparation and delivery of teaching materials and offer on-line teaching material to students. Staff at NCU confirmed that, in order to ensure that the NCU students achieve the same learning objectives as those studying in Dundee, UAD provide the curriculum, as well as some of the teaching materials and much of the assessment materials for the NCU Course of Study. Consequently and noting UAD's considerable input, this report comments on UAD's monitoring of the quality of the arrangements pertaining to the NCU Course of Study, in relation to its articulation with UAD's MSc programmes.

16 At the time of the audit visit UAD was revising its Collaboration Policy and associated procedures to reflect the University's current and future intentions for collaborative activity and to ensure that the Policy and procedures were informed by the most recent revisions to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. UAD senior staff told the audit team that the main aspects of the institutional and programme approval procedures remain as they were when this link was approved. The team was provided with draft versions of relevant revised documents and were informed that it was likely that pending Senate approval the revised procedures would become fully operational from session 2006-07. The team also noted that the previously named Committee for Academic Quality and Standards (CASQ) has now been replaced by the Quality Assurance Committee

(QAC) and the Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC).

17 In the case of overseas collaborations the aims of the new Collaboration Policy include: to generate additional business for the University which is capable of supporting the pursuit of the University's mission; to facilitate a greater cultural awareness and understanding throughout the University through the interaction of staff and students from different backgrounds; and in an extra-European context to provide opportunities for students to access a British education experience in a cost-effective manner thereby increasing the number of students able to afford the experience. The Policy defines collaborative activity as 'a relationship between the University of Abertay Dundee and another institution through which an academic award of the University may be granted to a student of, or associated with, that other institution. The award may be gained by a programme of study at another institution or through an articulation arrangement between the University and the institution in which the student completes his/her studies at the University'.

18 Collaborative links must be approved by Senate in accordance with the University's revised Procedures for the Approval of Collaborative Links. This notes that the procedure for approval consists of four parts: the identification of suitable partners and preliminary explorations; the assessment of the quality and standards of the proposed collaboration; development of the Business Model; Senate Approval and the preparation of a legally binding Agreement between the participating institutions. The first stage requires a proposal to be submitted to Planning and Resources Committee which subsequently makes a recommendation to Senate. According to UAD's procedures this proposal should be informed by both the results of at least one visit to the prospective partner institution by an advisory panel comprising senior University staff and subject specialists and evidence from third parties such as the British Council and QAA reports on similar collaborative arrangements.

Responsibility for deciding on whether a proposal proceeds to the next stage of development rests with Senate. If Senate approves further development of a proposal then QAC and Planning and Resources Committee both consider the implications for the University's Risk Register and inform Senate accordingly. At this stage a preliminary memorandum may be signed.

19 During stage two, QAC is responsible for advising Senate on the academic standards and quality aspects of the proposed collaboration. The approval of a collaboration will normally proceed in parallel with the approval of the delivery of one or more programmes. During stage three, Planning and Resources Committee is responsible for advising Senate on the business and legal aspects of the proposed collaboration. In the final stage Senate makes a decision regarding approval, taking into account the advice received from Planning and Resources Committee and QAC. Once the proposal has the approval of Senate, a legally binding agreement setting out the rights and obligations of the partners is signed.

20 QAC has overall responsibility for monitoring the standards and quality of all UAD awards, including those associated with collaborative arrangements, and reports to Senate. Oversight of this monitoring is devolved to the Collaborative Provision Task Group of QAC, which has a responsibility for monitoring the quality assurance aspects of collaborative provision including the identification of potential standards issues.

21 Key to UAD's arrangements for operational oversight of collaborative activities is the delegation of responsibility to the sponsoring school or, where the collaboration involves subjects from more than one school, the lead school. At school level all programmes or courses are overseen by a course or programme executive, which is responsible to QAC and QEC through the relevant School Executive and Head of School.

22 The audit team concluded that in general UAD's policies and procedures underpinning the management of collaborative arrangements are appropriate and broadly reflect the precepts of Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. However, in relation to this link the team considered that there was scope for development in one or two areas as indicated elsewhere in this report.

Public information, publicity and promotional activity

23 The MoA stipulates that UAD retains the responsibility for overseeing the accuracy of publicity and marketing material relating to the programmes leading to UAD awards and requires NCU to seek approval from UAD in advance of publication. In terms of general UAD procedures, oversight of promotional material is now under the control of the Business Development Office but was previously regulated by the Vice-Principal (Academic Development).

24 NCU has the responsibility for marketing the programmes and advertising costs in China. The publicity material reviewed by the audit team accurately reflected the link between UAD and NCU and had been approved by UAD. NCU advertises its semester 0 course as a Pre-MSc English Language preparatory programme with guaranteed entry on successful completion to the PgCert stage, and semester 1 as a PgCert offered by NCU, 'according to the syllabus of the University of Abertay Dundee'.

25 In general, UAD's approach to the provision of public information, including maintenance of an authoritative record of collaborative provision and control of publicity and promotional activity is fit for its purpose and reflects the precepts of the *Code of practice*. The procedure for oversight of promotional and publicity materials is clearly and consistently set out in the MoA.

Formal arrangements for establishing the link

Selecting and approving the partner institution

26 As noted above approval of collaborative links are the responsibility of Senate and all links must be approved by a four-stage process. In considering the approval of collaborative links Senate requires assurance that the educational objectives of the partner institution are compatible with those of the University and that appropriate due diligence enquiries have been carried out. For collaborations outside of the UK this includes the need to evaluate the implications of operating within the local legislative and cultural context. QAC is responsible for considering the compatibility of educational objectives, while Planning and Resources Committee leads on the due diligence aspects. Recent developments in this area include the introduction of a checklist for the due diligence assessment of a potential partner organisation.

27 Initial contact between the partners was established through the initiative of the UAD Sino-Scottish Institute established in 1994 and the first visit to UAD in October 1999 included the Deputy Governor of Jiangxi Province and NCU representatives. A Letter of Intent was signed in June 2000 followed by a MoA in September 2002 establishing the articulation arrangements for the two programmes. In May 2004 the Supplementary Agreement, revising the enrolment quotas and tuition fees and setting out the further support that would be offered by UAD tutors to NCU was signed.

28 Following the Letter of Intent in June 2000, UAD staff, including the Deputy Principal, visited Nanchang in January 2001. In February 2001 Planning and Resources Committee considered a paper concerning a proposal for articulation with two postgraduate programmes, namely the PgDip/MSc IT and the PgDip/MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing). In August 2001 the Planning and Resources Committee approved the proposal to

proceed to the next stage subject to satisfactory completion of due diligence checks. These were carried out by the Depute Principal and included discussions with the Head of the Education Section in the Chinese Embassy in London and the local Director of the British Council. Approval was granted from the Academic Degree Commission of the State Council of the PRC. In December 2001 CASQ agreed that the proposal should proceed to an approval event. The audit team noted that the approval visit was only to consider articulation with the PgDip/MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing) (see paragraph 32).

29 The formal approval visit was made to NCU in January 2002. The advisory team included an external subject specialist as well as senior staff from the University and representatives of CASQ. The advisory team was asked to advise CASQ on a number of matters including: the suitability of NCU as a partner institution; the academic standing of the NCU awards underpinning the PgCert stage; the quality assurance mechanisms that would be used by NCU to validate its PgCert programme; the resource base and capability of the College of Computer and Information to deliver its PgCert programme and the procedures for ensuring that the standards of the NCU PgCert was calibrated with those of the equivalent qualification at UAD.

30 The advisory team recommended approval of the proposed collaboration with the following conditions: the UAD programme team should make available the on-line teaching materials available to students on its own PgCert certificate programme to students studying for the certificate at NCU and should ensure that such materials are available for all four modules at the PgCert level; in parallel to the significant investments being made in computing and IT facilities to support the collaboration NCU should be asked to provide the University with details of its plan for the enhancement of library provision; the UAD programme leader must submit to CASQ detailed evaluative reports on student performance after having reviewed the terminal

assessments on the NCU PgCert and the comparative performance of Chinese students entering by means of advanced entry with those undertaking the entire programme at UAD at both stage 2 and stage 3. The advisory team also made a number of recommendations covering induction, communication and contact and management of the collaboration. The advisory team report was considered by CASQ in February 2002 and final approval was recommended to Senate subject to completion of the first two conditions by May 2002. In February 2002, Senate supported the recommendation.

31 In the view of the audit team UAD's procedures for selecting and approving the partner institution at the time this link was established were fit for purpose, and included appropriate due diligence and risk assessment elements. Through reading the advisory team report and tracking its consideration by UAD central committees the team arrived at the view that institutional approval of the link with NCU complied with the then relevant procedures. The team noted that UAD has subsequently revised its procedures for partnership approval partly in response to publication of the revised section 2 of the *Code of practice*.

Programme approval

32 While the programme approval process for collaborative and distance learning programmes is essentially the same as for any programme, QAC normally requires Programme Approval Advisory Panels (PAAPs) to address the issues identified in the 'The Approval of Collaborative Programmes and Distance Learning Programmes' paper. For collaborative programmes, a site visit will normally be required to consider resource issues and to meet with the programme team if they cannot visit Dundee. In this respect the approval of a collaborative partnership may proceed in parallel with the approval of the delivery of one or more programmes. The University notes within the paper that it 'takes into account Section 2 of the [QAA] Code of Practice, which addresses collaborative provision and distance learning'. The Programme Approval

Task group reporting to QAC manages the programme approval process. Recommendations regarding final approval of a programme go to Senate through QAC.

33 A formal Proposal paper covering articulation into both the MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing) and the MSc IT was submitted to CASQ in December 2001, having previously been considered by Planning and Resources Committee. Approval to proceed with an advisory visit covered the PgDip/MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing) only. The audit team noted that in their report the advisory team had stated, 'that while there appeared to be significant opportunities for the further development of the collaboration in the area of information technology, their visit was designed only to consider the articulation of the NCU PgCert in Software Engineering with Abertay's Modular Masters programme in Software Engineering (Internet Computing)'. Hence the requirements for articulation into the MSc IT were not considered.

34 During the visit to NCU in January 2002 the advisory team discussed with the NCU course team the details of the UAD modules making up the PgCert stage of the MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing), as well as the content of modules taught at undergraduate and postgraduate levels at NCU, noting the availability of relevant expertise at NCU. While the report of the approval visit noted that, 'the content of the postgraduate certificate was a matter for Nanchang University,' it also noted that NCU was 'happy to adopt the [Abertay] syllabus'. Agreement was reached with NCU to add one additional module in the area of applied mathematics, which would help meet the academic requirements of NCU. Following Senate approval in February 2002, the first intake to the NCU Course of Study was in April 2002.

35 Different procedures appear to have pertained to the approval of articulation into the MSc IT. In July 2002, a further proposal was submitted to CASQ regarding articulation into the MSc IT, from the NCU Course of Study.

CASQ noted that this articulation was 'the same' as that already approved by Senate in February 2002 in relation to MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing) and recommended approval by Senate, which was granted in July 2002. The first cohort of students had been admitted to NCU in April 2002 onto the English Language programme, and while not required to take subject specific modules in semester 0, the entry requirements for progression to the MSc IT are different from those for MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing) and the audit team heard from students at NCU that they decide on their specialisms at the outset of the course. The audit team formed the view that this approval could be seen as retrospective.

36 In addition the proposal to CASQ in July 2002 highlighted the potentially difficult issue of articulation midway through one double module on the MSc IT, the solution to address this being that students from NCU would take two single (one semester long) modules, equivalent to the double module, taking the first single module at NCU and the second after progression to UAD. The proposal paper also noted that during 2002-03 the MSc IT would be revised for the purposes of SCQF Level 11 compliance.

37 The MSc programmes were existing approved programmes of UAD. A comprehensive programme specification exists for each of the MSc programmes. For the MSc IT only, this contains NCU specific information, including the programme specific regulations relating to APL. In line with the University's own view and from the evidence presented the audit team believe articulation into double modules for the students on the MSc IT has caused difficulties, some of which have been temporarily but not fully resolved by the introduction of programme specific regulations such as the awarding of part credit. In the view of the team a full approval event for the MSc IT may have led to a wider discussion of this issue. Having now proposed that from January 2006 NCU students will again study single modules only, the University may wish to continue to

keep the issue under close review, particularly to ensure the equivalence of student experience.

38 In general the audit team considers that the UAD's procedures for programme approval are appropriate and aligned to the *Code of practice*. Where and how the decision not to consider the articulation into the MSc IT at the same time as the MSc Software Engineering (Internet Computing) was made is not clarified in the minutes of relevant committees made available to the team, particularly as the original proposal covered both programmes. In the view of the team the approval of the arrangements for articulation into the MSc IT appear to deviate from the UAD stated procedure, particularly as the advisory team had explicitly stated that they were not considering the MSc IT programme at the time of their visit. The team also formed the view that the issues raised in the proposal document (see paragraph 35) were likely to raise issues not considered during the original approval visit. The timing of the approval could also be viewed as retrospective. The University may wish to give consideration to how it ensures that the approval of all collaborative programmes adhere to its stated procedures, thereby ensuring timely consideration of all major issues.

Written agreements with the partner institution

39 In its document, 'Procedures for the Approval of Collaborative Links', the University outlines the requirements for a formal MoA to cover the following: identification of the parties and their legal status; the duration of the agreement and the terms under which it is established; the financial obligations of the parties and the disbursement of costs and revenues; the responsibilities of the partners to each other and to the relevant students; the existence of appropriate extant or future annexes which detail the specific arrangements for particular aspects of collaboration for example, a particular degree; the arrangements for protecting the interests of students in the event of the collaborative link being broken;

dispute resolution and any special features of operating the collaboration resulting from the particular partner, the geographical location or method of delivery. The applicable law will also be stipulated. The MoA relating to this partnership is in line with UAD's requirements.

40 The MoA identifies the responsibilities of both parties and required notification of not less than one academic year for termination by either party. It also recognises an obligation to students in the case of termination, although how this obligation would be met is not made explicit. Senior UAD staff confirmed that they accepted their 'duty of care' if the agreement was terminated, and that arrangements would be put in place to ensure that students who had started on the NCU Course of Study could complete their Combined study programme. UAD procedures require that the operational arrangements of a collaboration are described by a procedures manual which complements the written MoA. The procedures manual for this collaboration, which is appended to the MoA, outlines the various arrangements governing the operation of the programmes, including programme management, contact and communication details.

41 The MoA also specifies the arrangements for changes to the programme of study, stating that UAD may seek to vary or amend the programme of study from time to time and that, 'NCU will implement such variations or amendments to their Course to ensure that students are appropriately qualified to enter the UAD's programme with advanced standing'. The MoA does not clarify under what circumstances and how NCU might seek to instigate changes to its Course of study, which in light of the statement in the Commentary that, 'decisions on content, presentation, pedagogy and academic standards are entirely under the control of NCU academic staff and management', seemed to the audit team to be an omission.

42 A supplementary Co-operation Agreement was drawn up shortly after graduation of the first cohort in May 2004. The audit team learnt that it was intended to

strengthen cooperation by increasing the planned intake capacity and forging closer links, particularly by formalising reciprocal staff visits.

43 The audit team concluded that the MoA, including the Procedures Manual and the supplementary Co-operation Agreement are generally clear, comprehensive and fit for purpose and consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Quality management of the link

Management of the link

44 At senior levels there has been significant communication and interaction during the establishment and ongoing development of this collaboration, with reciprocal visits including the President and Vice-President of NCU and the Principal, Vice-Principal and Depute Principal of UAD.

45 At an operational level, the China-Britain Centre was created within the School of Engineering at NCU in September 2002 with the remit to oversee the management and delivery of the Course of Study. The Director of the China-Britain Centre is the primary contact for the Course of Study programme at NCU, together with the NCU English Language coordinator. UAD programme tutors oversee each of the UAD programmes, with one of the UAD programme tutors being designated as the Nanchang programme tutor, thus providing the main point of contact within UAD for the operation of the collaboration. The roles of, and contact details for, the various personnel involved with the oversight of the programmes are outlined in the procedures manual, which governs the operation of the link.

46 The two UAD programme tutors and the EFL Co-ordinator visit annually. Part of the purpose of these visits is for the EFL Co-ordinator to assess the student's English Language proficiency, to develop closer links between the staff of the two partners, including discussion of the operational aspects of the link,

and to meet new students. During the visit UAD staff also deliver a number of workshops and classes in English. The audit team learnt that there is extensive and regular communication between the respective programme tutors and NCU staff, both through the annual programme of visits and through email and phone contact, with the aim of maintaining and enhancing the articulation between the two separate components of the programme.

47 In line with UAD requirements an annual report is prepared by the programme tutor for each MSc programme. These reports are approved by the School Executive and contain specific commentary relating to the NCU students. UAD require an annual School report and plan to be submitted through QAC to Senate. For this link there is a specific requirement to report on the achievements of NCU students, thus fulfilling a condition of approval (see paragraph 29). Although the audit team heard from staff at NCU that there is currently no formal requirement for them to provide a report to UAD on their experience of operating the Course of Study, the team felt that there may be merit in UAD inviting NCU to provide such an annual commentary in the future.

48 In accordance with the MoA student admission onto the pre-MSc (semester 0) component of the Course of Study is initially managed by NCU, who check that applicants fulfil the published entry requirements. Admission to semester 1 of the Course of Study requires successful completion of the English Language component of the course, which is assessed and certified by UAD. Students have to formally apply to UAD at a later date in a separate process, when the students' first degrees are scrutinised by UAD. UAD make available to NCU information regarding the NCU students' progression and achievement. NCU keep student information pertaining to the Course of Study, while UAD are responsible for student records relating to the Programme of Study.

49 UAD operates a class representative system and programme tutors at UAD ensure

that some of the class representatives on the two MSc programmes are students who have progressed from NCU. These representatives sit on the programme executive.

Arrangements for monitoring and review

Annual Monitoring

50 UAD's arrangements for the production and approval of annual reports are set out in the document, Annual Academic Reports and Plans. Schools within UAD produce an annual report for each programme, which are considered by the School Executive and by QAC's Annual Report Task group. For collaborative programmes UAD's expectation is that its collaborative partners, 'will be required to submit reports and plans on activities that impinge on the operation of their partnership with the University'. The Collaborative Provision Task Group of QAC has a responsibility for advising QAC on annual reports on collaborative activity. UAD Schools also produce a composite annual School report and plan which is submitted through QAC to Senate.

51 The audit team was provided with copies of the 2003-04 and 2004-05 annual reports for the MSc Programmes. These reports covered the areas set out in UAD's programme report template including, for example, a discussion of recruitment/admissions, student performance and progression, teaching, learning and assessment, student feedback, resources, external examiners reports and an action plan. There was also specific commentary relating to the NCU students, for example intake, induction, outcomes, issues arising during the MSc programme and action taken. The report for the MSc IT 2004-05 discussed the introduction of new 'double modules' but there was no mention of the NCU students in relation to this issue. While the audit team heard from staff at NCU that they have no formal input into the UAD annual monitoring process, during the annual visit in August staff from UAD discuss the operation of the Course of

Study with the staff at NCU and this discussion provides input into the annual reports. The Director of the China-Britain Centre is also sent a copy of the report.

52 The School also produces a report relating specifically to the NCU programme. The interim report is produced after the first semester at UAD with a final report being produced in May. The interim report is submitted at the same time as the School's annual report and plan, the latter being commented on by QAC's Collaborative Provision Task Group. The audit team was given copies of the various reports dated June 2003, March 2005, May 2005 and March 2006. The earliest report, as required as a condition of approval, concentrated on the performance of students at NCU during the PgCert stage of the programme, comparing standards to those achieved by their counterparts at UAD. The scope of later reports is wider but concentrates predominantly on issues arising following NCU students' progression to UAD.

53 The programme team views the annual monitoring process as effective and considers it as part of the formal recording of regular ongoing quality enhancement. The audit team saw clear evidence of effective reporting of NCU student performance, albeit largely following progression to UAD. The additional report produced by the School provides useful, additional data for the ongoing quality assurance of the collaboration. As mentioned earlier (see paragraph 46) UAD may wish to consider the benefits of inviting NCU to provide an annual commentary on their experience of operating the Course of Study, which may further enhance the ongoing monitoring of the articulation arrangements. In general the team supports the view of the programme team that UAD's procedures for annual monitoring are appropriate and effective.

Periodic review

54 UAD's framework for quality assurance and quality enhancement includes a combined subject and programme review process which is managed by the Subject and Programme

Review Task Group of QAC. Procedures are set out in the University's 'Combined Subject and Programme Review' handbook. Reviews are carried out on a five-year cycle according to a schedule approved by Senate. The review process addresses programmes taught both in the UAD and by partner institutions. Both MSc programmes were reviewed as part of the Subject and Programme Review of Computing in 2002-03 and for the introduction of the University's revised modular scheme in 2004-05. For the MSc IT this was a substantial review undertaken to ensure compliance with the SCQF, Level 11.

55 Reviews are a two-stage process. The first stage considers the self-evaluation document (SED) and the second stage considers the revised programme specification and the quality development plan. The School Executive manages the development of the SED by the programme team and the internal Review Panel members meet with the subject team to discuss the revised programme specifications and the development plan. Progress against these plans is monitored by the University's annual reporting process and is reported in the Annual School report.

56 During 2002-03 the MSc IT programme comprised six single (15 credit) modules and one double (30 credit) module for students studying entirely at UAD, with students progressing from the first cohort at NCU studying the double module as two single modules. Following the review of the MSc IT in 2003-04 in preparation for the introduction of UAD's revised modular scheme, the PgDip stage of the programme at UAD comprised four double modules. Through the minutes of QAC and Senate the audit team was able to track discussion regarding the impact of changes to the NCU students and in particular the issue of double modules was raised. After referral of a proposal to accommodate the articulation in March 2004, QAC agreed to support a revised proposal from the School in May 2004 which in essence proposed the calibration of assessment instruments between NCU and UAD, UAD moderation of NCU marking and specified the

proportion of a double module grade which could be awarded by NCU. The requirement for a programme specific regulation to allow the APL of a part-module was noted. QAC's recommendations were subsequently agreed by Senate, which also approved the programme specific regulation, which in the view of the audit team was always likely to provide a temporary but unsatisfactory solution to the issue of articulation part-way through a module. The team learnt that this approval has now been rescinded by Senate and that NCU students now only study on single modules (see paragraph 37).

57 In the view of the audit team, UAD's procedures for combined programme and subject review are generally fit for purpose. However while the rationale for introducing additional double modules into the MSc IT programme to meet the needs of the SCQF Level 11 initially appeared appropriate, the team concluded that the full effect of this change on the partnership was not adequately thought through, as evidenced by the fact that the stated articulation arrangements for NCU students have varied in each of the academic years 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 (proposed).

Staffing and staff development

58 The MoA states that NCU is responsible for ensuring the 'appropriate provision of staff to enable the course of study to be taught in accordance with, so far as it is necessary, the UAD's requirements'. The audit team was told that the details of the expertise of NCU academic staff were considered during the Approval visit. The team heard that local staff selected to teach on the NCU programme were experienced and well qualified, with experience of teaching similar programmes at NCU. They undergo regular review and appraisal through student feedback. The team was not made aware of any requirement for NCU to inform UAD of changes to staff teaching on the Course of Study, but noted that to date the link had benefited from a very stable course team at NCU.

59 The Approval visit recommended that, 'a formal programme of regular visits by the programme leader at Abertay to Nanchang University should be put into place, perhaps to coincide with opportunities to lecture on the Nanchang programme and to be involved in the setting and moderation of assessments'. The supplementary agreement formalised this noting that 'in order to strengthen and support the programme during the NCU delivery stage, UAD will arrange for tutors to provide academic support and teaching to Nanchang University'. Each August the visiting UAD tutors provide input into student sessions as well as running a number of workshops for NCU staff. These workshops have focused on a number of topics, for example, the comparison of teaching styles, the tutorial process and grading standards. In August 2005 the workshops focussed on a recorded panel discussion involving six former students, allowing the exploration of different teaching and learning styles. The Commentary reinforced the success of the workshops delivered during the annual visits indicating that they raise awareness for NCU staff of the 'western-style' of teaching and learning as well as exposing students to subject specific content in English and enhancing their study skills.

60 Each year NCU staff prepare their teaching plans outlining the intended delivery and assessment of their modules. These are discussed during the annual visit of UAD staff and subsequent follow up takes place by email. Cohort results are also discussed including issues arising from the performance of NCU students on progression to UAD. The audit team saw evidence of ongoing email communication between UAD and NCU staff concerning teaching and learning issues.

61 A programme of extended NCU staff visits to UAD commenced in February 2004, timed to accompany new NCU students progressing to UAD, and allowing a stay of two to three weeks to observe classes and meet UAD staff. The Commentary stated that NCU staff found this useful and 'are evaluating how to transfer some of the methods used to their own teaching'. The audit team heard from staff

at NCU that all NCU staff involved with the link have now visited UAD and reported that the visits worked well, allowing the two-way interchange of ideas and experience.

62 UAD considered the level of contact between subject staff in the two partners as a model of good practice. In the view of the audit team the arrangements for ongoing staff development directly relating to the enhancement of this link and regular formal and informal staff contact are a positive feature of this partnership.

Student admissions

63 Requirements for the admission and recruitment of students are set out in the MoA. All applicants undergo an initial English Language proficiency test, which is set and assessed by NCU. Applicants must also satisfy UAD minimum entry requirements for the relevant programme as defined in the programme specifications; for the MSc Internet Computing applicants must hold a good first degree in computing and for the MSc IT they must hold a good first degree in a subject other than computing. In addition while the satisfactory completion of the NCU Course of Study normally entitles students to enter the MSc programmes with advanced standing, the MoA states that, 'UAD retains the responsibility for and discretion in the admission of students to the Programme of Study'.

64 Students selected by NCU are required to complete an application form for UAD at a later date, and the applicants' first degrees are scrutinised by UAD during the process. On successful completion of the semester 0 English Language programme at NCU students' applications are processed at UAD and students are given conditional offers. At this stage each student is allocated a Student ID number and email account for access to UAD on-line learning resources, including access to the virtual library. This affords students at NCU access to educational resources during semester 1 commensurate with those available to students at UAD. Following successful completion of semester 1 NCU students are

made unconditional offers by UAD. UAD staff provide guidance on the completion of application forms during their visit to NCU in August. NCU facilitate the preparation of official documentation, and assist in the application for a UK entry visa.

65 In its Commentary, UAD noted its requirement for applicants to postgraduate programmes to have attained a minimum International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.0. According to the Commentary, when assessed in August, only about 60 per cent of the NCU students have achieved IELTS 6.0 or better. Students, who score between IELTS 5.5 and 6.0, however, are allowed to continue to semester 1 studying English for 10 hours per week alongside semester 1 modules and do an additional placement test when arriving in Dundee. The audit team learnt that almost all students have by then improved to IELTS 6.0.

66 UAD's requirements for APL are set out in its academic regulations. In the case of this link UAD had approved, but later rescinded, for the MSc IT programme a specific regulation allowing APL of a part-module to facilitate the progression of students into the second half of a double module (see paragraphs 36 and 55).

67 In addition Senate has explicitly approved the UAD exit award of PgDip for NCU students. Where NCU students exit with a PgDip award they have only completed 50 per cent of the programme for which they gained direct entry at UAD, the APL needed to facilitate this being higher than normally allowed at master's level. This regulation applies to both programmes and is noted in Annex B of the UAD's Academic Regulations and the Programme Specification of the MSc IT. There is no equivalent statement in the programme specification for the MSc Internet Computing and the University may wish to ensure that these requirements are stated consistently in the two programme specifications.

68 In the Commentary the University stated that the selection process is working well as the students selected by NCU do fulfil the UAD

requirements and show a high success rate on the programme, albeit this has improved over time as discussed in the reports received by QAC through the School annual reporting process. In general the evidence presented supports that view, and the audit team noted the considerable input of UAD into various stages of the Course of Study, including the assessment of the English language element of the NCU programme and the need for students to formally apply to UAD before final acceptance onto the programme for study. In the view of the team the admissions process applied to this collaboration is fit for its purpose and reflects the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Assurance of academic standards

Assessment of students

69 The MoA set out the responsibilities of the individual parties regarding assessment. It establishes that UAD's responsibility for ensuring that the relevant procedures relating to the assessment of students on its Programme of Study, which include the establishment of regulations and procedures for appeals against decisions, discipline, the membership and conduct of assessment boards and the appointment of external examiners, are in place and appropriately implemented. NCU is responsible for ensuring similar procedures are in place for the assessment of students on its Course of Study. In accordance with the MoA the NCU Course of Study is assessed in English, although it is delivered in Chinese with some usage of technical terms in English.

70 The semester 0 English Language course, while taught by staff at NCU, is assessed by the EFL tutor from UAD, who communicates the results of the assessments to NCU prior to the start of semester 1. UAD semester 1 assessment material is made available to NCU and NCU is encouraged to make use of this to provide an equivalent student experience. Staff at NCU also informed the audit team that internal

moderation of their marking takes place through the UAD tutors. This is in line with the School's proposal to QAC in May 2004 that, 'any assessments set in Nanchang unless identical to assessment set at UAD will be moderated by the corresponding module deliverers at UAD', thus reinforcing the audit team's view that UAD's input into the NCU Course of Study is substantial.

71 The Commentary stated that, 'where a UAD programme uses double modules straddling semesters 1 and 2 students undertake relatively more of the PgDip stage assessment at UAD itself as they participate in at least 75% of the (end-loaded) assessment of the whole module'. It also stated that, in the case of this collaboration, 'as the final award is based solely on the work carried out at UAD there is no difference in standards between this and other awards offered by UAD, or indeed between the standards of awards for students on the NCU or on the standard UAD MSc IT'. The programme specification for the MSc IT further states that, 'all assessments set in semesters 2 and 3 will be designed carefully in order not to disadvantage students who completed the NCU Course of Study. For example they will not directly assess detailed material covered only in semester 1'.

72 Students who met with the audit team confirmed that they had met with a range of assessment methods across all elements of the Combined programme of study. Those that had progressed to the University informed the team that in one module they started an assessment in NCU, building on it after progression to UAD. Staff at NCU informed the team that students on double modules undertake the same assessments as UAD students, during the first semester, online. While this assessment is graded for the NCU Certificate element of the programme it is not carried forward to UAD as part of the overall master's award. The team heard from staff at UAD that this is in keeping with students studying wholly at UAD who do not normally receive summative grades at the end of semester 1, unless they exit with a PgCert award, when grades are given.

73 The results of semester 1 are communicated to UAD by NCU. UAD comment on the performance of the NCU students through the annual reporting process and NCU are kept informed of student progress at UAD. The Commentary stated that in the first year of operation it became apparent that the grades given by NCU were better than those being given by UAD for the same modules. Subsequently this has been a focus of a staff workshop. UAD assessment boards are held in accordance with University regulations.

74 In the view of the audit team the arrangements for assessment in general were appropriate, although UAD's input into the assessment process at NCU, including the provision of assessment instruments and moderation of marking appears to go beyond the approach articulated in the Commentary that UAD has 'no direct qualitative or academic control over the NCU course of study'. However, the audit team also formed the view that this additional input benefits the ongoing monitoring of the appropriateness of the NCU PgCert for articulation with UAD's MSc programmes.

External examining

75 External examiners for all UAD programmes are appointed by Senate on the recommendation of QAC. The UAD External Examiners' Handbook outlines the role and expectations of external examiners, and the requirements for induction and liaison with the appropriate school. The Head of School is responsible for the induction of new external examiners and is also responsible for ensuring that external examiners receive feedback as a consequence of issues raised in their reports.

76 The audit team noted that as this was an articulation arrangement there was no requirement for external examiners in relation to the Course of Study and while, as with all UAD appointed external examiners, the externals for the MSc programmes are asked to comment on the calibration of standards of assessment at UAD with equivalent programmes within the sector there is no requirement for them to comment on the NCU students specifically.

77 On receipt, external examiners' reports are scrutinised by the University Secretariat before being copied to the Vice Principal and Deputy Principal, Head of School and SCCT Director of Academic Programmes. They are also considered in detail by the External Task Group of the QAC. External examiners' reports are considered by the separate programme annual reports. The audit team saw copies of external examiners reports relating to 2003-04 and 2004-05 for both MSc programmes. Both externals confirmed that standards were appropriate. The external examiner for the MSc Internet Computing has noted the difficulty that NCU students have experienced with writing the master's dissertation. No mention was made within the report for MSc IT of any issues relating to student articulation part way through a double module.

78 With the exception of the Director of the China-Britain Centre, staff at NCU had not seen any external examiners reports relating to the UAD programmes. As a general comment the University may wish to consider whether further, direct exposure of NCU teaching staff to the external examiners' comments and reports on the MSc programmes may be beneficial to the ongoing development and enhancement of this partnership.

79 In the view of the audit team UAD's procedures for the appointment of external examiners and for consideration of their reports is generally effective, although not directly applicable in case of this articulation.

Certificates and transcripts

80 The MoA states that the UAD is responsible for the conferment of PgDip and master's awards and the production of award certificates. Students are awarded an NCU PgCert on completion of semester 1. The audit team saw samples of these certificates, which record a grade against each module studied at NCU. The students are also awarded credits at the appropriate level for those components of study that have been completed successfully at NCU.

81 The University provided examples of the certificate and transcripts that students receive

on successful completion of the programmes at UAD. The transcript clearly stated the modules studied, grade obtained and language of study, for modules studied at UAD. The audit team noted that while the transcripts recorded the NCU Course of Study as APL the place of study was not specified. The team was told that this issue was being considered with a view to including NCU on the transcript and would urge UAD to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

Quality of information and support for students

Student information and support arrangements

Student information

82 An annual open lecture supported by staff from UAD to publicise the potential for studying in UAD takes place in NCU in October of the year preceding the start of the programme. Students who met with the audit team commented that these presentations were very useful and were well attended. Students are recruited from both NCU and other Chinese universities, although the majority are from NCU and Jiangxi Province. Applicants in the final year of their undergraduate studies constitute the majority, but graduates with appropriate experience are also encouraged to apply.

83 The audit team was provided with a copy of the brochure produced by the NCU China-Britain Centre promoting the Combined Programmes of Study and the link between NCU and UAD. The NCU student handbook was not available in English. The brochure described a joint programme with the first year of study at NCU and the second at UAD. For the MSc IT it also indicates that the first part of several modules will be studied at NCU and the second part at UAD but does not specifically explain the issue of articulation into double modules. Some of the students who met with the audit team were aware of the existence of double modules but did not view the arrangements as problematic.

84 The audit team also saw examples of student handbooks for the UAD MSc Programmes. The handbooks included relevant information on the School and the two MSc programmes. Students also receive a pre-arrival handbook prior to progressing to UAD. Students who met with the team confirmed that the information they had received was adequate and accurate.

85 Students undertaking semesters 2 and 3 at UAD have the same rights of complaint and appeal as other UAD students, the latter being described within UAD's Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures approved by the University Court.

86 The MoA states that in terms of student support, 'NCU is responsible for arrangements in connection with and for the welfare of students on the course of study. UAD is responsible for arrangements in connection with and for the welfare of students enrolled on the programme of study'. The audit team learnt that support for students studying at NCU during semesters 0 and 1 is generally provided through the Director of the China-Britain Centre for academic and pastoral issues and through individual module tutors for academic issues. Nonetheless, it also heard that UAD is involved in providing support in a number of ways during delivery of the Course of Study at NCU, including meeting students in August during the annual staff visits. During semester 1 NCU students have remote access to UAD learning resources including their virtual learning environment, on-line teaching material and library facilities which includes appropriate journals, inter-library loans, together with access to the NCU full library and IT facilities for the duration of their study.

87 Following the students' progression to UAD, day-to-day student support is provided by the programme and year tutors, supported by the Director of Academic Programmes. Each student has an academic tutor to provide individual pastoral support and the students meet with their tutor at least once per semester. The Commentary stated that a major role of the tutor is to minimise the detrimental

effect of any personal mitigating circumstances. Students who met with the audit team confirmed that they meet with their academic tutor at the outset of their time at UAD and that the support provided is helpful and effective.

88 On their arrival in Dundee the Commentary stated that where specific knowledge gaps of students are identified UAD make arrangements for extra classes. The Programme team provided an example of NCU students being provided with a workshop on the Oracle database system which they had not had the opportunity of experiencing at NCU.

89 Subject-specific support is provided by module tutors and MSc tutors provide specialist support for dissertations. The programme team has introduced a number of measures aimed at reducing the initial problems students encounter when undertaking their projects. These include more frequent, smaller deliverables (such as Review of Literature, Methods, and a log book). For NCU students UAD programme teams are considering how to incorporate initial dissertation preparation into the induction programme commencing at NCU. On arrival at UAD students from NCU are enrolled onto a 10-week dissertation writing course. Students who met with the audit team expressed satisfaction with the support available in relation to the MSc dissertation.

90 NCU students benefit from access to wider support through for example the School office and UAD's Student Services. Within Student Services, the international student advisor assists with a number of issues including visa issues. Accommodation and careers advice is also available. Students may receive additional support from the Student Academic Support team on aspects of study skills.

91 Semester 0 of the NCU course is a full-time English language programme. English language support continues in semester 1 of the NCU course with students receiving a minimum of four hours per week of English language tuition. Once at UAD English language support continues through the programme. The majority of students who met

the audit team were positive about the English language support received, both at NCU and at UAD. They welcomed the approach of teaching semester 1 in Chinese and assessing in English, particularly as it coincided with their transition to postgraduate study.

92 From the evidence available to it the audit team considered that there is a comprehensive and effective system of support in place for students, both at NCU and at UAD and that the information they receive is accurate and reliable. Feedback is provided to UAD on the operation of the Course of Study during the UAD staff annual visits.

Student input into quality management

93 As part of its procedures for the approval of collaborative arrangements UAD requires QAC to be assured that appropriate arrangements for student feedback are in place. In the case of this link, the MoA does not stipulate responsibility for ensuring a role for students in feeding back to NCU or UAD on the quality of the Combined Study programme. The Procedures manual states that, 'the procedures for obtaining student feedback during the NCU component of the programme are the responsibility of NCU with NCU providing student feedback information to UAD tutors during their annual visit...!.

94 UAD operates a class representative system and some of the student representatives are students who have progressed from NCU. Representatives are able to raise issues with the programme team at regular meetings. The formal programme executives are held once a semester although informal meetings also occur. Minutes of these meetings were read by the audit team and in relation to the NCU students raised day-to-day issues such as access to their student computing accounts. Students who had progressed to UAD also confirmed that the mechanisms for student representation were effective. Students confirmed that they had raised issues such as the longer-term availability of accommodation, which had been acted upon by UAD.

95 Module and programme questionnaires are used at UAD to gain student feedback and focus groups are also held to gain more detailed feedback. The audit team saw examples of student focus group notes for NCU students studying at UAD. Students were generally positive about the level of support offered by staff but highlighted issues such as study styles, orientation and induction. In the view of the audit team the use of focus groups to elicit feedback from this group of students is a positive addition to the methods already in use by UAD. NCU staff also meet with the NCU student cohort completing the programme during their visits to UAD, allowing an additional feedback opportunity.

96 In the view of the audit team there are appropriate and effective means in place for students to input into the quality assurance of their programmes, both while at NCU and following progression to UAD. The mechanisms in place for gathering and responding to student feedback and the responsiveness of staff to student issues is a positive feature of this partnership.

Student progression to the UK

97 The induction of students from NCU to UAD starts following the English language assessments in NCU in August at the end of semester 0 when the UAD programme tutors present, with the EFL Co-ordinator, a number of workshops and classes to enhance the students' study skills and prepare them for life and study in Dundee. A number of other activities are organised including new students meeting graduates who have returned to China and a day trip with UAD staff. At this point students gain on-line access to UAD resources following successful completion of semester 0. The Commentary also stated that with the development of the link NCU staff have modified their teaching styles to foster more independence in students, with the intention of easing the transition to study in Dundee. At this point students receive a pre-arrival handbook, which contains useful information and essential facts about Dundee, UAD and the programme.

98 During the induction period at UAD a small number of NCU teaching staff accompany NCU students to Dundee. On arrival at UAD the students undertake an orientation programme and induction programme. The induction covers practical advice and help as well as information about the University and its services. Also included is information about the programme and modules, and initial meetings with UAD academic and module tutors. Student feedback indicates that the induction is generally useful but there has been an issue with its timing, to which UAD has responded by ensuring that, in future, induction does not overlap with the academic study of the students. Students who met the audit team in Dundee and NCU felt that they had been well prepared for the transition to UAD, particularly in terms of the curricular content, and that some specific measures had been put into place to ensure that they settled in such as the use of student ambassadors.

99 Students who met with the audit team indicated that they had selected the programme because of the opportunities it provided for progression to UAD and subsequent UK master's-level qualification. English language was seen as an important element of this. Graduates gave examples of where the progression opportunity had enhanced their employment prospects on their return to China. The team also heard that some students from NCU had gone onto PhD study within the UK.

100 Notwithstanding the issue concerning progression into double modules, in the view of the audit team the activities undertaken by UAD to ensure that students progressing from NCU are able to settle in quickly are extensive and effective and a positive feature of this collaboration. The team also noted the enhanced opportunities open to students on completion of the MSc programmes, including employment opportunities and PhD study.

Conclusion

101 In considering the partnership the audit team identified the following positive features:

- good staff links and levels of communication with the NCU staff allowing the interchange of ideas across both Universities (paragraphs 59 to 61)
- the level of preparation of students at NCU for progression to UAD (paragraphs 82, 84, 86, 87 to 89, 97 to 98)
- effective mechanisms for gathering and responding to student feedback (paragraphs 94, 95)
- enhancement of the employability prospects for students studying the programme (paragraph 99).

102 The audit team also identified the following points for consideration by the University:

- a concern that the University's requirements for the approval of collaborative arrangements are not being fully met; for example, the approval of the MSc Information Technology articulation (paragraphs 33, 35)
- a need to continue to keep under close review the articulation arrangements for students on the MSc IT particularly in terms of equivalence of the student experience (paragraphs 36, 37, 56)
- the merits of the University inviting the partner to submit a formal annual report on its experience of operating the Course of Study (paragraphs 48, 53)
- final resolution to issue of transparency of the transcript with regard to the APL credits (paragraph 81).

103 The audit team formed the view that the link in general reflects the Code of practice, published by QAA, but would benefit from consideration of the matters outlined above.

104 The audit team found the Commentary to be frank about the issues which UAD was addressing in relation to this arrangement. However, the team, based on the evidence

presented to it, also considered that UAD has more input and control over the NCU Course of Study than the Commentary suggested, which in many ways additionally demonstrated its oversight of the arrangements for this articulation. In the Commentary the University stated that the decision to enter into this collaborative arrangement was consistent with its strategy of greater external and international collaboration to support teaching and learning activities. It also noted that while there have been a number of issues and areas for improvement that the programme as a whole had been successful, and having been subject to 'significant' internal scrutiny has now reached a point where it was regarded as a 'best practice' model for the University on which to base future collaborative agreements. This being the case the findings of the audit would support a conclusion of confidence in the University's stewardship of academic standards and oversight of the quality of the students experience on its overseas collaborative provision.

Appendix A: University commentary on matters relating to the partnership since the audit

The University of Abertay Dundee takes great pride in its partnership with Nanchang University, which is one of the 'Project 211' institutions of the People's Republic of China, and in having obtained the approval of the Ministry of Education in Beijing for the initial establishment and continuing development of the collaboration based on articulation opportunities for students from the People's Republic of China to come and study in Scotland.

Since the audit visit by QAA, certain minor changes have been made to the disposition of the modules on the two programmes considered by the audit team. Additionally, the University's partners have incorporated an additional week of English language preparation at the end of Semester 1 to prepare students further for their arrival at the University in Dundee.

In the audit report, the QAA audit team identified a number of issues that it would be prudent for the University to attend to in terms of clarifying procedures and practice with respect to the future development of partnership arrangements. The University welcomes this advice. The University also welcomes the many positive observations made by the audit team regarding the management of the collaboration with Nanchang University.

Appendix B: Summary of student numbers in the partnership

At time of writing, 13 students are on the master's stage of the MSc in Information Technology (IT) and the MSc in Internet Computing (IC) (seven and six respectively). A further 36 students (19 for MSc IT and 17 for MSc IC) are awaiting results before progressing to master's stage.

61 students will shortly complete the programme of English language study ('Semester 0' of the Nanchang University Course of Study) and will progress to Semester I of the course depending on the results of their assessments.

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