Review of UK transnational education in China: The University of Reading and Beijing Institute of Technology

November 2012

Executive summary

The University of Reading (the University) has a long tradition of research, education and training at a local, national and international level. The University is developing region-based internationalisation strategies and is currently active in China, the Middle East and Africa. Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT), founded in 1940, offers courses spanning science, engineering and the humanities. It has received preferential state support and its teaching quality has been rated 'excellent' by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

The partnership between the University of Reading and Beijing Institute of Technology arose out of discussions in 2002 between the (current) Director of the Informatics Research Centre within Henley Business School at the University of Reading and the (then) Head of BIT's School of Economics and Management. The partnership, established in 2006, involves a jointly delivered MSc programme in Informatics, originally located within the University's School of Systems Engineering and now located within Henley Business School (formerly the School of Management). The partners have recently agreed to establish a new collaborative programme, the BA (Hons) Accounting, and there are plans for a small core of University academic staff to be based at BIT. Initially, cautious minimum student recruitment targets were set for the MSc programme, based on discussions with potential students and representatives from industry. These targets were subsequently scaled back and a clear marketing plan developed to address a perceived lack of identified market for the programme.

Teaching is delivered in English by University of Reading staff and conducted entirely at BIT in intensive one-week blocks (one per module). Pre-intensive and post-intensive-phase support is provided by BIT academic staff. Originally, it was intended that students visit the University for up to six months for dissertation supervision, but few have taken up the opportunity because of visa difficulties in the UK and employment commitments in Beijing.

Since its inception, the programme offered under this collaboration has faced significant challenges arising from changes to the location of the management of partnership links at the University. Most recently, the introduction of Henley Business School's new academic structure requires the formal framework for managing, monitoring and reviewing the MSc programme to be kept under review. Amid these challenges and their impact upon the effectiveness of formal monitoring processes over recent years, liaison between staff at an informal level has remained strong.

The MSc Informatics provides the benefits of a demanding learning environment that requires student engagement with UK learning styles, with an emphasis on independent learning. For the University and BIT, the partnership link maintains at its core shared and continuing research interests, and, despite the challenges, the partners' confidence in the strength of their relationship is affirmed by the recent extension of the collaboration to undergraduate provision.

Report

Introduction

1 The University of Reading (the University) was established in 1892 as University College Reading and received its Royal Charter in 1926. It is based on several campuses in and around the town of Reading, to the west of London. The University has a long tradition of research, education and training at a local, national and international level. In 2010, there were approximately 3,000 students from outside the UK studying at the University, constituting 17 per cent of the student body, with 1,900 coming from outside of the EU. In terms of internationalisation, the University is developing region-based strategies. It is currently active in China, the Middle East and Africa.

2 There are currently two established collaborative provision arrangements between the University and Chinese universities: Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT) and Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology (NUIST). Only the collaboration with BIT is featured in this review; the partnership with NUIST is a recent development, the first students having been recruited in 2011.

3 Beijing Institute of Technology was founded in 1940 and offers courses spanning science, engineering and the humanities. It has received preferential state support under both Project 211 and Project 985 - Chinese national projects aimed at strengthening selective universities and creating world-class universities, respectively. In China's scheme for the quality assessment of undergraduate education (implemented by the Higher Education Evaluation Centre of the Ministry of Education) its teaching quality was rated as 'excellent'. The partnership between the University and BIT was established in 2006. It involves a jointly delivered MSc programme in Informatics, originally located within the University's School of Systems Engineering and now located within Henley Business School (formerly the School of Management). Teaching is conducted entirely at BIT by University of Reading academic staff, in intensive one-week blocks for each module, with pre-intensive and post-intensive support offered by BIT academic staff. Students have the option of coming to Reading to undertake their dissertation. In the academic year 2010-11, there were 35 students studying on this programme. The partners have recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement for a new collaborative programme, the BA (Hons) Accounting, and there are plans for a small core of University academic staff to be based at BIT.

Part A: Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

4 The University wishes to support the development of collaborative programmes which are purposeful, strategic and aligned with its Corporate Plan and other relevant strategies. In 2012, the University adopted new programme approval processes which, for collaborative programmes, incorporate a more integrated and risk-based approach sensitive to different circumstances and collaborative models. All proposals progress through university-level processes, as previously, but the process differs according to the nature of the proposed programmes and partner. There are four stages: idea development, programme documents and business proposal, formal approval, and post-approval.

5 Before the programme idea can be developed, the International Project Board must approve the proposed partnership and Memorandum of Understanding, following scrutiny of the proposed partner's academic standing, its current partners, and the benefits, risks and enhancements to the University. Partnership investigations, which inform the development of programme documentation and the business proposal, then follow. The University has

developed procedures in accordance with the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*. While scrutiny must be robust, with adequate assessment of financial, legal and reputational risks, its scale varies depending on the nature of the proposals. Investigations are normally undertaken by the Quality Support Office, drawing on supporting evidence such as annual reports, annual accounts and details of professional indemnity cover, reports by external bodies, and a partnership visit. Typically, the visit - undertaken by the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) and a member of the Quality Support Office - includes meetings with senior management, with teaching, support and quality assurance staff, and with students, and includes a tour of facilities.

6 At the formal approval stage, the operating context and the partner's status, operational structure and ability to manage quality assurance processes are examined. All these matters are addressed in the business proposal (with the partnership visit report annexed) and the programme documentation (paragraph 35). They are then considered by the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning (FBTL), the University committee on Strategy for Student Recruitment and Academic Provision (STRAP), and the University Board for Teaching and Learning (UBTL), leading to a recommendation to the University's Senate for final approval.

7 Post-approval, the Memorandum of Agreement, which is sometimes accompanied by an operational handbook, is drafted by the Quality Support Office in liaison with the School, Academic Legal Services and the partner, in consultation with the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), for signature by the Vice-Chancellor or delegate. On completion, advertising and recruitment can formally begin.

8 In reviewing the relevant documentation, the review team concluded that current arrangements for selecting a partner are robust and pay due attention to financial, legal and academic risk.

9 The MSc Informatics was conceived in 2002 in discussions between the (current) Director of the Informatics Research Centre within Henley Business School and the (then) Head of BIT's School of Economics and Management. The partnership was approved in accordance with University policies and procedures in place at that time. Following initial faculty-level approval, business plan approval by the STRAP and a favourable report on a visit to BIT by the Director of Quality Support and the School Director of Teaching and Learning, the UBTL recommended final approval, granted by Senate in 2004.

10 The initial proposal described BIT's standing in China and outlined the benefits of the proposed collaboration to the University. The visit addressed institutional and programme-related matters, including BIT's standing, its mission, its international links with other institutions, facilities, staff, and quality assurance framework - although the nature and extent of any further due diligence investigation was unclear to the review team. In the context of the more recent approval of its collaboration with NUIST, the University has stated that to conduct 'traditional' due diligence on Chinese universities is unlikely to yield any useful information, as they operate under an entirely different framework.

11 BIT submitted an application for approval of the MSc Informatics to the Chinese Ministry of Education in November 2004 and approval was granted in September 2006 for six years. Reapproval was granted in 2012 for a further four years.

12 The original institutional agreement operated for six years (2006-12); the current agreement, completed in February 2012, extends the arrangement for a further six years. Both agreements cover financial, academic, quality assurance and admission arrangements, and set out clearly the responsibilities of the respective parties, stating that the University is

responsible for the academic standard of the award and for ensuring that BIT has in place appropriate quality assurance procedures. With the exception of provisions on contract assignment, sub-contracting and the legal jurisdiction for dispute resolution, which were omitted in 2006 but are now included in the 2012 agreement, both agreements take due account of the provisions of the relevant expectations of the Quality Code.

13 The 2012 agreement is supplemented by an Operational Handbook, a comprehensive document produced in first edition in October 2012, including information about the programme, recruitment and admissions, learning resources, student representation, student complaints and disciplinary procedures, assessment, programme management, and quality assurance, together with programme and module specifications.

14 The University's procedure for the renewal of collaborative partnerships is intended to mirror, as far as appropriate, the process for the approval of new arrangements. It comprises periodic review, financial review, and operational and strategic review. At the QAA review visit, senior staff described the interim and periodic reviews conducted in May 2010 and November 2011, respectively (paragraphs 40-49), as forming part of the process for partnership renewal. However, the nature of the accompanying financial and strategic review leading up to renewal of the institutional agreement in 2012 was unclear to the review team. A formal annual process for monitoring financial and operational aspects of partnerships was approved by the International Project Board in February 2012 and reported to the UBTL in March 2012, and is currently being implemented.

Making the link work

Programme management

15 The programme management team comprises, at the University, the MSc Informatics Programme Co-ordinator, Programme Director, Programme Advisor, Admissions Tutor and Programme Manager; and, appointed at BIT, the Associate Programme Director, Programme Manager and Programme Administrator. Led by the University Programme Director, the team is charged with day-to-day management, maintaining the quality of the student experience, reporting to the programme committee, discussing programme development, and providing a supportive environment for sharing effective practice between the two institutions.

16 In meeting staff, the review team were interested to explore the provision of BIT staffing resources, particularly in the light of the series of changes in the programme management team reported by the 2010 interim review (paragraphs 40-44), and the interim review panel's concerns about the amount of time the BIT management team could dedicate to the programme, given their responsibilities elsewhere in the school. Hearing from senior staff that the contractual requirement for the provision of 1.5 full-time equivalent BIT academic staff was fully satisfied, the current review team formed the view that BIT programme management and staffing provision was sufficient for the effective operation of the programme. Nevertheless, the review team **recommends** that the University continue to monitor the provision of BIT staffing resources for programme management.

17 From meetings, it was evident to the review team that informal liaison between staff at the respective institutions was effective, particularly during teaching visits by University staff, and also on a day-to-day basis by electronic communication.

18 With effect from August 2011, Henley Business School introduced a new academic structure creating Boards of Studies for 'programme areas', including the 'pre-experience postgraduate programme' area (where the MSc Informatics is now located), which reports to

the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning and the Faculty Management Board, and to which new 'Programme Committees' (formerly 'Boards of Studies') report. At the University of Reading, a pre-experience postgraduate programme does not explicitly require students to have work experience.

19 The documentation considered by the review team was largely generated before these changes, when the MSc Informatics (BIT) programme, together with the school's other MSc Informatics programmes, was monitored and reviewed by the Informatics MSc Board of Studies, which reported annually to the Faculty Board for Learning and Teaching. The original institutional agreement required the Board of Studies to include membership from the University and BIT and to meet twice a year, once at Reading and once at BIT. The current agreement requires the Board to meet twice a year, where possible rotating meetings between Reading and Beijing, and always to include members from both institutions. The review team heard from senior staff that, although it was originally intended that Boards of Studies meetings alternate between Reading and Beijing, most management meetings take place at Reading. The review team observed from available documentation that only University staff were in attendance at Boards of Studies meetings held at Reading in 2009-10 and 2010-11; two Boards of Studies meetings were held at BIT in 2010-11, and one of these was described as 'ad hoc'.

20 The review team also heard from senior staff that, although the new academic structure was now in place, BIT 'Programme Committee' meetings would continue to be reported as 'Boards of Studies'; a circumstance reflected in the 2012 institutional agreement, which uses the terms 'Programme Committee' and 'Board' apparently interchangeably.

21 In the light of the contractual provisions, and the introduction of the new Henley Business School academic structure, the review team **recommends** that the University keep under review the effectiveness of the programme-level and faculty-level committee framework for managing, monitoring and reviewing the programme at BIT.

Student admissions and record keeping

22 Admissions requirements, including English language requirements, are clearly set out in the programme specification. Entrants are normally required to have obtained a 2.1 honours bachelors degree or equivalent in IT, management or relevant fields, or equivalent experience, as determined by the University's Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) rules. Applicants whose first language is not English must have IELTS 6 (with no section scoring below 5.5) and now TOEFL 76 or equivalent, which is a new requirement. Exceptionally, if an applicant has worked in an English language environment for a minimum of three years, an English test organised by the University's Centre for Applied Language Studies may be conducted in lieu of formal qualifications. The University processes applications, makes admissions decisions, and has ultimate responsibility for holding student records. Students on the programme are designated 'students of the University studying at BIT' but are registered with both BIT and the University.

23 The initial programme proposal set target minimum student recruitment numbers of 30 in year one of operation, rising to 40 in year two, based on discussions with potential students and representatives from industry. These targets were described as 'conservative' but were scaled down in the 2006 institutional agreement, which specified a minimum of 20 (maximum 50) students recruited annually. These levels have not been achieved, with 13, six and 16 students having been recruited in 2007-8, 2008-09 and 2009-10 respectively, and the minimum enrolment target is reduced to 15 in the current agreement.

24 In exploring recruitment difficulties with senior staff, in particular the reference in the 2010 interim review report to pressure from both BIT and Reading to lower the entry tariffs

for the programme, the current review team heard confirmation that admissions requirements for the BIT programme stood firm, as set out in the programme specification. An entrance examination, designed to give students with borderline academic backgrounds an opportunity to prove their suitability for the programme, was no longer being operated, having been introduced for one year only.

25 In the view of the interim review panel, a key issue underlying poor recruitment was the lack of a specific identified market for the programme, and the report recommended that BIT, with the support of the University, develop and implement a clear marketing plan. The current review team heard from senior staff an account of the marketing activity that had been undertaken in response (paragraphs 43 and 63).

Student induction and support, including student handbooks

26 Student induction, comprises a 'welcome meeting' at BIT, normally attended by a member of staff from the University and timed to coincide with the delivery of the first module. Students met by the review team described the induction process, confirming that they had been provided with information about the programme, including course handbooks, had been given access to the University intranet, and had met University staff.

27 Students were happy with the teaching and confirmed the usefulness of the pre-intensive learning materials and the helpfulness of the support provided by BIT staff. For the dissertation stage of the programme, in addition to the support provided by the University supervisor, BIT staff provide local supervision support, meeting with students on a regular basis. Originally, it was envisaged that students would undertake a 15-day visit to the University for face-to-face dissertation supervision, and the opportunity to visit for up to six months is available. Such visits were expected to be the norm, but the review team heard from staff and students that few students have taken up the opportunity because of visa difficulties in the UK and employment commitments in Beijing.

28 Students referred, positively, to the challenge of UK learning styles, with an emphasis on independent learning. The review team considered the programme team's approach to learning and teaching, which challenges students to engage with independent learning, to be a **positive feature** of the programme. Students confirmed the accessibility of University and BIT staff and that both academic and personal support are available to them, through personal tutors, designated student advisors and academic staff.

Student feedback systems and how cultural differences between the UK and China are accommodated

29 From the commencement of the programme, it was agreed that student evaluation questionnaires would be distributed to MSc Informatics students during the intensive phase and at the end of the post-intensive phase of each module. In 2010, it was reported at the Board of Studies that, although no current or recent module feedback had been received for the MSc in Beijing, the process had been introduced by BIT staff. At the review visit, staff confirmed that students complete evaluation forms, which are sent directly to the University for analysis.

30 The 2004 site visit panel found that the existing BIT system of student representation worked well, and it was agreed that two student representatives would be elected for the MSc programme. They, along with the Programme Manager, would form a Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC), reporting to the Board of Studies.

31 At the review visit, students confirmed that there were student representatives and that formal meetings with staff provided them with the opportunity to feed back on the

programme. Students gave the example of changes to teaching scheduling, in response to their feedback. The review team observed that, while the MSc Informatics Board of Studies considered minutes and notes from MSc SSLC meetings held at the University in 2010 and 2011, it did not appear that any minutes from BIT SSLC meetings were presented to the Board during this period. The review team **recommends** that SSLC meetings at BIT be formally recorded, for onward reporting at programme and faculty level.

Administration of assessment/examinations

32 The MSc Informatics is assessed in accordance with University procedures. Currently, one module is assessed by examination, and responsibility for the security of the examination and examination papers rests with BIT. The review team heard from staff that examination papers and student scripts are carried between the University and BIT personally by a member of University staff, and that coursework assignments are sent from Reading via encrypted email, confirming that the security arrangements are effective.

Part B: Quality assurance

Academic standards and the quality of programmes

Programme approval

33 As noted above (paragraph 4), in 2012 the University adopted new processes for the approval of new programmes, including those involving delivery with a partner. The processes comprise four stages, including the development of programme documents and a business proposal, both informed by the partnership investigations (paragraph 5). Details of the full approval cycle are given earlier in paragraph 6.

34 Before the partnership visit, the visiting team receives the draft programme specification and business proposal. In meetings with senior, teaching and support staff and with students, and through a tour of facilities, the visit explores institutional and programme-related matters, the latter including programme operation, resources and student support arrangements.

35 Consideration by the scrutiny panel entails documentation review, based on a completed programme approval form, programme specification and module descriptions, and a meeting with the programme proposer(s). Scrutiny ranges across delivery, resources, assessment, quality management and enhancement, and programme design, including the use of subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The panel typically includes at least one member of staff from each institution, at least one external subject specialist from the higher education sector, at least one member with appropriate industrial or employment experience, where relevant, and a panel Secretary.

36 The MSc Informatics was approved in accordance with University policies and procedures in place at that time, commencing with consideration by a scrutiny panel, followed by initial approval at faculty level.

37 Meeting in 2003, the scrutiny panel comprised members from University Academic Services and other University schools and an external subject specialist. The panel considered the documentation in detail, particularly the programme specification, although there is no direct reference to the use of the FHEQ. Noting that a visit to BIT would be necessary, the panel recommended approval, subject to conditions concerning the programme specification and module descriptions, Board of Studies and Examination Board,

staff, and staff training and resources. These issues were resolved before the relevant Joint FBTL (at that time Life Sciences and Science) approved the programme. Subsequently, the STRAP approved the business plan and the UBTL granted programme approval, subject to a favourable partnership visit report.

38 During the partnership visit to BIT early in 2004, the meetings held addressed programme management and delivery; admissions, assessment and quality assurance arrangements; and student support and welfare. Subsequently, the UBTL recommended approval, which was granted by the Senate in 2004.

39 The review team considered the University's current process for collaborative programme approval and the former process, as applied to the approval of the MSc Informatics, to be thorough and effective. The team found the MSc Informatics programme specification to be comprehensive, addressing aims and outcomes, transferable skills, content, assessment and classification, admission requirements, student support and career prospects.

Programme review

40 An interim review was conducted in May 2010 at BIT, 18 months before the periodic review of management programmes, scheduled for November 2011. The interim review report records the reasons for a review at that particular time. No formal visit had been undertaken to BIT since the programme was transferred to the School of Management, it was six years since the original site visit, and there were concerns about low recruitment levels (paragraphs 23-25).

41 The panel, comprising the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning (Chair) and the International Quality Support Manager (Secretary) met key BIT academic and support staff and current students. The panel concluded that the collaboration was working well overall and commended the unique learning experience provided by the pre-intensive, intensive and post-intensive delivery method.

42 Recommendations concerned: greater BIT staff involvement with the Board of Studies, examination boards and external examining; provision of final module marks to BIT staff; the establishment of a SSLC; IT access issues for students; staff access to Blackboard; and the use of Henley-branded award certificates for the MSc Informatics. It was subsequently reported at the Board of Studies that, generally, these recommendations had been or were being addressed, though the current review team observed, from relevant minutes, that few BIT staff had been involved with recent Boards of Studies held at the University (paragraph 19).

43 The interim review panel's greatest concern was the lack of a clear target market, leading to the failure to recruit a sustainable number of students; the programme was operating well below the levels set out in the contract. The panel recommended that a clear marketing plan be developed and implemented by BIT. The current review team heard from staff that this recommendation had now been addressed (paragraph 63).

44 The renewal of the University's collaborative partnerships, which is intended to mirror, as far as appropriate, processes for the approval of new arrangements, comprises three elements: periodic review, financial review and operational and strategic review (paragraph 14). If renewal is recommended by the UBTL, renegotiation of the Memorandum of Agreement is triggered.

45 Periodic review is undertaken by a panel including two external academic members appointed by the relevant FBTL, to which it reports, and normally involves consideration of

one or more subject areas and associated programmes, on a six-year cycle. The process entails consideration of documentation and, typically, a two-day visit to the school, when the panel meets staff, students and, where appropriate, recent graduates and/or employers. Successful periodic review leads to reapproval of the programme(s).

46 A review incorporating a collaborative programme focuses on that programme as part of the school's wider offering, with an additional one or two-day visit to the partner by the panel chair. The visit is expected to address the standard questions of periodic review and includes meetings with staff and students, a tour of facilities and review of documentation and student work, with all these matters specifically applying to the collaborative programme being clearly reflected in the final report and recommendations.

47 A periodic review of undergraduate and pre-experience postgraduate programmes in Management was held at Henley Business School in November 2011, and covered all the school's MSc Informatics programmes including the MSc Informatics delivered at BIT. The panel, which included two external academic members, met staff, students, former students and employers. It recommended reapproval of all the programmes for six years. The review report, together with the school's response and action plan, was subsequently submitted to the FBTL and the UBTL, and reapproval was obtained.

48 Referring to the school's suite of MSc Informatics programmes, the review report expressed support for the one-week blocks teaching arrangement, while noting concern that it did not allow students to assimilate their learning fully. The panel recommended the introduction of pre-module work, enabling students to commence the intensive teaching period with an appropriate background of knowledge. The school's action plan addressed this recommendation by requiring a specification of preparatory study to be included in the module package; and, as noted above, students whom the review team met at BIT confirmed the usefulness of the pre-intensive learning materials (paragraph 27).

49 The periodic review report refers directly to the MSc Informatics (BIT), recognising it as highly innovative. However, the panel did not meet any BIT staff or students and the review of learning resources was limited to consideration of facilities at Henley Business School. The report does not mention the 2010 interim review at BIT, an omission that would seem to be a missed opportunity, since, so far as the review team could ascertain from the available documentation, the periodic review did not incorporate a visit to BIT. The review team **recommends** that the University should review the operation of periodic review process for collaborative provision to ensure that all elements of the process are fully implemented.

Programme monitoring

50 Generally, programme level quality control and assurance mechanisms at the University are the responsibility of Boards of Studies. At Henley Business School, since the introduction of the school's new academic structure in August 2011 (paragraph 18), responsibility for operational quality control and assurance mechanisms lies with programme committees, subject to the oversight of Boards of Studies which have a strategic quality management role across broad programme areas. At University level, drawing together information from faculty annual reports, the Quality Support Office prepares an annual overview report on collaborative provision for consideration (alongside faculty reports) by the sub-committee on Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, and for onward reporting to the UBTL by means of an evaluative summary.

51 As noted earlier (paragraph 19), the programme documentation considered by the review team was largely generated before the introduction of the new school structure, when the MSc Informatics (BIT), together with the school's other MSc Informatics programmes,

was monitored and reviewed by the MSc Informatics Board of Studies, which reported annually to the Faculty Board for Learning and Teaching.

52 The relevant annual programme reports viewed by the review team were presented within the University's template and covered key areas including applications and admissions, cohort analysis, module and programme evaluation, external input, teaching and learning resources, and the management of collaborative provision, specifically the MSc Informatics (BIT). The reports record close contact between University and BIT staff, and cited the following as good practice: the sharing of teaching and learning practice; the provision of appropriate facilities; and the learning and dissertation support by BIT staff (noting their increasing understanding of University standards and expectations).

53 Under the original and current institutional agreements, in addition to the regular monitoring by the Board of Studies/Programme Committee, University staff are expected to carry out monitoring visits to Beijing, where the first visits were to take place in 2007 and 2009. The interim review reported in May 2010 however, that no formal visit had been undertaken to BIT since the transfer of the programme from the School of Systems Engineering to the School of Management, and the current review team found no evidence of formal monitoring visits since 2010. The review team **recommends** that, in addition to monitoring by the Programme Committee, formal University monitoring visits to BIT should be undertaken, in accordance with the institutional agreement.

54 Recent annual overview reports refer to matters relating specifically to the MSc Informatics (BIT), including the close collaboration between University and BIT staff and the effective teaching support provided by BIT staff; and the challenges arising from programme management changes and student recruitment. The review team considered that these reports in general provided a useful annual summary of the MSc Informatics (BIT) in appropriate areas.

Staffing and staff development

55 Responsibility for appointing BIT staff to manage and teach on the programme rests with BIT. The University reserves the right, under the current institutional agreement, to veto the engagement of any member of BIT staff it considers unsuitable for the programme. At the review visit, senior staff confirmed that the University checks the qualifications and experience of BIT staff, though this does not include formal checks on English language proficiency.

56 According to the original and current institutional agreements, University staff from the Henley Business School are to provide annual training workshops for staff at BIT and to arrange further training on teaching visits, in relation to matters including quality assurance and assessment, particularly with respect to marking and academic misconduct.

57 In meetings with staff, the review team heard that University staff provided formal staff development at BIT in 2006, before the commencement of the programme, covering quality, teaching and the dissertation. Staff told the team that, since then, staff development has continued, largely informally, through interaction between University and BIT staff on teaching visits, including observation of teaching by BIT tutors. The review team found no evidence of annual training workshops being provided and **recommends** that staff development provision by the University at BIT be extended to include annual training workshops, in accordance with the institutional agreement.

58 At the review visit, staff spoke of the benefits of the collaboration for staff, referring to skills transfer and professional development, especially for young BIT staff members, and the strengthening of research collaboration between the two institutions, including joint

research and publication. The review team formed the view that continuing shared research interests provide an important core element of the partnership.

Assessment

59 The University's academic regulations and assessment procedures apply to the MSc Informatics. The assessment, which is described clearly in the programme and module specifications, comprises an examination (for one module), coursework and the dissertation. University staff set all examination papers and coursework assignments and mark examination scripts. University and BIT staff double mark the dissertation. The original agreement provided for coursework to be marked by BIT staff and moderated by University staff and, in 2010, the interim review reported that where BIT staff undertook first marking, the work was always second marked by University staff. The current agreement provides for coursework to be marked by the module delivery team, including both University and BIT tutors, and moderated by University staff. The review team heard from BIT staff that they receive support for their task through marking guidelines provided by University tutors.

60 The University has responded appropriately to feedback from BIT staff regarding assessment arrangements. In 2010, BIT tutors commented to the interim review panel that they wished to know how students were performing and that this information would help them to mark accurately to the University scale. The review report recommended that BIT tutors receive finalised marks for assessments in which they have been involved. Appropriate action was subsequently reported at the Board of Studies, and the current institutional agreement requires the University to inform BIT tutors of the final marks for the modules on which they have taught. In January 2011, the Board of Studies, responding to comment from BIT staff, identified action to be taken to clarify the precise coursework-marking responsibilities of BIT staff, which differ from module to module.

61 The external examiner, whose remit covers all the school's MSc Informatics programmes, is appointed by the University. The review team heard from staff that, although not part of the role, the external examiner visited BIT in 2009, when he observed classes and met students. External examiners' reports, covering the school's entire suite of MSc programmes, are submitted to the University, and the school responds. Although the reports are not formally presented at BIT, staff confirmed to the review team that they are made aware of their contents. Examination boards are held at the University.

Certificates and transcripts

62 Certificates and diploma supplements, which are issued by the University, are consistent with the specifications set out in the relevant sections of the Quality Code. The University has adopted the recommendation of the 2010 interim review that BIT graduates receive Henley-branded award certificates. The review team heard from staff that, where the physical transportation of certificates and diploma supplements to BIT is required, they are delivered personally by a member of University staff.

Part C: Information

Publicity and marketing

63 As noted above, the original target student recruitment numbers have not been realised, and concern about poor recruitment was one of the reasons for instigating the 2010 interim review (paragraphs 23 and 40). The review panel recommended that a clear marketing plan be developed and implemented by BIT. At the current review visit, staff described marketing activity that had been undertaken by the University and BIT in response

to this recommendation, including flyer, website, newspaper and exhibition advertising and promotion. In the light of this activity, and the marketing materials available to it, the review team concluded that appropriate action had been undertaken to try to address this matter.

64 The University Head of School has ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of publicity material, which is checked by the University project manager, assisted by a Chinese speaker where required.

Student handbooks

65 Course handbooks provide students with clear, extensive and detailed programme-specific and school-specific academic information, including assessment procedures, academic misconduct, learner responsibilities, MSc dissertation guidelines, research ethics notes and forms, and the programme and module specifications, together with appendices covering plagiarism, the use of references, extenuating circumstances, and dissertation topics. The review team considered the course handbook to be a **positive feature** of the programme.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features of the partnership are identified:

- the programme team's approach to learning and teaching, which challenges students to engage with independent learning (paragraph 28)
- the course handbook, which provides clear, extensive and detailed information for students (paragraph 65).

Recommendations

The University of Reading is recommended to take the following action:

- continue to monitor the provision of BIT staffing resources for programme management (paragraphs 16-17)
- keep under review the effectiveness of the programme-level and faculty-level committee framework for managing, monitoring and reviewing the programme at BIT (paragraphs 18-21)
- formally record SSLC meetings at BIT, for onward reporting at programme and faculty level (paragraph 31)
- review the operation of periodic review for collaborative provision, to ensure that all elements of the process are fully implemented (paragraph 49)
- undertake, in addition to monitoring by the Programme Committee, formal monitoring visits to BIT, in accordance with the institutional agreement (paragraph 53)
- extend staff development provision by the University at BIT to include annual training workshops, in accordance with the institutional agreement (paragraphs 56-57).

Glossary

Academic Infrastructure The core guidance developed and maintained by QAA in partnership with the UK higher education community and used by QAA and higher education providers until 2011-12 for quality assurance of UK higher education. It has since been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (**Quality Code**).

accreditation of prior learning (APL) The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement that occurred at some time in the past (perhaps as the result of a previous course, self-directed study, or active experience), which is taken into account when admitting a student to a programme of study.

articulation arrangement A process whereby all students who satisfy academic criteria on one programme are automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a programme of a degree-awarding body. Arrangements, which are subject to formal agreements between the parties, normally involve credit accumulation and transfer schemes. Read more in the glossary of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

C9 League A group of nine major research universities in China, established in 2009.

CET The College English Test, a national 'English as a foreign language test' in China.

CFCRS Initialism for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools, denoting cooperation between foreign and Chinese educational institutions in order to establish educational institutions or educational programmes. The activities of CFCRS are governed by regulations introduced in 2003.

Code of practice A core element of the **Academic Infrastructure** (now superseded by the **Quality Code**).

collaborative provision or **collaborative arrangement** A term used to describe how institutions work together to provide higher education, including learning opportunities, student support, and assessment, resulting in a qualification from one or more awarding institutions.

comprehensive university A university in China that typically offers a full rather than a specialised curriculum, which includes a wide range of disciplines such as liberal arts, social sciences, science, technical and industrial studies.

dazhuan A three-year tertiary education diploma in China.

due diligence Enquiries relating to the governance, ethos, status, capacity, reputation and general suitability of a potential delivery organisation or support provider to satisfy the requirements of a degree-awarding body for an arrangement to deliver learning opportunities.

flying faculty An arrangement whereby a programme is delivered by visiting staff from the UK institution. Support for students may be provided by local staff. Also known as 'fly-in fly-out faculty'.

gaokao National higher education entrance examination in China.

IELTS International English Language Testing System, an international standardised English test.

kaoyan Postgraduate degree entrance examination in China.

post-experience education A postgraduate programme that typically requires students, as a condition of entry, to have substantial and appropriate graduate-level work experience, in addition to an undergraduate degree; a programme of this nature is designed to draw on students' experience and practice.

pre-experience education A postgraduate programme that typically does not explicitly require students to have work experience, and is designed to be equally accessible to recent graduates and those who have some relevant experience.

Project 211 A Chinese government programme, initiated in 1995, that is aimed at strengthening institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the twenty-first century. The '21' and '1' within 211 refer to the 'twenty-first' century and 'one' hundred universities, respectively. To be included in the programme, universities had to meet scientific and technical standards and offer advanced degree programmes. It includes the **Project 985** universities.

Project 985 A project to promote the development of world-class universities in China, which was initiated in May 1998 and named after the date: year '98', month '5'. Much of its funding is devoted to academic exchanges whereby Chinese academics participate in conferences abroad and foreign lecturers visit China. It includes the **C9 League** universities.

QS World University Rankings Annual university rankings published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

TOEFL Test Of English as a Foreign Language, an English test by the Educational Testing Service.

The University of Reading's response to the review report

'The University welcomes the QAA's positive report. We are pleased that the review team particularly identified as positive features the programme team's approach to teaching and learning, which challenges students to engage in independent learning, and also the clear and detailed information provided to students in the programme handbook. The University will continue to monitor staffing resources for the programme and the effectiveness of the committee framework, formalise monitoring visits, and improve the record-keeping and reporting of student-staff liaison committees. We will enhance staff training and also ensure full implementation and documentation of the periodic review process in relation to collaborative provision.'

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