QAA

Audit of
collaborative provision

Coventry University

DECEMBER 2009
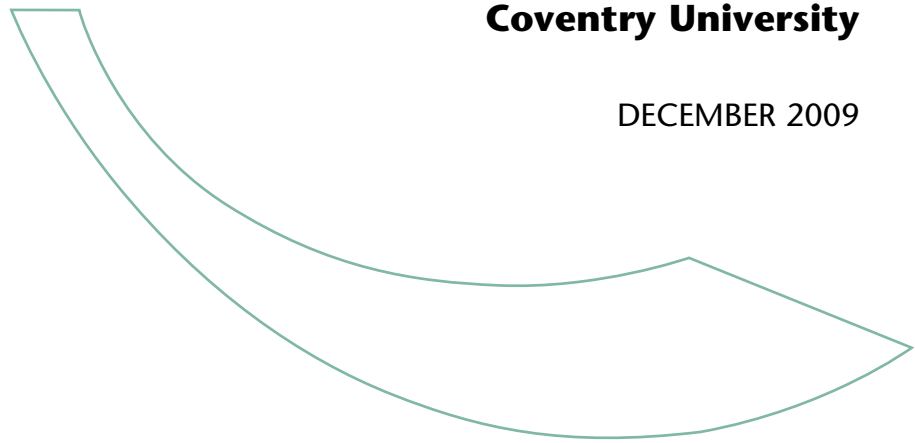
Preface

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions. Where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's provision offered through partnership arrangements as part of the Institutional audit, it can be audited through a separate Audit of collaborative provision.

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations and assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the then Department for Education and Skills. It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA. It was again revised in 2009 to take into account student auditors and the three approaches that could be adopted for the Audit of collaborative provision (as part of the Institutional audit, a separate audit, or a hybrid variant of the Institutional audit, involving partner link visits).

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002, following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK's) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students studying through collaborative arrangements, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and on feedback from stakeholders.

The Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity results in judgements about the institution being reviewed as follows:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision in collaborative partners, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Coventry University (the University) from 7 to 11 December 2009 to carry out an Audit of collaborative provision. The purpose of this audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision delivered through collaborative arrangements. As part of the process, the team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from a further overseas partner.

In the Audit of collaborative provision, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of Coventry University is that in the context of its collaborative provision:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

In the audit team's view, the University's approach to quality enhancement in relation to collaborative provision was informed by clear strategic direction through the Quality Enhancement Framework, with appropriate mechanisms in place for implementation, monitoring and dissemination.

Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

In the audit team's view, the University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements meet the expectations of the section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and in the main are operating as intended.

Published information

In the audit team's view, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the model of supported validation in systematically developing partner institutions' capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes

- the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners in the UK and overseas

- the process of interim review in further reassuring the University of the relationship with, and the academic health of, new collaborative arrangements

- the sharing of inter-faculty experience and the use of institutional thematic audit in the enhancement of collaborative provision across the University.

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas.

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that the list of typologies encompasses all types of collaborative provision arrangements operating within the University

- ensure that the collective list of collaborative provision contains a record of all the University's collaborative arrangements, and make it publicly available

- strengthen the process for the approval of academic regulations and policies used by validated partners

- ensure that all external examiners receive timely and appropriate responses to their annual reports, in keeping with the University's expectations for on-campus provision.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- extend the scope of management information collected from partner institutions in order to inform further the University's oversight of its collaborative provision

- ensure that external examiner reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes, October 2006* (*HEFCE 06/45*).

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice*

- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1   An Audit of collaborative provision of Coventry University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 7 December 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers through collaborative arrangements and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students at partner institutions.

2   The audit team comprised Professor K Hurst, Professor E Lillie, Dr S Ryrie, Mr L Walker, auditors, and Ms C Smith, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University can trace its roots back to 1843 with the establishment of the Coventry College of Design, and the establishment of Lanchester Polytechnic in 1970, before the current University came into being in 1992. The mission of the University is to be 'a dynamic, enterprising and creative university committed to providing an excellent education enriched by our focus on applied research'. This is supported by a series of statements of core values which includes the aim to work in sustained partnerships with external organisations. The strategic direction of the University is set out in the most recent Corporate Plan. The main criteria governing the formation of new collaborative partnerships are linkage to the Corporate Plan, and contribution to the University's Widening Participation Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy.

4   The University comprises three academic faculties and two academic schools of which two are actively involved in collaborative arrangements and two have some experience in supporting collaborative provision in the UK and overseas. For the purpose of this report all will be referred to as faculties, in keeping with the University's institutional Briefing Paper. The University has collaborative arrangements with universities, colleges and other organisations in the UK, Europe and more widely overseas. At the time of the audit the University had formal arrangements with 37 institutions (15 located in the UK and 22 overseas), and approximately 2,280 students were studying in UK collaborating institutions and 2,770 based overseas.

5   The University formally lists six types of collaborative arrangements: 'franchise'; 'hybrid franchise'; 'validated'; 'autonomous franchise'; 'supported validation'; and 'recognised'. One faculty also lists 'credit rating' and 'joint arrangements' as types of arrangement and the audit team also saw reference to 'hybrid orphan franchise' arrangements. The definitive list of collaborative provision, held by the central Quality Enhancement Unit, does not cover all the types of collaborative arrangements used within the University. The team recommends therefore that the University ensure that the list of typologies encompasses all types of collaborative provision arrangements operating within the University.

6   The University's Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision considers it essential that a master list, covering all collaborative links both UK and overseas be developed. It is the view of the audit team, however, that no such master list exists which gives all types of collaborative arrangements operating in the University. At the time of the audit, the University's register of collaborative provision was not publicly available and was regarded as being commercially sensitive. Nevertheless, public scrutiny assists in ensuring that standards are seen to be maintained by means of public acknowledgement of the University's responsibility for standards at partner institutions.

7   The audit team advises the University therefore to ensure that the collective list of collaborative provision contains a record of all arrangements operating in the University, and to make it publicly available. Thereby providing an up-to-date and authoritative record of the University's collaborative partnerships and programmes which forms part of the institution's publicly available information, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

8   New collaborative provision is often approved within the University's 'supported validation' framework. This model allows a more developmental approach to be taken where the University has more control and provides greater support in the early stages of a partnership, but allows the partner to take on greater responsibility as confidence in the collaboration develops. The audit team considers the model of supported validation as a means of systematically developing partner institutions' capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes as good practice (see also paragraph 56).

9   The most recent Institutional audit of the University took place in 2008 and considered on-campus provision only. It resulted in an overall judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of the quality of its academic programmes and the standards of its awards. The present audit team considered that the University was responding appropriately to the recommendations contained within the audit report. Collaborative provision was looked at as part of the Institutional audit in 2004 which commended the University's considered approach to the management of collaborative provision as good practice.

10   The University has participated in two overseas audits since 2002, Malaysia (2003) and Hong Kong (2007). Both audits had positive outcomes, and the University has taken appropriate action in relation to the points raised in the reports. The University was also a case study for the overseas audit in India (2009) which highlighted the changing relationship and responsibilities of the University and the partner as the partnership developed.

11   Through its involvement in various reviews of its further education partners, including Integrated quality and enhancement reviews, the University has demonstrated that it takes appropriate responsibility for the quality and standards of its academic awards and has effective working and supportive relationships with these partners.

12   Quality Assurance processes for on-campus provision at the University have been revised and streamlined; these are contained within the Quality Enhancement Framework. However, those for the approval and review of collaborative provision have not been streamlined in recognition of the potentially higher risk of collaborative provision.

13   At institutional level a number of committees have central responsibility for collaborative provision including the Quality Assurance Committee; the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision, and the Internationalisation Development Committee. Others, such as the Teaching, Assessment and Learning Committee, also take account of collaborative provision. At faculty level, responsibility for quality matters is vested in the faculty boards, boards of study, and subject and programme assessment boards.

14   The Quality Enhancement Unit is the administrative unit which advises and administers quality assurance processes for collaborative provision. A Unit adviser is allocated to each faculty and works closely with the faculty registrar, and course team members in development and approval matters, as well as liaising with link tutors and the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator. The Coordinator is responsible for UK collaborative provision and regularly liaises with staff within partner further education colleges.

15   At faculty level responsibility for the oversight of collaborative provision varies by faculty, depending on the volume of collaborative provision. For example, one faculty has a Collaborations Manager within an International Development Unit, whereas in two other faculties an associate dean has responsibility for collaborative provision. Three of the faculties also have a faculty collaborative provision committee.

16   Collaborative arrangements are overseen by a link tutor appointed to a particular programme or set of programmes. Link tutors have a pivotal role in interacting with partners, in monitoring quality and supporting partner institution staff. Their role is outlined in the document 'Support and Maintenance of Collaborative Arrangements' and tutors are also able to draw on additional operational guidance produced by the two faculties with the most experience in

collaborative provision. The audit team noted the different means of briefing and induction for link tutors, including informal mentoring arrangements and cultural advice and support from regional managers within the International Office. It also noted that the systems for link tutors are currently undergoing further development.

17   The Quality Enhancement Framework was implemented across the University in September 2005 and states that faculties have 'front-line' responsibility for academic standards and quality. The Framework also recognises the need to adapt in response to the different types and experience of collaborative provision in each faculty. The audit team noted that the University was developing more standardised practice across the faculties, but where appropriate, differential practice was permissible. At the time of the audit the document 'Support and Maintenance of Collaborative Provision' had been recently introduced and outlines University policy and guidance for faculties operating collaborative arrangements. Two faculties have also developed comprehensive operational documentation for overseas and UK collaborative provision. At the time of the audit another faculty has also developed similar documentation.

18   The Framework for Research Degrees has not been applied to collaborative provision and will be rolled out when it is appropriate to do so, on a partner-by-partner basis.

19   University level consideration of new proposals for collaborative partnerships involves an outline proposal and business case submission to the Strategic Academic Planning Group or Internationalisation Development Committee depending on the location of the proposed partnership, UK or overseas. The Strategic Academic Planning Group approves the titles of all awards. Through the development of the business case at faculty level, its consideration at the Strategic Academic Planning Group or Internationalisation Development Committee and due diligence activities in the forming of agreements, collaborative arrangements are fully costed and accounted for.

20   Confirmation that a partnership proposal is strategically sound sets the formal approval process in motion. The University assures itself of the good standing of prospective partners through institutional approval events undertaken by Partnership Approval and Review Panels on Course Approval and Review Panels, depending on the nature of the link being established. Partnership Approval and Review Panels are used for franchised provision where the programme is already approved. In cases where a new course is being franchised a combined Partnership Approval and Review Panel and Course Approval and Review Panel is used. A Course Approval and Review Panel is only used in relation to course approval (see paragraphs 25, 45). Approval events include verification of congruity of mission and objectives. Institutional approval panels are responsible to the Quality Assurance Committee and do not have delegated authority to grant approval. This is the responsibility of Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee.

21   The audit team concluded that the process for selecting and approving a partner organisation was comprehensive and provided appropriate due diligence.

22   An integral part of all approval procedures is a formal agreement. These legally binding documents set out the responsibilities of both parties. Despite the title, 'programme agreements' these documents distinguish between institutional and programme level aspects of the collaborative arrangement and in doing so align with the expectations of the *Code of practice*. The University uses a standard form of agreement to cover policies and procedures which apply to all collaborative links. Programme agreements require signature by the head of the collaborating institution and a senior member of the University's Executive, normally a pro vice-chancellor, to confirm institutional commitment at the highest level to the arrangement. The audit team found agreements that it reviewed to be clear, comprehensive and in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

23   The audit team concurs with the 2004 Institutional audit that the University takes a considered and proactive approach to the management of its collaborative provision, which

incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement by the University in the partnership to the level of confidence it has in the arrangement. The team concluded that the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was sound, effective and appropriate to its scale and mission.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

24   Given the different types of partnership arrangements and their differentiated features the audit team sought to find out whether any distinctions were made either in the methods and instruments used to manage and monitor the academic standards of different types of partnership, or in the intensity of scrutiny by which partners were approved and monitored. In undertaking their investigation into the roles and responsibilities of individuals, committees and academic and central units in managing the academic standards of collaborative provision, the team was helped by a number of useful documents which provided evidence of the University's increasing confidence in its ability to provide a more systematic, cross-faculty framework for the management of academic standards in collaborative provision.

25   New programmes are subject to different approval regimes depending on the type of programme and the partnership arrangement. Where an institution will deliver a course already approved by the University as franchised provision, the system is that of Partnership Approval and Review Panels. Here panels assess the ability of the partner institution to deliver the programme. Course Approval and Review Panels are deployed for new (or significantly revised) validated provision where the partner has written the programme. The same panel will also be used for a progress review for a programme or set of programmes. If a new programme is being franchised a combination of Partnership Approval and Review Panels/Course Approval and Review Panels is used.

26   Where both the institution and the programme require approval, an institutional approval event takes place prior or at the same event as approval of the programme. It is made very clear, however, that the programme may not run unless the institutional event comes to a satisfactory conclusion. In one of the partner institutions visited by the audit team the programme was not allowed to start until certain conditions for the approval of the institution had been met. Where existing partners seek to offer a programme already approved on a new campus, a campus approval event will take place rather than a full institutional approval visit. Programme approval events are effectively managed, using panels with appropriate externality that are comprehensively briefed and consider a sufficient evidence base. The subsequent reports are informative, well evidenced with recommendations that are monitored and followed up.

27   Proposed major amendments to provision are carefully discussed with partners and at boards of study and thereafter approved either by a panel event or by the Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee, on behalf of the Committee. While the former are well documented, it was not clear to the audit team what evidence base was used to approve amendments by the latter route. In the case of a partnership arrangement that is terminating, the University carefully manages the continued assessment of students to secure the standard of the award.

28   Periodic reviews are well conducted and reported, with external presence and a sufficient evidence base (including a large set of relevant documentation, meetings with staff and students and tour of facilities) and with continuing monitoring and reporting of actions following recommendations.

29   The relatively recently introduced interim review requires all new partnerships to be reviewed after two years. It is an effective process that mirrors periodic review in its methodology. The audit team considered this type of review to be a feature of good practice in bridging the period between initial approval and periodic review, and in further reassuring the University of the academic health of new collaborative arrangements. Interim review events, which may include additional approval or recognition arrangements, are well conducted and reported, with appropriate externality and evidence base.

30   The annual reporting of collaborative provision during annual monitoring is shared between the University and partner institutions at different levels. At programme/partner level separate annual quality monitoring reports are prepared by link tutors and partners; a faculty report is produced by faculty collaborative provision committees and, at institutional level, two summary reports are prepared, one for UK collaborative provision and one for overseas provision. Aspects of which are incorporated into the University's Annual Report on Academic Work.

31   Link tutor reports indicated that interaction between University and partner staff is regular and productive and that University staff engage in a range of activities designed to support the maintenance of academic standards, including the delivery of workshops on assessment, second-marking and moderation activity (often alongside an external examiner), support for curriculum design, and presence at assessment boards. Most link tutor reports highlight external examiner comments and actions taken or required; the most informative reports also include an insightful analysis of student achievement. Annual Quality Monitoring reports prepared by the partner institutions showed a more varied level of detailed reporting, but with a useful emphasis on responses to external examiner comments, action planning, student data, and evaluation of the factors involved in managing academic standards and the quality of student experience.
An annual report on UK Collaborative Provision is presented to the Quality Assurance Committee along with a summary report on overseas Collaborative Provision. These are useful overview documents, skilfully assembled, summarising evidence and the salient points raised in the annual monitoring reports.

32   The annual quality monitoring system is well managed, including the collective scrutiny undertaken and the way in which reports inform and build up from programme level to more strategic overviews.

33   University committees and boards of study act responsibly in the monitoring and forward planning of collaborative provision, the level of deliberation of the evidence base from local to central committees is appropriate and the communication flow between groups is effective. The Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision in particular is an effective committee in discharging its responsibilities for the management of academic standards in collaborative provision.

34   The elements of the Academic Infrastructure are used appropriately in course development and checked effectively at approval events and annual monitoring. Collaborative provision processes, protocols and practice are well aligned to the *Code of practice*.

35   All collaborative partners have at least some responsibility for the assessment of students. In many instances the University provides support and moderates examinations as well as coursework. Where common issues are identified through the annual monitoring process, such as difficulties in calibrating marking to University standards, there is considerable evidence of University response via link tutors and other staff working with partners through training and moderation exercises to assure assessment practice.

36   Collaborative links operating franchise courses follow the University's Academic Regulations. Those with validated courses are authorised to use their own regulations once they have been approved by the University, although in practice many partners choose to use, or adapt, University regulations for their own purposes. For validated arrangements evidence of initial and continuing scrutiny of regulations and their application was limited and inconsistent. The audit team considers that the University would benefit from providing approval and review panels with clearer guidance in making decisions about curriculum or regulatory match. It recommends, therefore, that the University strengthens and make more transparent the processes by which approval is granted for academic regulations and policies used by validated partners.

37   External examiner reports are considered at the relevant boards of study, and referred to within the annual monitoring process along with any recommendations for improvement, but are not routinely shared with collaborative provision students (see paragraph 78). Faculty

registrars prepare an annual summary of issues raised by the external examiners. The Academic Registrar then prepares a report on the themes which are of relevance across all faculties including separate sections on reports received in relation to collaborative arrangements, although, due to differences in timings, not all external examiner reports are received in time for inclusion. This overall report is a useful summary document for the purposes of informing the senior committee with responsibility for quality and standards and contains detailed references to external comments on collaborative provision, and is accompanied by a general update on the outcomes of the previous year's recommendations and good practice. The reports of external examiners are generally used well in collaborative provision to monitor and improve academic standards

38   The Briefing Paper stated that 'Boards of Study report back to the External Examiner in writing'. When examples of replies were requested, however, the audit team was informed that no formal response is required or recorded, and that 'informal feedback is given at the next subject or programme assessment board'. The audit team established however that action taken in response to external examiners reports are recorded fully in annual quality monitoring reports and are reported into the following boards of study. External examiners receive an update at the next assessment board in the following semester or academic year. There is no indication that external examiner reports are not taken seriously or that issues raised do not receive careful consideration and action planning; nevertheless, the team is of the view that external examiners should expect to receive a formal and timely responses to their annual reports, in keeping with the University's expectations for on-campus provision.

39   Arrangements for issuing certificates and transcripts are the same as for on-campus provision. Evidence presented to the audit team confirmed that the production of certificates and transcripts is controlled effectively by the University and the documents include all the necessary information for users to distinguish the nature of the partnership.

40   The production and use of data in relation to the monitoring of academic standards for collaborative provision is generally well done, despite occasional and understandable difficulties in gathering data from partners. The University could usefully extend the scope of management information collected from partner institutions in order to further inform its oversight of validated partners' application of its own regulations, and to identify any implications for academic standards of the University award or for the student experience.

41   The audit team concluded that the different types of partnership arrangements are managed within a set of quality assurance procedures in line with those governing on-campus provision, with suitable additional activities necessary to address the risk associated with collaborative provision. There is evidence of increasing convergence in approval, monitoring and reporting practice across faculties and helpful differentiations in the level of support given to particular partners. Overall, the team found a well-managed set of processes with clear responsibilities for individuals and committees and much evidence of diligent, sometimes exemplary, scrutiny of the evidence and monitoring of subsequent actions. However, some processes require attention in relation to the protocols and guidance provided for validated arrangements to reflect more fully the additional responsibilities and autonomy these partner institutions hold.

42   The audit team confirms that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

43   As part of the programme approval process (see paragraph 25), close attention is paid to relevant processes and procedures such as the admissions policy, staffing and the physical resources supporting a programme, such as the library and other relevant learning facilities. Programmes cannot start until conditions of approval are met and subsequently further checking will take place as necessary.

44   Academic and pastoral support for students, provided predominantly by the partner institution, is also considered at the time of initial approval. The audit team noted, however, that there had been instances of inconsistent levels of consideration by approval panels of such support arrangements, and suggests that more explicit guidelines about the minimum acceptable levels of provision might assist the University is ensuring consistency of decision-making.

45   While institutional approval may only be granted after consideration by the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision and formal signing off by the Quality Assurance Committee, Course Approval and Review Panels have delegated authority from the Quality Assurance Committee to approve validated programmes. Where a partner institution wishes to deliver a franchised programme in a new area of activity, a combined Partnership Approval and Review Panel and Course Approval and Review Panel is used. In this instance the Partnership Approval and Review Panel is assessing the partner's capacity to deliver the 'new' programme. The results of all the panels are reported to the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision for the purposes of sharing good practice, to ensure consistency and identify trends. A member of the Quality Assurance Committee is part of the Partnership Approval and Review Panel or Course Approval and Review Panel.

46   Amendments to programmes are noted on a standard form. Where these are minor, they may be agreed within the faculty or school (depending on the system for collaborative provision operating in the faculty). They are then sent to the Quality Assurance Committee for final sign off. More major changes such as those to award titles or substantial revisions affecting the learning outcomes of the programme or a change to a site of delivery would normally require approval by a Partnership Approval and Review Panel/Course Approval and Review Panel. In all instances the factors relating to the quality of learning opportunities such as learning resources and staffing are considered. Changes in staff on a collaborative programme must be approved by the relevant head of department and dean of faculty before such staff can teach on modules.

47   Link tutors have an ongoing and sustained contact with partner institutions, supporting them in the enhancement of learning opportunities and course delivery as well as in interaction with the University. The tutors play a key role in supporting the partner in the preparation of their annual quality monitoring report (see paragraph 30). Link tutors also complete a comprehensive report on the different aspects of the operation and learning opportunities for the programme(s) within their remit. All link tutors are supported in the annual quality monitoring process by the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator who organises an annual briefing day attended by both University and UK partner college personnel.

48   As noted earlier, new partnerships and courses now have an interim review after two years, enabling the University to consider the quality of the student experience and make any necessary recommendations (see paragraph 29). Interim reviews give careful consideration to the operation of the programme, the resources supporting it and the points made in the discussion with students. Courses are normally reviewed periodically every six years. Partnership Approval and Review Panels and Course Approval and Review Panels are used for the purposes of periodic review as well as initial approval with, as appropriate, slightly different terms of reference and modifications in procedures. On the basis of the evidence seen by the audit team such reviews give detailed consideration to the operation of the course and the student experience in the period under review.

49   Link tutor reports, visit notes and evidence heard by the audit team indicated the strong support offered by the link tutors to partners on an ongoing basis throughout the academic year in relation to the quality of learning opportunities, enabling effective monitoring of programmes as well as additional help in preparation for specific events such as interim, periodic review or QAA's Integrated quality and enhancement review.

50   The audit team concluded that the procedures for approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision in terms of learning opportunities are appropriately deployed by

the University and that they made an effective contribution to the experience of students on collaborative programmes. The team considers the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners both in the UK and overseas to be a feature of good practice.

51   The Quality Enhancement Unit ensures oversight and management of the Academic Infrastructure within the University. A yearly overview of developments in the *Code of practice* is presented to the Quality Assurance Committee and link tutors are informed of developments. Due cognisance is taken of the Academic Infrastructure on approval and review. Where overseas partners are concerned, close attention is paid to the regulations of national authorities. The audit team concluded that proper and effective use was made of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the context of learning opportunities.

52   The University considers the role and input of students as an important one with systems for student input being checked at the time of approval of an institution as well as on interim and periodic review. The University has a series of mechanisms for gathering feedback from students in collaborative partners. All partner institutions are required to collect student feedback through their own systems and franchise students also complete the University's module review form, as well as the National Student Survey. The standard link tutor report form includes a section on student feedback in which matters arising from the partner's own monitoring system are regularly outlined as well as key points from meetings held between the link tutor and students. Students might also in certain instances meet with the external examiner.

53   Active and effective representation systems are in place in partner institutions offering good opportunities for students to give feedback on their experience. As appropriate, certain issues may be subject to further consideration by the University. Students do not necessarily receive training or advice on how to act as representatives and the University might wish to give further consideration to this. Students on collaborative provision programmes with a direct link to an on-campus programme at the University have an opportunity to act as student representatives with their on-campus colleagues.

54   Although the University does not currently include collaborative provision student representatives as members of review panels, students are always consulted as part of interim review, periodic review and, where feasible, institutional approval, with their views informing the process.

55   The audit team concluded that arrangements made by the institution for obtaining and responding to student feedback on their learning opportunities, as well as for ensuring a contribution to quality assurance processes, made an effective contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

56   Following approval, the University actively engages with partner institutions in the promotion of research and scholarly activities, thereby enhancing students' learning opportunities. Of particular note is the supported validation model which provides additional support during the early stages of the partnership to promote scholarly practice and research through an enhanced programme of visits and participation by University staff. There was clear evidence that partner institutions appreciate the support received from the University in enriching and developing their research culture and in enabling their staff to undertake further study and research. The audit team consider the model of 'supported validation' to be a feature of good practice in systematically developing a partner institution's capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes; as is the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners both in the UK and overseas.

57   Delivery through other modes of study is not a major feature within collaborative provision at the University. However, where such modes are to be found, the University draws on internal guidance for on-campus provision. The audit team saw careful scrutiny of partner institution arrangements for delivery of programmes through these modes with, for instance, consideration

of a partner's online environment at initial and interim review. The team concluded that where other modes of study were deployed, they were monitored and implemented so as to make an appropriate contribution to the student experience.

58   The admission of students onto collaborative provision programmes is the responsibility of the partner institutions using their own admissions policy, which is approved and monitored by the University. Other than for non-standard applicants, partner institutions normally decide whether to admit a student; decisions regarding non-standard applicants are usually the responsibility of the link tutor. Link tutors are also expected to monitor admission decisions.

59   The audit team formed the view that collaborative provision makes a significant contribution to the University's aim of increasing access to higher education. However, the team encourages the University to consider whether greater dissemination and awareness of the monitoring of admissions decisions might assist it in securing greater consistency of admissions decisions.

60   The primary responsibility for providing resources to support programmes at a partner institution and to provide academic and pastoral support for students rests with the partner. The audit team found that the University, on the whole, was taking appropriate steps to monitor and, where necessary, to provide support for students directly, particularly through the diligence of many link tutors and of other staff involved in visits to partner institutions. Students who met the team expressed satisfaction both with the resources available to them and with the extent of their access to the University's own facilities. The nature and availability of support is communicated to students through student handbooks. Students confirmed that they had received helpful course handbooks from their home institution.

61   Appropriate consideration is given by approval panels regarding the adequacy of staffing at partner institutions, with the University permitting only those staff to teach on its collaborative provision courses who have been approved by it to do so.

62   The University provides a wide range of support mechanisms for staff at partner institutions at both faculty and institutional level, and in the audit team's view the University is taking appropriate steps to identify and meet the needs of partner institutions for the development of their staff. In particular, auditors noted the seriousness with which the University takes its responsibility for supporting a partner institution which is not yet regarded as able to sustain a full validation.

63   Overall, the audit team concluded that in the context of the University's collaborative provision, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

64   The University's approach to quality enhancement is assurance-based with measures to promote systematic enhancement being embedded within the structures of the University. This is set out and described fully in the Quality Enhancement Framework and Strategy which is linked to the Corporate Plan. The University states that priorities for enhancement should be defined in a devolved way and thus the Framework and Strategy sets out only the principles for each faculty to pursue. These include taking every opportunity to consider teaching and learning issues at all levels, identifying examples of good practice and taking steps to disseminate them.

65   The University has a comprehensive mechanism for disseminating good practice arising from the quality assurance procedures and deliberative structures, for example the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision, the faculty collaborative provision committees and through the work of link tutors and the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator. The University holds an annual quality monitoring briefing session which is partly aimed at the sharing of the good practice highlighted in the monitoring round. In 2006, the Standing Advisory Group on

UK Collaborative Provision and the Standing Advisory Group on Overseas Collaborative Provision were merged into the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision. This has enabled far greater exchange of experience and good practice between UK, European and overseas collaborative arrangements.

66   Four of the five faculties are actively involved in collaborative provision and University policies have been operationalised by each faculty in line with their own structures and experiences. In order to gauge the effectiveness of this a thematic audit was conducted during 2008-09, focusing on faculty-based processes and procedures for collaborative provision. The internal thematic audit and the proactive response to the findings is regarded by the audit team as good practice and demonstrates that the University is taking development-led steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

67   The audit team found the Quality Enhancement Framework to be driving a consistent and ongoing focus on enhancement. By posing reflective questions it stresses further the University's procedures, processes and good practice as well as enhancement and development plans. There is evidence of an ongoing move towards a systematic coordination of enhancement through, for example, incorporation of enhancement within the remit of the Teaching, Assessment and Learning Committee. The Framework and Strategy also makes the point of recognising that enhancement depends on the efforts of individual staff across the University and in the collaborative partners.

68   The audit team saw evidence that an institutionally and faculty-driven and directed systematic approach to enhancement is being taken in respect of most provision. The team considered that the University's approach to quality enhancement was characterised by a commitment to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, underpinned by the Quality Enhancement Framework. There was a clear evidence of developmental intent linked to the University's own Mission and Corporate Plan.

Section 5: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

69   At the time of the audit the University had partnership arrangements with five institutions to offer research degrees to some 120 students, the majority of which were at a single institution. The process for approving arrangements for the validation of research degrees at partner institutions is similar to that in place for the approval of taught programmes, relying on a combination of institutional approval and partnership approval.

70   The audit team formed the view that the approval process demonstrated a suitably high degree of attention to ensuring the quality and standards of research degree provision. Through its consideration of documentation and meetings with students, the team confirmed that due account had been taken by the University to the partner institutions' ability to provide appropriate research and skills development; gather student feedback; ensure the provision of clear information to students about their programmes of study, their expectations and their responsibilities; and provide a process for representations, complaints and appeals. Students who met the team were satisfied with the manner in which they were represented and with the opportunities to provide feedback more generally.

71   In contrast, however, the audit team noted some inconsistency in the application of the University's requirements for the conduct of periodic reviews of collaborative research degree provision, and would encourage the University to ensure that all such reviews are conducted in a manner as rigorous as its own policy requires.

72   The approval of the appointment of a supervisory team for each student is the responsibility of Research Degrees Sub-Committee except for two institutions which have delegated authority to use their own mechanisms. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee is responsible for monitoring the progress of research students at all partners with the exception of the two mentioned above. Monitoring of individual students' progression is primarily through the completion of an annual report written by each student and the audit team found that this process was carried out conscientiously. The examining arrangements for research students are those of the University itself, and the arrangements for each student are approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

73   The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements are sufficient to ensure that the research environment and the student experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 6: Published information

74   The University and its partner institutions publish a wide range of material for the use of staff and current and prospective students, both in hard copy and electronically. The audit team concurred with the Briefing Paper that great care is taken over the use of the University's corporate identity, with regular tracking and 'web dipping' to ensure appropriate branding and use of name. Comprehensive guidance is available to partner institutions to ensure the accuracy and completeness of all information published relating to the association with the University. This guidance also appears as a schedule to programme agreements between the University and its partners.

75   Where partner institutions take responsibility for the production of their own programme and module handbooks, this is based upon University templates and developed in conjunction with the link tutor and other staff at the University. Promotional material is produced by collaborative partners and sent to the University for approval.

76   Evidence considered by the audit team demonstrated that the mechanisms in place to ensure the accuracy, usefulness and currency of published information are effective. Meetings with students confirmed that the material they received prior to admission and throughout their programmes of study was comprehensive and provided the information needed to understand the requirements to achieve the award for which they were registered. While there is no evidence to suggest that publicity and information is inaccurate or unrepresentative, consistency of approach across the different provision has been acknowledged as requiring further development by the University.

77   Programme specifications are available from the University website for franchised provision. They are not, however, systematically provided for students in hard copy or electronically by a validated partner, but are generally summarized in programme handbooks. The University might wish to review the consistency with which programme specifications are made available to students on collaborative provision programmes.

78   External examiner reports are not systematically provided or seen by partner students. It is recommended that the University ensure that external examiner reports are shared with all collaborative provision students in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase Two Outcomes, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45)*.

79   The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the model of supported validation in systematically developing partner institutions' capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes (paragraphs 8, 56)

- the process of interim review in further reassuring the University of the relationship with, and the academic health of, new collaborative arrangements (paragraph 29)

- the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners in the UK and overseas (paragraphs 31, 50, 56)

- the sharing of inter-faculty experience and the use of institutional thematic audit in the enhancement of collaborative provision across the University (paragraph 66).

Recommendations for action

Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure that the list of typologies encompasses all types of collaborative provision arrangements operating within the University (paragraph 5)

- ensure that the collaborative provision register contains a record of all collaborative arrangements as defined by the University, and make it publicly available, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 7)

- strengthen the process for the approval of academic regulations and policies used by validated partners (paragraph 36)

- ensure that all external examiners receive timely and appropriate responses to their annual reports, in keeping with the University's expectations for on-campus provision (paragraph 38).

Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- extend the scope of management information collected from partner institutions in order to further inform the University's oversight of its collaborative provision (paragraph 40)

- ensure that external examiner reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45)* (paragraph 78).

Appendix

Coventry University's response to the Institutional audit report

Coventry University welcomes the publication of the report on the audit of its collaborative provision which indicates that confidence can be placed in the academic standards of awards made in its name. The University is also gratified that the soundness of its approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students, including future plans is recognised.

The University has noted that a number of areas of good practice were identified by the audit team and have been referred to in the body of the audit report. The University is particularly pleased that the Quality Assurance Agency has acknowledged the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners both in the UK and overseas, and that the University's part in systematically developing partner institutions' capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes though the supported validation arrangement has been commented upon.

The University acknowledges the recommendations for action, some of which have already been actively addressed and others that will be addressed subject to further development:

- The list of typologies used by the University to describe its collaborative arrangements will continue to be updated at such times as new types of relationships with external organisations emerge.

- The University will continue to update its register of collaborative provision as new partnerships and/or extensions to existing partnerships take place. Discussions on how best to share information about the University's collaborative partners with the general public are ongoing.

- The approval process for collaborative ventures is continually reviewed and refined. During the course of the audit it became apparent that Institutional Approval reports for validated programmes do not always explicitly state that the partner institution's academic regulations and policies have been deemed to be appropriate and fit for purpose. The University is therefore looking to strengthen this aspect of the approval process.

- Partner colleges are to be reminded of the need to provide External Examiners with timely and appropriate written responses to issues raised in their annual reports.

- Whilst External Examiner reports are considered by Boards of Study at which there is student representation, they are currently not routinely shared with the wider student audience, and it is not clear how widely they are shared with students in partner institutions. This is an area that the University will seek to address in consultation with its partners.

- The University will consider extending the scope of management information collected from partner institutions in order to further inform the oversight of its collaborative provision.

In conclusion, the University is appreciative of the constructive approach adopted by the audit team, and of the positive outcome of the audit process.