QAA

Coventry University

December 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Audit of collaborative provision at Coventry University (the University) from 7 to 11 December 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of institution's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to 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 the audit team's view, the University's approach to quality enhancement in relation to collaborative provision was informed by clear strategic direction, with appropriate mechanisms in place for implementation, monitoring and dissemination.

Institutional arrangements for 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 be 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 of good practice:

- the model of supported validation in systematically developing partner institutions' capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes (paragraphs 5, 14, 54, 94, 116)

- the process of interim review in further reassuring the University of the relationship with, and the academic health of, new collaborative arrangements (paragraph 38)

- the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners in the UK and overseas (paragraphs 40, 77, 94)

- the sharing of inter-faculty experience and the use of institutional thematic audit in the enhancement of collaborative provision across the University (paragraph 121).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- ensure that the list of typologies encompasses all types of collaborative provision arrangements operating within the University (paragraph 4)

- ensure that the collective list of collaborative provision contains a record of all the University's collaborative arrangements, and make it publicly available (paragraph 7)

- strengthen the process for the approval of academic regulations and policies used by validated partners (paragraph 58)

- 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 63).

Recommendations for action that the team considers 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 69)

- 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 143).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   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 expanded upon by means of 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 new Corporate Plan (2009) which has a comprehensive section covering internationalisation.

2   There has been significant growth in collaborative partnerships over the last few years and the strategic aim of the University to increase collaborative provision further by concentrating upon those partnerships which are, or have the potential to be, of large scale. In considering new partners the University intends that that there must be an academic and business fit with the University. The main criteria governing the formation of new partnerships are linkage to the Corporate Plan, contribution to the University's Widening Participation Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy. The University favours what it refers to as multi-touch arrangements where there is the potential for broader collaborations such as linking with business and enterprise activities.

3   The University is organised into five academic units: three faculties and two schools (in keeping with the Briefing Paper and for the purposes of the report all will be referred to as faculties). Two faculties are actively involved in collaborative arrangements (Business, Environment and Society, and Engineering and Computing) and two have some experience in supporting collaborative provision in the UK and overseas (Art and Design, and Health and Life Sciences). At the time of the audit the University had arrangements with 37 partner institutions (15 located in the UK and 22 overseas), with approximately 2,280 students studying in the UK and 2,771 based overseas, equating to approximately 22 per cent of the total student population studying for University awards. All programmes are delivered in English.

4   The University's typology of its collaborative provision is listed in the document 'Support and Maintenance of Collaborative Provision' developed in 2009 (see paragraph 23). Types

of arrangements include 'franchise'; 'hybrid franchise'; 'validated'; 'autonomous franchise'; 'supported validation'; and 'recognised'. In addition, one faculty also list 'credit-rating' and 'joint arrangements' as part of its collaborative provision. The audit team also saw reference to 'hybrid orphan franchise' arrangements, where 'orphan' means that the University does not offer the programme on-campus, but has the necessary expertise to offer it through collaborative arrangements, and 'hybrid' refers to a University award where the student numbers belong to the partner institution. The team was provided with a document produced by the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU), for the purposes of the audit, which defined the collaborative provision typologies. Although this document provided the most comprehensive explanation of the typologies seen by the team, it did not include reference to 'hybrid orphan franchise'. The team concluded that the lack of a definitive and centrally adopted set of definitions has the potential to put effective institutional oversight at risk. The team recommends, therefore, that the definitive list of typologies encompasses all types of collaborative provision arrangements operating within the University. The University might find the document produced by QEU for the audit helpful in this regard.

5   The typology given to a partnership is decided during the approval process. At the time of the audit the majority of the collaborative partnerships were validated arrangements, where the partner institution has a greater level of autonomy in designing and managing academic programmes, admitting students, setting and managing the regulations and assessment practices. New collaborative arrangements are frequently approved within the University's 'supported validation' framework, where the University provides greater support and has more control in the early stages of a partnership, while allowing the partner to take on greater responsibility as confidence in the collaboration develops (see paragraphs 54, 91, 94, 116). The audit team considers this developmental process which increases the capacity of the partner organisation to develop and assure the quality of programmes to be good practice.

6   The definitive list of collaborative provision is held centrally by QEU, in the form of the collaborative provision register, and informed by the faculties and the UK Education Partnerships Coordinator. Credit-rating and recognition (articulation) agreements are regarded as collaborative provision by the University, but do not appear on the register seen by the audit team. Agreements for these are signed at faculty level and the team was informed that these are ratified by the International Office. Although the University's Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision (SAGCP) consider it essential that a master list, covering all collaborative links both UK and overseas, be developed. It is the view of the team that no such master list exists which outlines 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*.

The information base for the audit

8   The University provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the partner link visits selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team had access to the institution's intranet.

9   The audit team also had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (November 2008)

- the report of the previous collaborative provision audit (April 2004)

- the report of the overseas audit of Hong Kong (May 2007)

- Integrated quality and enhancement review reports published by QAA since the previous Institutional audit

- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)

- the report on the mid-cycle follow up to Institutional audit, where available

- the institution's internal documents

- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students at the University and at three partner link visits.

Developments since the last audit

10   The most recent Institutional audit took place in 2008 and considered on-campus provision only. It found that 'confidence could be reasonably placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the academic standards of its awards and quality of the learning opportunities available to its students', and identified a number of features of good practice covering the coordination of student representation, supporting the diverse learning needs of students, the work of the Centre for the Study of Higher education, and student retention. A number of advisable recommendations were identified in relation to the delegation of authority of Academic Board, the discontinuation of courses, and the management of placement learning. One desirable recommendation was identified regarding student representation.

11   To address the recommendations and ensure continuation of the good practice the University has taken a number of actions: it has put in place formal procedures for the discontinuation of courses, and commenced faculty-level initiatives to provide appropriate placement learning opportunities to students. In the context of the good practice the University noted that the role of the Student Representative Coordinator was continuing. The University acknowledged that action on some of the recommendations was subject to further development during 2009-10, including the implementation of a new Teaching and Learning Strategy covering the period 2010 to 2015.

12   The University's collaborative provision was considered as part of the 2004 Institutional audit and the considered approach of the University to the management of collaborative provision was noted as good practice. None of the recommendations made in the audit related directly to collaborative provision.

13   There have been two overseas audits since 2002 which focused on the collaborative link between the University and INTI College Malaysia (April 2003) and City University Hong Kong (May 2007). Both audits had positive outcomes, and the University, through the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) as well as faculty-based committees, has taken heed of the issues identified in each of the reports. The staged and developmental approach to partnership working, commended in the INTI report, has been extended across the University and the current audit team saw evidence of this working effectively. In the light of comments made in the Hong Kong overseas audit report, the role of interim reviews was formalised in 2007 (see paragraph 26, 38).

14   The University's partnership with M S Ramaiah School of Advanced Studies in Bangalore was included as a case study in the overseas audit of India (2009) and demonstrated how the University works with a partner institution to enable it to take on greater responsibility

for the management of the link over time. The current audit team saw clear evidence of two further partner organisations benefitting from this developmental approach associated with the University's 'supported validation' typology and concluded that the model was a feature of good practice.

15   The University has addressed the concerns identified in the no confidence judgement in a Foundation Degree Review conducted in 2005. Through the action plan it has implemented the University has made significant progress in assuring academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. There have been positive outcomes in relation to the four Integrated quality and enhancement reviews that the University has participated in since 2008.

The awarding institution's framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

16   The Briefing Paper stated that a Quality Enhancement Framework had been developed which identified a more streamlined approach to quality assurance and management. A development confirmed in the 2008 Institutional audit of on-campus provision. The Framework was implemented in September 2005 across all on-campus and collaborative provision. For collaborative provision the Framework has retained essentially the previous approval and review processes to acknowledge the potentially higher risk associated with such arrangements. The Framework provides scope for some adaptation and provision of additional information depending on the type of collaborative arrangement. A Framework for Research Degrees has also been developed but has not been applied to collaborative provision. It will be rolled out when it is appropriate to do so, on a partner-by-partner basis (see paragraph 125).

17   Academic Board has responsibility for the standards of the University's awards, but has delegated authority to the QAC for academic standards and quality. Prime responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's awards rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) who is the Deputy Chair of the Academic Board and also chairs QAC, the Strategic Academic Planning Group and the Teaching, Assessment and Learning Committee.

18   QAC is responsible for the approval and review of all University courses to be delivered through collaborative arrangements via the Strategic Academic Planning Group (SAP), the Internalisation Development Committee (IDC), and Partnership/Course Approval and Review Panels (PARPs/CARPs) for franchise and validation arrangements respectively. These panels have delegated authority to approve and review programmes, but only SAGCP can approve institutional level partnerships. In addition, the SAGCP has a central monitoring role of academic standards and quality assurance (including approvals and reviews). SAGCP came into existence in 2006 with the merger of the Standing Advisory Group on UK Collaborative Provision and the Standing Advisory Group on Overseas Collaborative Provision (see paragraph 119). The Briefing Paper noted that at faculty level, responsibility for quality matters is vested with faculty boards and boards of study. The assurance of standards at the assessment and awards stage is the responsibility of subject and programme assessment boards.

19   The QEU is an administrative unit which advises and administers process. A QEU adviser is allocated to each faculty and works closely with the faculty registrar, and with 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.

20   At faculty level, responsibility for the oversight of collaborative provision varies depending on the volume of collaborative provision in a faculty. 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 and another is in the process of forming one.

21   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, monitoring quality and supporting partner institution staff. Their role is outlined in the recently finalised 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. Briefing for link tutors is devolved to faculties and the University does not outline formal expectations in this regard, although it was pointed out that systems for link tutors are currently undergoing further development. The audit team noted the different means of briefing and induction, including informal mentoring arrangements and cultural advice and support from regional managers within the International Office.

22   Link tutor reports, visit notes and evidence heard by the audit team confirmed the strong support offered by the link tutors through a sustained series of visits to partner institutions, as well as input to annual quality monitoring and ongoing work and events, such as preparation for interim review or other external reviews such as Integrated quality and enhancement reviews.

Selecting and approving a partner organisation or agent

23   There are no formal institutional-level documents or guidelines setting out expectations of the University in relation to the initial discussions with potential partners and faculties. Two of the faculties include advice about what might be covered in this early discussion phase in their operational documents (see paragraph 21). The audit team had sight of a newly introduced 'Support and Maintenance of Collaborative Provision' which describes the different types of collaborative provision, details those with authority and responsibility for assurance, approval, admissions, induction, enrolment, project and dissertation support, teaching input, in-bound visits, assessment, monitoring, revision to programmes and other administrative responsibilities. This document, drawing on similarly thorough guidance produced by the two faculties with significant experience in collaborative provision, provides detailed and helpful advice and is evidence of the University's ability to provide a more systematic, cross-faculty framework for the management of academic standards.

24   University-level consideration of new proposals for collaborative partnerships involves the development of an outline proposal and business case by a faculty with support from the QEU adviser. These are considered by SAP and IDC depending on the location of the proposed partnership, UK or overseas. SAP approves the titles of all awards. Through this process and due diligence in the forming of agreements, all collaborative arrangements are fully costed and accounted for. The University has developed appropriate guidance mapped against relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* and a standardised form for the documentation to support the outline proposal and business case.

25   Confirmation that a partnership proposal is strategically sound sets the formal approval process in motion. Full programme documentation is submitted to the QEU who organises a partnership approval event undertaken by a PARP/CARP depending on the nature of the link being established. PARPs are used for franchised provision, where the programme is already approved, to assess the partner institution's ability to deliver the programme. In cases where a new course is being franchised a combined PARP and CARP is used. A CARP is only used in relation to course approval (see paragraph 32). This documentation includes an overview, programme specification module descriptors, collaboration framework document, resources document and course regulations. The primary aim of the approval events is to allow both parties to verify congruity of mission and objectives. Approval panels are responsible to QAC and do not have delegated authority to grant institutional approval, this is done by SAGCP on behalf of QAC. For overseas provision the International Office provides guidance and support to the faculties and panel members.

26   The University now requires all new partner institutions to undertake an interim review after two years of the initial agreement (see paragraph 38).

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

Written agreements with a partner organisation or agent

28   The University has legally binding written agreements with its partner institutions setting out the rights and obligations of both parties. These agreements are developed when conditions for approval have been met. 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 programme agreement is signed 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 saw one instance where a Memorandum of Co-operation was in place but was assured that this was a historical document and that programme agreements have replaced these.

29   Programme agreements use a standardised form and include sections covering the length and termination of the agreement; the collaboration framework; institutional responsibilities; operational arrangements; the provision for institutional review; intellectual property; publicity and marketing; and financial arrangements. In addition, the agreement states that it is the responsibility of the collaborative institution to secure any local authorisation to operate. The University requires confirmation that such approval is in place before the courses can commence.

30   The audit team found agreements that it reviewed to be clear, comprehensive and in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice*. The team also saw sufficient evidence to assure them that the University is carefully managing the continued assessment of students and to secure the standard of the award during the termination of a programme agreement.

31   Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University adopts a proactive approach to quality assurance, evident from initiatives such as the guidelines provided by SAGCP and the interim reviews. The team concurs with the 2004 Institutional audit that the University takes a considered approach to the management of collaborative provision, which incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement to the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement. The team also 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

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Approval

32   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 (PARPs). Course Approval and Review Panels (CARPs) are deployed for new (or significantly revised) validated provision. The same panel will also be used for a periodic review for a programme or set of programmes. If a new programme is being franchised a combination of PARPs/CARPs is used.

33   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.

34   Examination of a selection of reports from PARPS and CARPS indicate that University protocols and guidance are correctly followed: panels include external representatives, a sufficient evidence base is used, useful general briefing notes for chairs and panels are provided, and informative reports based on well organised and conducted events produced. For validated provision, evidence of scrutiny of partner institution's regulations was very limited in the documentation (see paragraph 58).

35   Where amendments are minor (including changes to modules), they may be agreed within the faculty/school by a board of study (BoS) or collaborative committee (depending on the system operating in the faculty in question). They are then sent to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) via the Quality Enhancement Unit for final sign off using the form 'Notification of Changes to a Course Title, Structure or Regulations'.

36   Proposed major amendments to provision are carefully discussed with partners and at BoS thereafter, approved either by a panel event and reported into the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision (SAGCP), or are proposed via faculty collaborative provision committees (FCPCs) (on occasion by chair's action) and thence to the QAC Chair for approval on behalf of the Committee. While the former are clearly documented, it was not clear to the audit team what evidence base was used to approve amendments by the latter route: the notification of proposed change/sign-off forms seen by the team were lacking.

Interim and periodic reviews

37   Requirements for periodic review include the compilation of a critical appraisal in which the collaborating institution's course team provide a self-critical evaluation of the operation of the course. On the evidence presented periodic reviews of taught courses are well conducted and reported, with external presence and sufficient evidence base (including a large set of relevant documentation, meetings with staff and students, and a tour of facilities) (see also paragraph 127). Actions taken in response of the recommendations made are monitored and reported.

38   While the approval period is normally six years, for all partnership arrangements and courses, interim review is an effective process that mirrors periodic review in its methodology. The audit team considers it good practice in bridging the period between initial approval and periodic review with a formal event. These events, which may include additional approval or recognition arrangements, are well conducted, reported and followed up with external presence and sufficient evidence base, with continuing monitoring and reporting of actions.

Annual quality monitoring

39   The reporting of collaborative provision during annual monitoring is shared between the University and partner institutions at different levels. At programme and partner level separate reports are prepared annually by link tutors and partners. These annual quality monitoring (AQM) reports are initially considered within each faculty, following the processes laid down by the faculty for managing collaborative provision, whether this be a faculty committee or relevant department boards. Reports from faculties are the subject of consideration at SAGCP with points noted relating to different partners. At university level two summary reports are prepared: the AQM Report on UK Collaborative Provision prepared by the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator, and the Summary Report on Overseas Collaborative Provision for consideration by QAC. The areas covered in the link tutors reports are reflected, as appropriate, in these summary AQM reports, aspects of which are incorporated into the University's Annual Report on Academic Work and presented to Academic Board.

40   Although link tutor reports vary in the detail of information presented and the quality of analysis, they are generally diligently completed using a standard format. A study of all link tutor reports from 2008-09 and a sample from the previous year indicated that interaction between University and partner staff is regular and productive, and contributed to the audit team's conclusion that the high level of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners in the UK and overseas is good practice. The reports also showed University staff engaged 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 changes, and presence at subject and programme assessment boards (SABs/PABs). Most reports detailed external examiner comments and actions taken or required. The most informative reports also presented insightful analyses of student achievement.

41   The format for link tutor AQM reporting is the same for all types of partnership in the UK and overseas. While this is a prudent arrangement, ensuring tutors address a standard range of topics and enabling the University to identify good practice and any common issues of concern across the provision, the audit team considered that certain types of partnership arrangement would benefit from additional data and commentary (see paragraph 69). A review of a sample of AQMs prepared by UK and overseas partners in a common format indicated a more varied level of sophistication in critical 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.

42   The AQM Report on UK Collaborative Provision is presented to QAC along with the Summary Report on Overseas Collaborative Provision, using the same general format, and therefore enabling the committee to cross-reference and gain oversight of the collaborative provision as a whole. These are useful overview documents, skilfully assembled, summarising the evidence and salient points arising from AQM, dealing with issues of teaching, learning and assessment, student progression and achievement, learning resources, student support and guidance and quality assurance and enhancement.

43   After examining the University's annual reporting arrangements the audit team came to the view that the system is well managed. Of particular note were the way in which reports inform and build up from specific operational monitoring to more strategic overviews, the communication to relevant individuals and groups, and the degree of collective scrutiny.

44   The audit team explored the University's deliberative structures in relation to approval, annual monitoring and review. The team noted that all BoS discussed the relevant partnerships, with varying degrees of attention: the most effective giving detailed, in some cases very substantial, consideration to the evidence base - including external examiner, partner and link tutor reports, review reports and minutes of BoS conducted in the partner institutions and debating new course proposals and amendments.

45   The activities of FCPCs where they operate were rigorous, with strong scrutiny of the faculty's evidence base for collaborative provision including close consideration of all annual and external examiner reports and data relating to progression and achievement, with actions identified and followed up. It was clear that faculties were taking seriously their commitment to monitoring the collaborative provision for which they were responsible.

46   The quality of University scrutiny was further demonstrated by SAGCP, whose minutes showed regular debate of annual reports, including substantial consideration of the AQM Report on UK Collaborative Provision and the Summary Report on Overseas Collaborative Provision, as well as an overview of the effectiveness of University operational processes – for example, the 'need for greater clarification on issues of moderation for collaborative links', which was a theme common to many external examiner and link tutor reports. The Group also demonstrated an ability to contribute usefully to the consolidation of an increasingly common framework of

procedures for managing and developing the University's collaborative provision. For example advising on the development of the document 'Support and Maintenance of Collaborative Provision Arrangements'; on revisions to AQM templates; and to standardising the collaborative provision register.

47   SAGCP feeds into QAC, whose minutes showed limited discussion of collaborative provision in its own right, apart from a consideration of the two overview reports (UK Provision and Overseas Provision) and a report on IQER outcomes, including items identified for action. Given the significant consideration of collaborative provision evidence at SAGCP, faculty committees and BoS, the audit team considered that QAC received sufficient information about the way in which collaborative provision was being managed. Academic Board receives little information on collaborative provision, although there are useful references within the Annual Report on Academic Work, for example in the resolution of inconsistencies in assessment practices across the partner institutions.

48   The audit team concluded, therefore, that the University is acting responsibly in its monitoring and forward planning of collaborative provision, that the level of deliberation of the evidence base from local to central committees is appropriate, and with some limitations (see paragraph 69) the information set and the communication flow between groups is effective. SAGCP in particular is an effective committee with appropriate agendas, evidence of careful monitoring and promotion of good management of collaborative provision.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

49   From a study of approval and review events, external examiner reports and consideration of a range of programme specifications, the audit team confirmed the Briefing Paper's statement that 'external reference points, including the different aspects of the QAA's Academic Infrastructure are used throughout the course development process with reference being made to them in Programme Specifications, that the University's Programme Specification template sets out explicit intended learning outcomes, and that University Module descriptors follow a learning outcomes format with corresponding assessment statements'. Subject benchmark statements are used by course teams in the course design and review stages, with new or revised statements being circulated to relevant staff during the consultation periods.

50   Reports from approval and review events, as well as link tutor reports, and discussions with partner staff confirmed that partner organisations are supported in their understanding of the Academic Infrastructure and, where partners are designing academic programmes or adapting their academic administrative processes, are helped to incorporate the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure into their development activity.

51   The University's awards are mapped to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and the University has adopted the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer system of level descriptors. The University's framework for the management of collaborative provision, its protocols supporting guidance and practices, is generally in line with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

52   In summary, the elements of the Academic Infrastructure are checked fully at approval events and in the course of proposed amendments, programme specifications are updated when programme amendments have been approved, external reference points (and external experts) are used appropriately.

Assessment policies and regulations

53   All collaborative partners have at least some responsibility for the assessment of students. In many instances the University provides some support and moderates most but not all examinations and course work, the exception being some UK validated courses. Evidence indicates that this moderation is undertaken in a professional, well documented fashion. Some provision in UK validated institutions is moderated only by the external examiner.

54   A number of link tutor reports, external examiner reports and partner AQM reports, have identified difficulties in 'calibrating marking' to University standards as an issue. In response, SAGCP has proposed an online support module. This has not yet been implemented but has the potential to improve partner marking practice. There is considerable evidence of additional support for this issue via link tutors and other staff working with partners through training and moderation exercises to assure assessment practice. Support for partners in developing expertise in assessment design and practice demonstrates the strength of the supported validation model of collaborative provision.

55   Subject and programme assessment boards may take place at the University or at the partner organisation, for example in some validated partners. External examiners are expected to attend the relevant SABs/PABs at the collaborating institution. A study of a sample of assessment board minutes and AQM reports indicated that where boards take place at the partner organisation there is University presence, although the University in some cases relies on the link tutor and external examiner (sometimes by a virtual presence) to monitor practice at the boards. Among the limited number of examples of board minutes provided, however, it appeared that the external examiner for one UK validated partner had not been present for two successive boards, with no evidence of written comments presented at the board. A link tutor report for another UK validated partner noted that an external examiner had not attended any SABs/PABs for two years, and that the external examiner's report stated that the regulations and assessment system had not been explained to the external nor had they attended an external examiner workshop or briefing session (see paragraph 64).

56   The audit team, however, also saw notable practice including the summary grid of comments compiled in one faculty and used at examination boards to provide feedback and draw together comments from internal and external moderators; or when external examiners moderation is completed alongside internal moderation from visiting tutors resulting in a joint report on marking standards.

57   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, the University's regulations for their own purposes. Where validated partners choose to use their own academic regulations, the University's regulatory framework provides, in principle, rigorous processes for approving the suitability, integrity and comparability of those regulations, and assures the University that they are appropriate for the granting of UK awards. Equally, the regulatory framework includes appropriate assessment and classification rules (including questions of condonement, access to resits and retakes, progression rules), and rules in respect of mitigation and academic offences that have a direct bearing on students' final achievements and the value of the award.

58   However, the audit team saw limited evidence of initial and continuing scrutiny of the regulations of validated provision and their application. There is no guidance for approval teams concerning curriculum or regulatory match between the University and validated partners and these are pragmatically determined during approval events. While there are checks and balances in the approval process, including consideration of assessment and related regulations prior to the approval event and the use of panel expertise including a Quality Enhancemeny Unit (QEU) adviser, with the Registrar advising in case of doubt, the basis for decisions and the record of the decision-making process are not transparent. Approval, interim and periodic review reports make little mention of the deliberations of approval teams on this matter, nor do University or partner AQM reports offer systematic data on the application of regulations by partners. The team advises, therefore, that the University should strengthen and make more transparent the processes by which approval is granted for academic regulations and policies used by validated partners.

59   Regulatory changes by partner institutions are approved by the Chair of QAC following advice from QEU and the Registrar, and although the audit team saw evidence of a significant

amount of advice and support being provided by the University, for example in the recasting of an overseas partner institution's academic regulations to take account of local government and cultural differences, the team was not clear from the evidence available to it what rigour of scrutiny occurs during the approval of regulatory changes.

External examiners

60   Arrangements for the nomination and appointment of external examiners for collaborative provision follow standard University procedures. The examiners normally report directly to the University for franchise programmes and overseas validations; in the case of UK validations, the reports will come to the University via the partner. Nominations are considered, on behalf of the Academic Board, by the PVC (Student Learning and Experience).

61   The 'Application to Appoint' document advises faculties to clarify 'any franchised input into courses and if so any variations from internal practices' and induction documentation includes the 'Collaborative Framework'. Annual briefing sessions are organised by QEU, aimed mainly at newly appointed external examiners, who are briefed separately by their faculties on issues specific to the educational context of their collaborative institution, including local requirements and regulatory framework. The expectation is that link tutors will work with external examiners to establish their role and duties in relation to specific partnerships, although the evidence presented did not enable the auditors to establish the take-up or quality of local briefings in relation to collaborative provision.

62   The duties of the external examiners are set out clearly in University's External Examiner Handbook. Those appointed to courses operating at collaborating establishments are required to submit a report each year. There is no difference in the reporting template requirements for collaborative provision and on-campus provision or by type of partnership arrangement. The audit team saw evidence of individual reports being considered at the relevant board of study, and referred to within the AQM process along with any recommendations for improvement. Faculty registrars prepare an annual summary of issues raised for their faculties. The Academic Registrar then prepares a report on the themes which are of relevance across all faculties for the December meeting of QAC including separate sections on reports received in relation to collaborative arrangements, although, due to differences in timings, not all external examiner reports may be 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, contains detailed references to external examiner comments on partnerships and is accompanied by a general update on the 'outcomes of last year's recommendations' and good practice.

63   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 SAB or PAB'. The team established however that action taken in response to external examiners reports are fully recorded in AQM reports and are reported into the following BoS. External examiners receive an update on actions taken 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.

64   Overall, the audit team concluded that in most cases the University makes strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners. External examiner visits to partners are regular and their actions are in line with the requirements of the External Examiners Handbook. The reports of external examiners are generally well used in collaborative provision to monitor and improve academic standards. The team saw evidence in two cases of a lack of support for external examiners, accompanied by serial non-attendance at meetings of boards of examiners for validation provision. In one instance this occurred where University staff do not moderate student

work and where the College appoints the external examiner who reports directly to it. While accepting that these were isolated cases, the team would encourage the University to consider whether its current procedures for identifying and acting on serial non-attendance are sufficiently robust to prevent this happening in the future.

Certificates and transcripts

65   The University's arrangements for issuing certificates and transcripts for collaborative provision 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 that they include the necessary information for users to distinguish the nature of the partnership.

Management information - statistics

66   Outside of franchise arrangements, the University relies on collaborating institutions to provide data via link tutors who verify the information. The University recognises that there can sometimes be difficulties in the production and reporting of statistics. For instance, the most recent AQM summary report on UK collaborative provision commented that the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator continues to work with faculty administrators and Academic Registry to resolve 'the differences in data by providing revised enrolment figures'; the previous year's SAGCP summary report commented that 'the reporting of statistics would benefit from revision in AMRs'; and the latest Annual Report on Academic Work commented that the University's student records system 'needs to produce more meaningful statistics' in relation to the awards list.

67   An initiative to provide one overseas partner with access to the University's student record system is gradually being extended to other collaborating institutions in the UK and overseas. The Briefing Paper stated that 'this has been a challenging process as Coventry University has had to ensure that remote access does not compromise the security of the extensive student data held on it. Remote access is therefore strictly limited to the courses approved for that particular organisation, and the students enrolled on those courses. Apart from security, the University has found that the provision of training and support across time zones for overseas partners has required flexibility on both sides. Additionally, the technology and information technology infrastructure at other institutions has led to software issues'.

68   The audit team considers that these comments by the University, and their ongoing supportive actions, indicate a necessary diligence in evaluating the quality of management information, and are of the view that student achievement and progression data is properly monitored during the AQM process. A study of a wide range of annual reports from link tutors and partner organisations indicated that data on student progression and achievement is sufficiently represented for all types of collaborative provision, although with varying quality of analysis. Interim and periodic reviews also include informative statistical data on entry qualifications, programmes and awards and employment history for the three previous cohorts, plus a commentary on statistical trends.

69   The production and use of data is generally well used to monitor academic standards, despite occasional and understandable difficulties in gathering data from partners. The audit team recommends as desirable, however, that the University extends the scope of management information collected from partner institutions in order to further inform the University's oversight of its collaborative provision. While data on student progression and achievement is sufficient for franchised provision, a wider set of data regarding validated provision would offer further opportunity to give assurance that assessment and related regulations regarding the outcomes of awards are being properly managed by the partner. The team found little evidence within annual reports, reports of reviews or SABs/PABs, of data/information which would help the University to monitor a partner's application of its own regulations, such as those relating to appeals and mitigations, and to identify any implications for the academic standards of the University award or

for the student experience. The University confirmed that management information in these areas is not gathered systematically by the University and is not covered through the AQM process.

Overall conclusions on the management of academic standards

70   The different types of partnerships are managed within a set of quality assurance procedures in line with those governing on-campus provision, with suitable additional activities necessary to assure the collaborative dimension. There is evidence of increasing convergence in approval, monitoring and reporting practice across faculties. There is little differentiation in the formal protocols governing the varied types of partnership, but there are sensible differentiations in the level of support given to particular partners. Overall, the audit 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, particularly in relation to the protocols and guidance provided for validated partner arrangements, to reflect more fully the additional responsibilities and autonomy these partner organisations hold.

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

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Approval

72   Consideration of factors relating to the quality of learning opportunities is central to the work of Partnership and Course Approval and Review Panels (PARPs/CARPs) (see paragraph 32). Reports of approval events and discussion with partner institutions show that the human and physical learning resources for a programme, including the library (for which there is a template checklist used on partner approval) and other relevant learning resources, receive due consideration. If a resource area such as the library is made a condition of approval for the programme, the course cannot start until it is met.

73   Whereas institutional approval may only be granted after consideration by the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision (SAGCP) and formal signing-off by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), CARP panels have delegated authority from QAC to approve programmes, although the results of the panels are reported to SAGCP for the purposes of sharing good practice, ensuring consistency and identifying trends. A member of QAC is part of the PARP/CARP.

74   Changes in staff on a collaborative programme must be approved by the relevant head of department and dean before such staff can teach on modules. It is part of the link tutor's responsibility to ensure that this takes place.

Annual quality monitoring

75   As noted earlier (see paragraph 21) the link tutor is the key point of liaison for the University and partner institution, and regular visits is a requirement of the programme agreement. The link tutor supports partner institution in their preparation of an annual quality monitoring (AQM) report and also complete a comprehensive report on the provision for which they have responsibility. In their reports, the link tutors consider interaction with the partners and look as well at matters relating to the curriculum, teaching and learning issues, staff development, assessment (including particular reference to comments by the external examiner), student feedback and support.

76   All link tutors are supported in the AQM process by the UK Partnerships Coordinator who organises an annual briefing day attended by both the University and UK partner college personnel. In addition, the first annual conference for link tutors in the University was held in September (see paragraph 120). The UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator also regularly visits partner institutions, as far as possible on a termly basis.

77   The audit team concluded that the procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes in terms of learning opportunities were appropriately deployed by the University and that they made an effective contribution to the experience of students on collaborative programmes. The team considered 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.

Interim and periodic review

78   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 38). 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. PARPs and CARPS panels are used for the purposes of progress 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 (see paragraph 37).

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

79   The Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) ensures oversight and management of the Academic Infrastructure within the University. A yearly overview of developments in the *Code of practice* is presented to QAC. The audit team also learnt that in the event of changes to the Academic Infrastructure, link tutors would be notified directly by QEU. The importance of taking account of the Academic Infrastructure is stressed in the University Guidelines on Course Approval and Review documentation which indicate the need to adhere to the FHEQ as well as to consult subject benchmark statements. Evidence from partners and reviews confirmed that cognisance was taken of the Academic Infrastructure in relation to the quality of learning opportunities at approval and review. Where overseas partners are concerned, there is close attention to the regulations of national authorities and evidence was given of discussion and direct involvement with overseas education authorities in ascertaining their requirements.

80   The audit team concluded that proper and effective use was made of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points as applicable to learning opportunities within the context of collaborative provision.

Management information - feedback from students

81   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 institutions and programmes as well as on interim and periodic review. Partner institutions gather feedback for students on both validated and franchised programmes through their own systems which might include module evaluation forms, questionnaires or other means of consultation. In addition, franchise students will complete the University's module review form as well as the National Student Survey, as they are students of the University and are reported to the Higher Education Statistics Agency as such.

82   In addition, link tutors normally hold a meeting with students during their visit to the partner institution without staff from that institution being present. The standard link tutor report form also includes a question on student feedback. In this section points and issues arising from

the partner's own monitoring system are regularly captured as well as the outcomes of meetings held between the link tutor and students.

83   The audit team heard evidence suggesting that while certain students had met with staff from the University at the partner institution, this was not invariably the case. Students may also in certain instances meet with the external examiner but such meetings are not required as part of the process. Further informal feedback might also be obtained in institutions where University staff undertake teaching as this offers an opportunity for direct engagement with students.

84   It was clear that certain issues raised by students had been acted upon or were under active consideration by the University, for example the provision of a 'chipless' University identification card to facilitate students in validated institutions; or action taken in response to a petition from students in an overseas partner about a proposed change to the location for delivery and pattern of teaching in the final term of their programme.

85   The audit team concluded that the information gathered for management information purposes, in particular through link tutor reports and meetings with students, also makes an important contribution to assuring the quality of the student experience.

Role of students in quality assurance

86   As indicated above, the University pays careful attention to partner institutional systems for student involvement as part of its processes of approval, interim and periodic review.

87   Students who met with the audit team indicated that active and effective student representation systems were in place in partner institutions offering opportunities for them to give feedback on their experience. While the University checks institutional systems for student representation on approval and review and indicated that the link tutor would be aware if the system were deficient, the team heard evidence which suggested that students did not necessarily receive training or advice on how to act as representatives. This is an area to which the University might wish to give some further consideration.

88   The Briefing Paper noted that where collaborative provision is directly linked with an on-campus programme at the University, the collaborative provision students have an opportunity to act as student representatives with their on-campus colleagues.

89   While the University does not currently include collaborative provision students as members of approval and review panels, students are always consulted as part of interim and periodic review.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

90   The University places significant emphasis on the consideration of staff resources on approval and progress is checked on interim as well as periodic review. Subsequent to approval, sustained efforts are made to engage with partner institutions and promote research and scholarly activities, thereby enhancing students' learning opportunities.

91   In those instances where the University considers that the partner would benefit from strong initial academic input from the University, the supported validation model is used to promote scholarly practice and research through an enhanced programme of visits and participation in module delivery. The Briefing Paper noted that two overseas institutions have been encouraged to set up research centres and work closely with research staff from the University.

92   The audit team heard evidence in all partners visited of University support enriching the research culture, with one institution describing the University as a strategic partner for research links as well as programme validation. Partner staff gave instances of research cooperation and

scholarly exchange with the University and its staff, seen as offering a valuable contribution to their academic development and institutional culture. There was evidence too of scholarly interchange and some research activity with a range of other partners.

93   The University also encourages staff in partner institutions, both in the UK and overseas, to undertake further study or research degrees, and examples were offered of partner staff taking up these opportunities.

94   The audit team concluded that the University offered effective support to its partners in enhancing the links between research and scholarship and learning opportunities. The team commends as good practice the model of supported validation in systematically developing a partner institution's capacity to deliver and assure the quality of the collaborative programmes concerned, as well as the high level and of focused and reciprocal interaction between the University and its collaborative partners both in the UK and overseas.

Other modes of study

95   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 audit team heard that the University is guided by the *Code of practice*. All courses are approved and reviewed by the University according to the same processes, with checking of partner policies forming part of approval and review for validation arrangements (see paragraph 57). Where other modes of study are concerned, the team saw evidence of careful scrutiny of partner policies in areas relevant to the programme and its delivery with, for instance, consideration of a partner's online environment at initial and interim review, as well as of the institution's own virtual learning environment (VLE).

96   Work-based learning is a feature in a number of collaborative provision arrangements, both Foundation Degrees and other courses. One postgraduate programme is, for instance, grounded and delivered through work-based learning, supplemented by residentials, student group meetings and online communication via a VLE, there is also a diploma delivered through work-based learning. The audit team was informed that while there was no guidance specifically designed for work-based learning in respect of collaborative provision, the expectation is that internal University guidance is used in briefing and supporting partners. The team saw an example of a useful and comprehensive template for a student handbook for work-based learning programmes, produced by the Work-based Learning Unit in one faculty.

97   E-learning is a feature of most programmes and a partner's online learning environment is assessed as part of initial approval, interim or periodic review. In this regard, the University draws on the guidance contained in the Guidelines on Course Approval and Review Documentation which indicates the need to consider the facilities necessary for the delivery of the course, and specifically any specialist equipment or additional resources required. The constitution and terms of reference for PARPs and CARPs include scope for a tour of the facilities available (see paragraph 37).

98   The audit 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.

Resources for learning

99   The University recognises that the primary responsibility for providing resources to support programmes at a partner institution rests with the partner. It endeavours to ensure within its approval process that appropriate learning resources are in place, and thereafter that resources continue to be available. However, the University has not developed any guidance for potential partners on learning resources which are required to be made available before designation as a partner institution.

100   The audit team found evidence through the partner link visits that institutional approval events for both taught and research programmes considered the availability and suitability of learning resources provided at partner institutions, and that the approval panels give appropriate and careful consideration of resources before recommending approval. Through one partner link visit it was apparent that, although the approval panel had been informed of the resources available to students, they appeared not to have attempted to judge their suitability.

101   The Briefing Paper noted that in many cases the approval of a programme requires a library development plan to be submitted for scrutiny by the librarian or subject librarian in order to satisfy the University that suitable resources are available. Although the audit team saw no example of a library development plan prepared as a result of a condition of approval, an example of a summary of plans for the development of library resources at one institutional approval had been made available to them, and noted that it documented the steps taken after approval to monitor the provision of library resources at the institution.

102   The University takes steps to reassure itself of the continuing adequacy of learning resources by means of AQM reports, which are required to include reference to, and an evaluation of, resources available at partner institutions, at interim review meetings, and through student views as expressed in feedback questionnaires and course committee meetings. The audit team noted appropriate references to the availability of and plans for the development of library and other resources in AQM reports. Through the partner link visits the team also found evidence of the effectiveness of the interim review process in considering learning resources. Additionally, the team was informed that the approval of new modules requires consideration of the adequacy of available resources, and that staff at partner institutions do not teach on modules which lead to University credit until their curriculum vitae have been approved by the University.

103   The majority of students the audit team met expressed satisfaction both with the resources available to them and with the extent of their access, if appropriate, to the University's own resources. However, the team heard postgraduate students at one partner institution express dissatisfaction with the suitability and availability of library resources, but found no expression of this view in the most recent link tutor report.

104   The audit team concluded that the University's processes are generally effective in ensuring the adequacy of learning resources available within its collaborative provision.

Admissions policy

105   In respect of admission of students to collaborative programmes, each of the University's partner institutions has its own admissions policy and is responsible for implementing it. The University's policy is that each programme specification should set out its entry requirements, and unless they are the same as those of an identical programme already being offered by the University, they are subject to the approval by the relevant CARP. The audit team found evidence that CARPs had given appropriate consideration to most proposed entry requirements, but that in some cases it had not explicitly done so.

106   The University seeks by a number of means to make its courses accessible to groups within the UK which are under-represented in higher education. It regards its strategy for collaborative provision as contributing to this aim by increasing the number and variety of qualifications and pathways into its programmes. Noting the large scale of the University's collaborative provision and the wide range of programmes and partnerships which comprise it, the audit team formed the view that this provision makes a significant contribution to the University's aim of increasing access to higher education.

107   The responsibility for taking decisions about the admission of students to collaborative programmes is based on the type of applicant, that is, those with qualifications defined in the programme specification, or those with an equivalent qualification as set out in the University's detailed guidance for assessing the equivalence of international qualifications, and those regarded

as 'non-standard', who present other qualifications or none. Partner institutions are responsible for making decisions for applicants other than for 'non-standard' applicants. Although link tutors are responsible for taking decisions on 'non-standard' applications, the audit team also heard that some decisions on these applicants are made by partner institutions and monitored by the University.

108   The audit team considered how the University monitors the process of taking admissions decisions carried out by partner institutions, and noted that link tutors play a key role in monitoring student performance relative to the admissions policy and assessing 'non-standard' applicants. The consistency of admissions decisions is ensured by link tutors who liaise with other University staff where necessary. However, the team noted that neither the link tutors' annual reports nor the annual reports from partners habitually include any reference to the outcomes of the monitoring of admissions decisions, and would invite the University to consider whether greater dissemination and awareness of such outcomes might assist it in securing greater consistency of admissions decisions.

Student support

109   The University's policy is that academic and pastoral support for students is provided predominantly by the partner institution, and that the appropriateness of this support should be explored at the time of initial approval. In considering the manner in which partner approval events had fulfilled this responsibility, the audit team noted an instance in which careful consideration was given to the adequacy of student support, as well as instances where there appeared to have been no such judgement made by the approval panel. The team subsequently heard that the University has no explicit guidelines for the minimum acceptable levels of provision of student support, and suggest that the University might wish to review this position in the context of ensuring consistency of decision-making at partner approval events and in review.

110   University staff also provide additional support through visits to partners. Although link tutors tend to have limited contact with students they are often involved in the student induction process, while other teaching staff assist with the delivery of some modules and with student feedback.

111   The nature and availability of support is communicated to students through student handbooks, and the audit team found that examples of these included helpful guidance concerning, for instance, the availability of counselling support, careers guidance, support for academic English, and a variety of other services available within the institution. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that they had received course handbooks from the partner institution.

112   Link tutors are responsible through their annual reports for evaluating student support and guidance in relation to progression. In considering the adequacy of student support at partner institutions, many link tutor reports focus primarily on an analysis of student recruitment and progression, and offer relatively little consideration of the suitability of student support processes or of student views about them. The University might wish to review the coverage of link tutor reports in this respect.

113   Overall, the audit team concluded that the University was, on the whole, taking appropriate steps to monitor and, where necessary, provide support for students, particularly through the diligence of many link tutors and of other staff involved in visits to partner institutions.

Staffing and staff development

114   Partner institutions are responsible for policies in respect of staffing and staff development, and the University requires that these should be explored at the initial approval event. The audit team heard that the University has no explicit guidance in respect of their expectations regarding

the nature and level of staffing or of staff development at partner institutions, and suggest that the University might wish to review this position in the context of ensuring consistency of decision-making at partner approval events. However, the team noted evidence that institutional approval events had considered the adequacy of staffing at partner institutions, and also heard that the University permitted only those staff to teach on collaborative programmes whose qualifications and experience had been approved by it. Accordingly, the team concluded that the University was taking adequate levels of care in checking the appropriateness of staffing.

115   The University regards itself as offering strong support for teaching staff at partner institutions. The audit team noted a wide range of support mechanisms in place, including staff exchanges, regular meetings arranged at the University by the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator, and the day-to-day support provided for partners by link tutors. The team also heard that the University has not consistently applied policy in respect of the nature and extent of support which it offers to staff at partner institutions, but that decisions are taken at faculty level based on the needs of the institution concerned, with input from link tutor reports, external examiners' reports and AQM reports, as well as from recommendations arising from the institutional approval event. The team formed the view that the University was taking appropriate steps to identify and meet the needs of partner institutions for the development of their staff.

Overall conclusion on the management of the quality of learning opportunities

116   Through the partner link visits the audit team saw extensive examples of the way in which the supported validation model engages with staff in partner link institutions including support for projects, assessment moderation, curriculum development, monitoring of promotional material, and support for a graduation ceremony. In addition, the team noted that a total of 20 academic staff were enrolled on the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Professional Practice. The team regarded this as evidence for 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

Management information - quality enhancement

117   The University defines quality enhancement as 'the taking of deliberate steps to bring about continual improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students'. Processes for enhancement are embedded within existing structures linking them to the Corporate Plan through the Quality Enhancement Framework and Strategy. The audit team found the Framework to be driving a consistent, 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.

118   The University also places emphasis on defining priorities for enhancement in a devolved way, with the Framework and Strategy setting out 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 in the most effective ways. At all three collaborative partners visited the audit team found strong evidence that University quality assurance procedures were acting as the key drivers for enhancement in keeping with the expectation for on-campus provision. The annual summary report of all external examiner reports (see paragraph 62) includes a commentary on the University's off-campus provision which contributes to institutional oversight of good practice as well as areas of concern requiring remedial action. The team also saw significant evidence of enhancements in relation to learning and teaching, the development of staff, support for the development of a research culture and

the development of internal partner quality enhancement processes. There was also an example of the curriculum being completely remapped and converted to being outcomes-based, which was claimed to be unique and leading in the country concerned. Recent evidence of ongoing enhancements included the collaborative development of a late submission policy and a plagiarism policy.

119 The audit team saw evidence of an ongoing move to the systematic coordination of enhancement, supported initially by the formation a Quality Enhancement Strategy Team. This was to be a think-tank, an information broker and an agent for change. On careful consideration of the intended membership and terms of reference it was decided by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) to incorporate these enhancement aims within the already established Teaching, Assessment and Learning Committee (TALC). To ensure the benefits to be gained from this development the membership of TALC was extended to include management level representation from the faculties. The merger of the Standing Advisory Group on UK Collaborative Provision and the Standing Advisory Group on Overseas Provision into the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision has enabled the exchange of experience and good practice between faculty and programme team staff with responsibility for UK, European and overseas collaborative arrangements.

120 Good practice is also disseminated by the faculty collaborative provision committees operating, and through the work of the UK Educational Partnerships Coordinator. Cross-faculty committee membership and the development of common protocols identified in the 'Support and Maintenance document helps this process. Good practice is also shared between the University and the collaborative partners through the annual quality monitoring (AQM) briefing session, which is partly aimed at the sharing of the good practice highlighted in the monitoring round, and the Link Tutor Annual Conference, the first of which was held in September 2009 and included discussion about access to resources and the library for collaborative partner students and staff, the availability to the University's identification cards and QAA's collaborative provision audit.

121 As noted earlier, 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 these local processes and procedures a thematic audit was conducted during 2008-09. The summary document identifying key findings was presented and accepted by QAC in March 2009 and the University is currently working through the recommendations and good practice highlighted in the report. The document highlighted differential practice across the faculties, but the audit team heard that the University was striving to enhance provision by sharing good practice and increasing the level of standardisation of practice, while maintaining some distinctiveness where appropriate. The team noted that this process was guided and informed by the considerable experience within two faculties. The internal thematic audit of collaborative provision and the proactive response to its findings is regarded by the team as good practice and demonstrates that the University is taking systematic development-led steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

122 The Quality Enhancement Framework and Strategy also recognises that enhancement depends on the efforts of individual staff across the University and in the collaborative partners. In this respect, the University has established a wide range of programmes aimed at encouraging and enabling staff to focus on the maintenance and improvement of their teaching. There are also visits from staff from collaborative partners to the University and some partner staff are taking University taught postgraduate or research degrees. The role of link tutors and other faculty staff in providing face-to-face staff development is thought key to enhancing academic relationships. The running of partnership days by University library staff and the development of a research network, including a joint research studentship scheme, are also ways in which the University looks to enhance the learning experience of students studying through collaborative provision.

123   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

124   At the time of the audit the University has partnership arrangements with five institutions to offer research degrees. The University reported a total of 120 research students at these institutions, of which the majority (98) were at a single institution. The University has no plans to increase the number of partners offering its research degree programmes at present, but considers proposals from potential partners on a case-by-case basis.

125   The University has established a Research and Professional Degrees Curriculum Framework which has been applied to postgraduate research (PGR) provision at the University itself with effect from September 2008. The University has no immediate plans to apply the new framework to PGR provision offered at collaborative partners, and such provision remains governed by the partner institution's own framework as approved by the University. In comparing provision at collaborative partners with that at the University itself, the audit team noted differences in the arrangements for student support and progression and would encourage the University to monitor the learning and study regimes provided by partner institutions to ensure that they offer experiences comparable to those implied by the University's own Framework.

126   The process for approving arrangements for 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. The audit team took particular note of the approval process for one collaborative institution in order to explore the effectiveness of this process in securing alignment with the expectations of Section 1 of the *Code of practice* and adherence to the University's own expectations in respect of research degree provision. The team found that in the course of this approval process the University had given careful consideration to the partner's provision in respect of the research environment; admission, induction and supervision; assessment; staff development, progress and review; the development of students' research and other skills; student representation; the process for complaints and appeals; and seeking the views of current students where appropriate. Additionally, the University had given explicit consideration to the partner institution's alignment with the Academic Infrastructure. The 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.

127   The audit team saw evidence of the conduct of the periodic review, and of the review of an accreditation arrangement involving postgraduate research provision. The team found evidence of a well-founded and satisfactorily completed review of the arrangements for research students at the accredited institution. However, the team noted that, in respect of the periodic review, the University's requirement that a critical appraisal be compiled by the partner institution to inform the review had not been adhered to and no such appraisal had been prepared for this event. Equally, the report of the review showed little evidence of considering or evaluating aspects of the partnership such as the research environment, the quality of supervision, student progression and completion, or training needs, and the team would encourage the University to ensure that all periodic reviews of PGR provision are conducted in a manner as rigorous as for on-campus provision.

128   The University requires each partner institution to provide students with a clear indication of their responsibilities and those of their supervisors. The Code of Practice for Research Degrees, prepared by one partner institution for its own students, provides comprehensive and helpfully presented information and the audit team viewed this as evidence that the University is ensuring that its requirement is being met.

129   The approval of the appointment of a supervisory team for each student is the responsibility of the Research Degrees Sub-Committee (RDSC), except for appointments in respect of students at the two partner institutions, each of which is empowered to use its own mechanisms. The audit team noted that the RDSC's responsibility is commonly fulfilled through the chair's Action, and that the subcommittee itself has little opportunity to consider the manner in which the Chair is carrying out these duties on its behalf. The team heard that the University expects supervisors of research students to be suitably trained, either at the partner institution or through provision at the University itself.

130   RDSC is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the standards of research degrees. To fulfil this duty, it monitors the progress of individual students at all partners with the exception of two partner institutions for which alternative arrangements offering greater autonomy to the partners have been made. The audit team noted the University's view that these two partners have sufficient depth of experience in supporting research degree students, and concurred with the University's judgement that this greater degree of delegation was justifiable.

131   The monitoring of individual students' progression is primarily through the completion of an annual report written by each student. Students told audit team that both they and their supervisors are aware of this process and take seriously their responsibilities within it. The team noted that a high proportion of research degree students at partner institutions had completed annual reports, and students whom the team met had participated in the monitoring process and had received feedback on their submission.

132   The University believes that the small numbers of such students makes it inappropriate to adopt a formal process for monitoring the progression and completion of research degree students at partner institutions relative to that of on-campus provision. However, the University's policy is to undertake such comparisons informally through annual reports.

133   All research students are required to undertake training in research methods, either by taking a research methods module at the University itself or, in the case of the two partner institutions with great autonomy by taking an approved module or training course at the partner institution. The audit team saw evidence of a comprehensive set of workshops and training sessions for research students.

134   The University expects each partner institution to have arrangements for student representation and the audit team heard that students are satisfied with the manner in which they are represented. The team also noted careful consideration by a partner institution of the outcomes of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, and the identification of suitable actions arising from it.

135   The examining arrangements for research students are those of the University itself. RDSC is responsible for approving the arrangements for each student, although the audit team noted that approval is typically granted by Chair's action and without consideration by the Sub-committee itself.

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

Section 6: Published information

137   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 via websites, on respective intranets and virtual learning environments (VLEs). 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 in whatever format relating to the association with the University. This guidance also appears as a schedule to programme agreements between the University and its partners.

138   Where partner institutions take responsibility for the production of their own course 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. In the case of some international partners such material is also approved by local officials.

139   The audit team considered in detail a breadth of information provided for the audit, including that available through the partner link visits and met a variety of students. The students described the information they received prior to beginning their programmes of study as clear, accurate and useful and stated that they were able to form reasonable and reliable expectations. Induction information is generally provided by the host institution and there was some evidence of University staff involvement at induction events for validated provision. Information provided for current students is comprehensive and all students met by the team said it was clear from the outset that the award was from the University.

140   Liaison with partner institutions on matters relating to published information in the University's name takes place via the link tutor, other faculty contacts and staff such as the faculty collaboration officer or the associate dean. Formal responsibility for the accuracy of the UK and international undergraduate and postgraduate published information lies with the Director of the Marketing and Communications Department who approves publicity material. The University recognises the need and is introducing a more systematic approach to checking partner institution websites and other marketing information. There is some evidence that staff from the University are helping to develop information and processes at partner institutions.

141   The Briefing Paper noted that in 2005 the University moved away from its open approach of making all information available via its website, preferring to provide some information available through the student or staff portals. This change in approach has necessitated the University to consider ways in which guidance is made available to staff and students at partner institutions. Steps are currently being undertaken to provide a web-based Partnerships Handbook which will be made available to staff at collaborative institutions.

142   Programme specifications for on-campus and franchised provision are maintained and updated by the Quality Enhancement Unit and are available via open access on the University website. Validated provision programme specifications are not systematically made available on the University website and not all are accessible on relevant partner websites. Most students met by the audit team were not aware of programme specifications, but acknowledged that similar information was available through other mechanisms such as programme handbooks. Nevertheless, the University might wish to review the consistency with which programme specifications are made available to students on collaborative provision programmes.

143   External examiner reports are not systematically provided or seen by partner students. It is recommended as desirable 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)*.

144   As part of recent IQERs, some of the University's partner institutions have been praised for their use of VLEs in providing course handbooks and other essential documentation such as detailed module guides. On-campus students and franchise students at collaborative partners have the right to access information through CUOnline, the University's VLE, and access the University library. In practice those students met by the audit team found such access limited. The University acknowledges some difficulty in this respect and there is evidence that steps are being taken to introduce a standard entitlement. Students on validated programmes access their host institution VLE where one exists.

145   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 by the University as requiring further development. It is a matter of some discussion by the Standing Advisory Group for Collaborative Provision and the Quality Assurance Committee as to how assistance can best be given to partners by the University.

146   The audit team formed the view that the protocols and procedures employed by the University in relation to published information are effective. Further, the University and its partners are generally proactive in bringing information to the attention of students. The team concluded that overall, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.