

University of Central Lancashire

MARCH 2006

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales. For institutions that have large and complex provision offered through partnerships, QAA conducts collaborative provision audits in addition to institutional audits.

The purpose of collaborative provision audit

Collaborative provision audit shares the aims of institutional audit: to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

Collaborative provision audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the awarding institution to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements; and
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, (or authorises to be published) about the quality of its programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards and the standards of those awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Collaborative provision audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which includes descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects

- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Collaborative provision audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of collaborative provision audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team six weeks before the audit visit
- visits to up to six partner institutions by members of the audit team
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff from the institution and from partners
- talking to students from partner institutions about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work through visits to partners. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews how institutions are working towards this requirement.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Central Lancashire (the University or UCLAN) from 27 to 31 March 2006 to carry out an audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff of the University, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its collaborative provision. As part of the audit process, the team met with four of the University's collaborative partners where it spoke to students on the University's collaborative programmes and to members of staff of the partner institution.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning), 2004,*

paragraph 13, published by QAA).

In an audit of collaborative provision both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the collaborative provision audit

As a result of its investigations the audit team's view of the University is that:

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

Features of good practice

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

- the manner in which the Partnership Forum operates both as an integrative mechanism for relationships between the partners and the University, and amongst the partners themselves
- the contribution made by the University and its regional partners to opportunities for wider participation in higher education within the region
- the process for ensuring comparability of standards across networked provision
- the variety of small scale funding initiatives available to staff in partner colleges.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality of programmes and standards of the awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained. The team

considers it advisable that the University:

- ensures that it exercises in full its responsibilities under the terms of its agreement with its accredited partner in order to ensure that its processes for monitoring quality and standards are clear and effective

and considers it desirable that the University:

- makes more explicit and transparent in its documentation the way in which recommendations arising from validation and periodic review are considered
- seeks ways to improve the response rate from students in partner colleges to the student satisfaction survey and to put into practice its intention to extend this survey to students on UCLan awards at overseas partners.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision. In due course, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The audit team was satisfied that the information the University and its partners are publishing currently about the quality of its collaborative programmes and the standards of its awards is reliable, and that the University is making adequate progress to providing TQI data for its collaborative provision.

Main report

Main report

1 An audit of the collaborative provision (CP) offered by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan, the University) was undertaken during the period 27 to 31 March 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

2 CP audit supplements the institutional audit of the University's own provision. The process of CP audit has been developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. It provides a means for scrutinising the collaborative provision of an HEI with degree-awarding powers (awarding institution) where the CP was too large or complex to have been included in the institutional audit of the awarding institution. The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

3 The CP audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards through collaborative arrangements; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study offered through collaborative arrangements that lead to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its CP; and for the discharge of its responsibility as an awarding body. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited four of the University's collaborative partners.

Section 1: Introduction: the institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision

4 Receiving university status in 1992 the UCLan can trace its origins back to 1828. Since 1992 the University has incorporated the Lancashire College of Midwifery, the Lancashire College of Nursing and Newton Rigg College into its activities. It has three campuses located in Preston, Carlisle and Penrith, and operates through the Faculties of Cultural, Legal and Social Studies, Design and Technology, Health, Lancashire Business School, and Science. Faculties have a major role in the management of CP.

5 The University currently has over 36,000 gross student numbers. One of the distinguishing features of the University is its large provision for part-time students which represent around 38 per cent of the student population. The majority of the provision includes taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The University has a long history of providing wider participation learning opportunities for regionally based students and for routes of study from further to higher education. It sees its partnership with its regional college partners as a major means to widen participation to students and communities which might otherwise be isolated from higher education because of cultural, social, economic and geographic inequalities. The wider participation ethos also applies to students based overseas.

6 CP represents approximately 22 per cent of the student population, spread across the University as follows:

Cultural, Legal and Social Studies	2,265
Design and Technology	2,329
Health	231
Lancashire Business School	1,086
Science	1,066
Institutional Level	926
Total	7,903

7 The type of programme being pursued by CP students is as follows:

UK based undergraduate	4,686
UK based postgraduate (including 464 Certificate in Education students)	536
Overseas undergraduate	2,637
Overseas postgraduate	44
Total	7,903

8 The University has grown its CP taught provision over the last 20 years to include 37 UK partners and 21 international colleges operating in 11 different countries. The majority of overseas partners are based in the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong) reflecting the University's priority area for overseas CP developments.

9 Fire Safety Engineering courses and awards represent a niche market for the University both nationally and overseas. Regionally, the University is in partnership with over 20 colleges for the provision of taught courses, most of which provide routes to other University awards. A particular feature of the CP is that the majority of provision satisfies the prerequisites for final year undergraduate study, enabling students to transfer to the University to complete their studies.

10 The University mission statement...'we promote access to excellence enabling you (the potential student) to develop your potential'...indicates the key motivation behind its CP. The access agenda is a significant part in the philosophy of the University and is, in part, addressed by providing courses of study through CP which give students access to further study at the University. The mission statement goes on to provide four elements of practice:

- 'We value and practise equality of opportunity, transparency and tolerance.
- We strive for excellence in all we do: locally regionally, nationally and internationally.
- We work in partnership with business, the community and other educators.
- We encourage and promote research innovation and creativity'.

11 The audit team heard that the above elements are part of the wider vision for the University looking beyond its physical boundaries to provide opportunities for a broader student population. This wider participation agenda provided a context within which the academic standards and quality of the provision could be considered by the audit team.

Background information

12 The published information available for this audit included the following recent documents:

- the report of the institutional audit conducted by QAA, April 2004
- University of Central Lancashire and Shenzhen University Overseas Partnership audit report, November 2001
- University of Central Lancashire and the Fire Safety Engineering College, Oman, overseas quality audit report, May 2005
- reports by QAA on subject-related reviews undertaken in various partner institutions of the University.

The University provided QAA with a series of documents and information including:

- an institutional CP self-evaluation document (CPSED) with appendices, dated October 2005
- the University Academic Quality Assurance Handbook 2005-06
- access to the University intranet
- documentation relating to the partner institutions visited by the audit team.

13 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a range of the University's internal documents. The team identified a number of partnership arrangements that illustrated further aspects of the University's provision, and additional documentation was provided for the team during the audit visit. The team was grateful for the prompt and helpful responses to its requests for information.

The collaborative provision audit process

14 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in June 2005 between a QAA officer and representatives of the University, QAA confirmed in November 2005 that four partner visits would be conducted between the briefing and audit visits. The University provided its CPSED in October 2005. The University provided QAA with specific supplementary information relating to each of the partners being visited in January 2006.

15 The students of the University were invited, through the University Students' Union (UCLanSU), to contribute to the CP audit process in a way that reflected the current capacity of the Union to reflect the views of students studying for UCLan awards through collaborative partners. Officers from UCLanSU contributed to the development of the CPSED and also submitted a student written submission (SWS). The audit team was able to meet representatives of UCLanSU and of students from partner Institutions at the briefing visit. The team is grateful to the officers of UCLanSU and other students for their engagement with the process.

16 The audit team visited the University from 23 to 25 January 2006 for the purposes of exploring with senior members of staff of the University, senior representatives from partner institutions (PIs), and student representatives from UCLanSU and PIs, matters relating to the management of quality and academic standards in CP raised by the University's CPSED and other documentation, and of ensuring that the team had a clear understanding of the University's approach to collaborative arrangements. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit was agreed with the University. Additionally, it was also agreed that certain document audit trails would be followed exploring various aspects of collaborative provision, in a range of different academic relationships.

17 During visits to PIs, members of the team met senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives of the PIs. The team is grateful to the staff of the PIs for their help in gaining an understanding of the University's arrangements for managing its collaborative arrangements.

18 The audit visit took place from 27 to 31 March 2006, and included further meetings with staff from partners and from UCLan and with students of the University. The meetings explored a wide range of matters, drawing upon expertise in managing links with PIs, operating international partnerships, institutional and course approval, monitoring processes and student records and data. The audit team is grateful to all those staff and students who participated in meetings.

19 The audit team comprised Professor M Broadbent, Mrs C Pickles, Professor G Taylor and Professor J Yip. The audit secretary was Mr I Pearson. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor I M Robinson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

20 UCLan's previous institutional audit took place in April 2004. While none of the features of good practice or recommendations for action relating to the 2004 audit refers directly to CP, some have an implicit bearing and are addressed later in this report (see paragraph 81). The 2004 report identifies a number of points of good practice. These included the comprehensive Course Developers Guide that has had a positive impact on the development of consistent practice; the categorisation of actions arising from external examiners' reports; and the pattern of support provided to students before and during induction to enhance their early experience of university life and improve retention. The report identified a number of points for further consideration. Of particular note to this audit they included:

- make more explicit and transparent in documentation the actions arising from review processes, the response to them and the progress being made.

21 The University's provision at the Fire Safety Engineering College in Oman was included in the QAA overseas collaborative audit of the Gulf States in spring 2005. Amongst the 10 positive features identified in the report were: the well-articulated international policy and strategy; the effectiveness of student involvement in the quality assurance of their programmes; the facilitation of student progression from the College to the University. The report identified a number of points for further consideration. These included:

- the articulation of residual obligations to students in the case of termination of the partnership
- promoting consistency and comprehensiveness in annual reporting
- stipulating minimum membership of assessment boards.

The University's SED stated that the University was currently acting upon these points, and the team was able to confirm that this was the case.

22 The University continues to grow in line with its regional and international strategy. It is in the process of approving new partnership proposals with regional FE colleges and it is also diversifying the geographical location of its overseas partners in China, Ukraine, Slovenia and the Netherlands; new relationships have been developed in Hong Kong, the Sultanate of Oman, India and Greece.

Section 2: The collaborative audit investigations: the awarding institution's processes for quality management in collaborative provision

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

23 The University has developed criteria for partnerships, both regional and international. Regionally, the HE-FE strategy makes clear commitment to:

- maximising the potential of collaboration between FE and HE for wider participation in higher education
- contributing to the social and economic regeneration of the region (referring to the North-West of England)
- the institutional agreements between the University and its regional FE college partners presents the objectives of partnerships as:
 - increasing the number and range of higher education opportunities in the North-West region (of the UK)
 - widening participation in HE provision in response to local need
 - developing materials and delivery modes which will support and enhance the student learning experience
 - maximising the expertise residing in the University and colleges for the benefit of the local economy.

24 In the audit team's meetings with members of the University and their regional partners there was a clear sense of shared purpose reflecting these objectives, and a strong sense of partnership between the University and its partners, and also between the partners themselves. The team heard of various examples of close and productive working. The University and partners described how relationships had developed over time to provide a coherent and effective local FE-HE partnership (see paragraphs

35, 50) for the benefit of the community and to those individuals who wish to pursue an educational pathway. Feedback to the team from regionally based students was very positive about the provision, although they indicated aspirations of being able to complete their studies at their own college, instead of travelling to UCLan.

25 The team considered the contribution made by the University and its regional partners to opportunities for wider participation in HE within the region to be good practice.

26 The University is in the process of revising its international strategy, retaining at its core the basic tenet of extending study opportunities to a broader student population who may not be able to attend a University. It was explained to the audit team that students based overseas, although academically qualified, may not, for various reasons, be able to pursue a university education in their home country. The University's strategy enables such students to work towards a UK academic qualification without having to incur the financial cost of attending for three years in the UK. Additionally, the University believes that UK qualifications are often perceived to be more vocationally relevant in the overseas market, and thus to be more career focused.

27 The International Activities Policy of the University articulates its 'main international aims as the recruitment of overseas students (either UK or home country based); the provision of an appropriate programme of staff and student exchanges, placements and visits abroad; and participation in international research and consulting'. To these ends the University has a clear aim of 'developing additional long term agreements with higher education institutions in other countries to assist in the provision of education and training facilities to the developing countries and to those where local higher education opportunities are limited'. Such overseas partnerships are primarily franchise in nature.

28 The University believes that its infrastructure must reflect the growing nature of its CP. The CPSED describes how this has been reflected in

the establishment of, over time, a Partnership Development Team (PDT), a Strategic Partnership Group, a Partnership Planning Advisory Group (PPAG), an International Collaboration Sub-Committee (ICSC) of the Academic Standards Committee (ASC), a new International Office in 2004, an International Strategy Group (ISG), a Dean of International Affairs, an International Operations Group (IOG) and an expansion of its regional offices based overseas.

29 The University describes its academic quality strategy as seeking to 'establish and assure appropriate standards for its awards and to enhance the student learning experience'. In pursuit of this objective the University has formalised a range of arrangements by which it contracts with partner institutions. These arrangements fall into the following categories, the nomenclature of which is adopted throughout this report:

- Validated Courses. Designed, delivered and assessed by a PI, but awarded by the University and subject to the quality assurance procedures of the University.
- Joint Courses. In such courses the University collaborates with other HE providers to design and deliver a common course which is validated by all the providing institutions and which leads to a recognised award of all the collaborating institutions. The nature and extent of the collaboration may vary and may require the design of course specific academic regulations and quality assurance procedures which are approved by all providers. Regulations which stand outside the general framework require the approval of the Academic Board.
- Franchised Courses. These are approved University courses (stage of a course, or part of a course), designed, delivered and assessed by the University, and are also delivered in, and by the staff of, another educational institution or other body, where such institutions/bodies are subject to the quality assurance procedures of the University.

- Networked course arrangements. The University collaborates with other educational partners to design a common course which is validated by the University and then formally franchised for delivery to the partner institutions. The awards are subject to the quality assurance procedures of the University. These arrangements relate mainly to Foundation Degrees and the Certificate in Education/Postgraduate Certificate in Education provision.

30 The University manages relationships with its collaborative partners within a framework which recognises the maturity of the partnership and the degree of engagement required. In partnerships with a limited number of courses, the relationship might generally be managed through the specific course link. In others, an institutional level relationship may also be required. The University describes such categories of partnership as:

- Accredited Institutions in which a partner institution is given delegated authority by the University for the design, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of courses leading to University awards offered by the partner institution, whilst recognising that the University retains ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of the awards. The specific terms of the agreement are set out in an Accreditation Agreement which is signed by both parties. The University currently has only one such partnership.
- Accreditation of in-house training or learning. These aim to support and enhance an organisation's staff development activities and to improve business performance. The University's Accreditation process (currently under review) has been developed to provide an employer friendly and academically robust model for the accreditation of in-company training and learning activities. Once accredited, the work-based training or learning provided for staff will qualify for a certificate of credit or credit equivalence and may count towards an appropriate University qualification.

- Articulation Arrangements are a specific form of collaboration where the University agrees to recognise specified qualifications offered by a partner institution for entry, or advanced entry, to specified University courses.
- Joint Supervision of Research Degrees which involves the joint supervision of research students associated with a partner institution. Students are registered for the award of higher degrees with the University in accordance with the University's higher degree regulations.

31 The audit team observed that its accredited institution has elements of delegated authority and is subject to a different series of quality assurance mechanisms than other CP arrangements. Arrangements are such that the accredited institution is not affiliated to a particular faculty or department within UCLan, and liaises directly with the Vice-Chancellor's (VC's) office.

32 The number and type of taught course offered by the University through collaborative partners at the time of audit was as follows:

	UK	Overseas	Total
Validated Courses	163	4	167
Joint Courses	1		1
Franchise Courses	216	44	260
Network Course Arrangements	13		13
Accredited Courses (in-house training or learning as defined above)	4	0	4
Totals	397	48	445

The awarding institution's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in collaborative provision

33 The University's quality strategy has four major objectives:

- to ensure the integrity of the academic awards of the University

- to assure the academic standards of the University's awards
- to enhance the student experience in the context of the achievement of the University's mission and its educational objectives
- to enable and support staff in the delivery of the highest quality provision.

34 In achieving these objectives the University seeks to:

- utilise rigorous and effective quality mechanisms that locate responsibility at an appropriate level within the University
- review and further develop the University's procedures to ensure efficient and effective processes, and
- ensure the engagement of staff with quality improvement.

35 The CPSED refers to variations in the management of UK and international CP but indicates that all aspects of CP are subject to the same strategy regarding quality and standards regardless of their location. The responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance (QA) has been delegated by the VC to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality/Standards and International) (PVC (QS&I)) with the executive responsibility for the UK CP residing with the Director of Advancement aided by the PDT and the PPAG and informed by the Partnership Forum (PF). The PF is an extensive grouping of UK-based partners and University representatives which informs University strategy and procedures. The forum is particularly active, chaired by a CP representative, and reflects good practice by drawing together all partner colleges and the University into a single purpose. The responsibility for the International Office and for academic standards and QA for international CP has been retained directly by the PVC (QS&I). The Dean of International Affairs chairs the IOG with routine decisions exercised by the Head of International Operations.

36 The Academic Board (AB) and its subcommittees provides University-level oversight. The Academic Standards Committee

(ASC) delegates responsibility for validation and periodic review of CP to the Academic Quality and Standards Unit (AQaSU) working through the UK and Overseas Partnership University Review Panel. Committee oversight of the quality and standards of CP is exercised mainly through the consideration of action plans following annual and periodic review, preparatory work for validation and more recently, the formal process of partner approval.

37 Once validated, the responsibility for the management of CP is shared between the faculties, departments, the partner college and, either the Partnership Development Office or the International Office. The CPSED explains that quality assurance and management responsibility resides as near as possible to the student experience, with monitoring at the next level and overall scrutiny at University level (see paragraph 73).

38 The audit team considered that procedures for academic standards and QA are well documented. The Academic Quality Assurance handbook (Quality handbook) is updated each year and provides a comprehensive set of procedures, guidelines and templates governing the approval and review of CP. Assessment procedures are detailed in the University's Academic Regulations. Additionally, the University produces a 'Collaborative Provision QA chart' which provides an overview of partners' and University host departments' responsibilities for QA. The team also heard of more detailed guidance regarding QA processes at faculty level.

39 The key document governing the relationship between the University and its collaborative partners is the Memorandum of Co-operation (MOC). It defines the key aspects of the contractual relationship and details the various QA duties and responsibilities within the partnership. The MOC is issued and signed by both partners after the completion of the course validation process; its revision is linked to the cycle of course review except where interim revisions are considered necessary. In its scrutiny of papers, the audit team observed one instance where course provision had shifted

from a tripartite to a bilateral relationship (see paragraph 70), and an MOC issued and approved by both parties but without a formal revalidation event.

40 UCLan believes that devolution of QA matters to partners is an essential feature of CP, and that the key management link is between the partner college course coordinator(s) and the UCLan department course leader, although the relationship is often aided by the presence of an HE Co-ordinator in the partner. For international partners the University specifies a minimum of at least three visits per year by the course leader.

41 The audit team found that course leaders' visits to partners are often supplemented by visits from heads of department, deans of faculty and members of the Directorate. They also heard that during overseas partner visits staff may meet students, observe teaching, provide guest lecturers, run staff development workshops on assessment practice and in the development and interpretation of the curriculum. The team read that support is offered to international partners by an existing and expanding network of regional offices located strategically throughout the world. In addition, the IOG considers operational issues and provides a forum for UCLan course leaders for international provision to share good practice.

42 In its CPSED, the University stated that its Admissions Policy and Code of Practice applies to all courses wherever they are taught. The UCLan head of admissions retains responsibility for the oversight of delegated arrangements in PIs and for ensuring that the University's legal requirements in relation to admission are met. The University monitors the outcome of its admissions policy, and the associated data related to progression and achievement. In its discussions with staff and students at PIs, the audit team formed the opinion that the entry standards set at validation are being maintained at partner colleges. The team were also able to observe the care that was taken in ensuring appropriate mapping was carried out to inform progression and entry decisions both to and from partner courses.

43 The CPSED stated that the 'key concept for the University in respect of the collaborative provision is that students at PIs have an equivalent experience to that of students at one of the University's campuses'. The audit team read that equivalence of student experience is ensured by consideration of, for example, the qualifications of teaching staff, the learning resources available and the manner in which modules are managed by UCLan departments within joint, franchised and network course provision. It heard that outcomes are assured through moderation of assessment tasks and student submissions; the use of common external examiners; standard learning outcomes; and a standard credit, grading and award framework.

44 The student experience is monitored through the Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) produced for each collaborative course. All collaborative courses are required to have processes for student representation and feedback, typically via staff student liaison panels. At module level student questionnaires are used to elicit feedback.

45 Through its meetings and reading, the audit team was able to confirm that the University's expectations of 'equivalent student experience' were clearly understood. Course committees or their equivalent were established and appeared to be functional, and working particularly well within the regional colleges. AMRs evidenced student feedback and appropriate follow-up actions. The team spoke to students on a range of collaborative courses and found that, in general, they were satisfied with their learning experience.

46 Within the course of the audit it was established that in franchised provision, modules are the same as those offered by the University and that network courses share the same modules. Shared modules are managed by a course team which includes University staff, and thus equivalence of provision is assured. The audit team considered, on the basis of their reading and discussions, this to be so.

47 Module assessments are initially considered by Module Boards; consideration of progression and awards by Award Boards. Boards, chaired by senior UCLan staff, are preceded by a rigorous process of moderation by course teams and oversight by external examiners. For courses offered within its accredited institution, students' performance is considered internally both at Module and Award Boards. The Accreditation Agreement provides for UCLan to assure standards with a University representative present at the Award Board. The audit team heard and read that this has not always been the case.

48 Overall, the audit team formed the opinion that the University's framework and processes for the management of QA and the student experience are well founded and effective. The devolution of QA to departments and faculties with central oversight, operating through well documented procedures is robust. The process by which course, departmental and faculty issues were aggregated for consideration was seen to be working well with remedial action being taken at the appropriate level. The oversight of partner institutions exercised through the Partnership Office and the International Office was considered appropriate and effective.

49 The management of quality and standards relating to its accredited partner was considered by the audit team to be less rigorous than for other CP provision. The University stated that in many ways it considered its accredited partner as an additional faculty. The University acknowledged that monitoring reports should therefore be considered in committee along with those of the faculties; for 2004 and 2005 this had not been possible, but committee cycles have been revised to enable this to happen in future (see also paragraphs 52 and 81).

50 The audit team considered the manner in which the PF operates both as an integrative mechanism for the relationship between the partners and the University, and amongst the partners themselves to represent good practice. Additionally, the team considered the manner in which that partnership provided opportunities for wider participation also to be good practice.

The awarding institution's intentions for enhancing the management of its collaborative provision

51 In the CPSED the University signalled a number of past and future developments for the enhancement of its processes for managing its CP. They include:

- developing the recently established Partnership Planning Advisory Group
- bringing together all partner colleges firmly within institutional arrangements and support mechanisms
- reviewing the accreditation of in-house training following the restructuring of the Knowledge Transfer Service
- conducting a review of the International Office
- establishing an International Strategy Group
- introducing an additional group, the International Operations Group.

52 During the audit, the audit team noted that the University had made significant progress with its plans. The IOG, ISG and PPAG were operational and the reviews of the International Office and accreditation of in-house training schemes were well underway. The team also noted progress bringing all partners together within the same overarching framework. It noted, for example, that the University's intentions to bring together the timing of annual reports from its accredited partner, to coincide with reports from other CP, had recently been achieved.

53 The audit team was able to verify the valuable role played by the PF in maintaining and developing links with partners, and noted the intention of the PDT to improve the dissemination of the Forum's work internally within the University.

54 In its reading of the terms of reference and minutes of the ISG, the audit team found that the group, established by the PVC (QS&I), includes in its membership the deans of faculty and heads of key services connected with international development. It not only aims to implement strategy but also to provide a forum for cross-faculty initiatives.

55 The audit team was similarly able to review the operation of the IOG. This group, chaired by the Dean of International Affairs, considers international operational issues and provides a forum for University course leaders and other staff involved in international activities to share good practice.

56 The audit team concluded that the University's intentions for the enhancement of quality in its CP involving UK partner colleges and international partners are generally appropriate within the context of its mission. In particular it noted that UK partner colleges considered the PF to be a valuable enhancement to the management of this aspect of CP (see paragraph 50).

The awarding institution's internal approval, monitoring and review arrangements for collaborative provision leading to its awards

Partner approval

57 The University has recently separated the approval of a new collaborative partner and the subsequent validation of courses. Procedures for the approval for both regional and international partners require a match of mission statement and a due diligence exercise, including both financial and legal aspects.

58 For UK partnerships the PPAG prepares a portfolio of information regarding the potential partner prior to an approval panel visit. Approval may be granted after a formal written report of the visit has been considered by PPAG and the ASaQA Committee. The visit may be waived by the PVC (Academic) if the potential partner has distinguishing characteristics supporting approval, for example, existing recognition as a high quality provider of HE, or where the partner already has degree awarding powers in its own right.

59 Departments and faculties seeking approval of international partners present prescribed information about the potential partner to the ICSC for approval. The audit team heard that the detail required is such that a department/faculty visit will invariably be required prior to its submission.

The information is similar to that required for UK institution approval. The strong initial appraisal process and the subsequent processes for partner approval result in only a few sound proposals coming forward to approval.

60 Following approval of a new partner, an Institutional Agreement (IA) is formulated, and the new partner will be able to work with faculties and departments to seek formal approval for collaborative course provision.

61 In rare cases, the University will award a PI accredited status. In such cases the process of institutional approval is replaced by an accreditation process. The University reviews the status of any accredited institution every five to seven years. The responsibilities of an accredited institution are set out in the Accreditation Agreement. New courses offered by an accredited institution are subject to the same UCLan validation processes as other UK partner institutions.

62 The partner approval process has yet to mature, but in discussions with PIs the audit team heard that partners considered the process robust and welcomed its continual development.

Programme approval

63 The process of collaborative course validation, unlike campus-based provision, is not devolved to faculties, but is managed centrally by AQaSU. Collaborative course validations are conducted by representatives from the UK and Overseas Partnership University Review Panel. This panel consists of a pool of members drawn from within the University and regional partner colleges.

64 Validation is a two stage process. Stage 1 is designed to aid course teams to refine proposals, check marketability and ensure compliance with academic regulations. For UK validations the stage 1 is completed by the partner college with faculty staff forming a review panel. For international validations the event is conducted by the relevant faculty and held at the overseas location.

65 At stage 2 validation, representatives from the University Review Panel and external advisers form a panel which considers the proposal(s) against a set of University criteria, gathering evidence including rationale, course aims and objectives, curriculum and learning resources. Outcomes range from approval, with or without conditions and recommendations, to refusal. Any conditions from the course validation process must be completed prior to student enrolments to the course. The audit team saw evidence of the way in which responsibility for these conditions was conscientiously fulfilled. However, the team could not establish how the University reassured itself that recommendations from validation panels were considered by the proposers.

66 In general the University will only validate provision in disciplines where it has similar provision on-campus. The audit team found a number of cases where well established partners were widening provision to encompass subject areas new to HE and where there was no comparable provision at UCLan. The team was satisfied that the University took great care in such cases to ensure standards by the involvement of relevant PSRBs and subject matter experts in the development and validation processes.

67 The University has a small portfolio of accreditation agreements for in-house training and learning. The team found that these programmes were considered within the standard University validation processes.

68 Once courses are validated the University and partner will agree an MOC and an associated financial annexe, both linked to the IA. Prior to formalisation of agreements for international partners, the University assures itself of the legal and educational status of the partner to offer the named courses in their resident country. International (and exceptionally UK-based) courses are subject to a formal interim review by the University after the first year of operation.

69 The audit team heard and read that the University believes its approval processes to be robust. Approval processes for courses in partner institutions have recently been clarified and

consolidated to bring all partner institutions within a common institutional framework. The University has recently conducted an internal review of its approval processes, confirming that its validation and QA frameworks were strong. The willingness to engage in reflective review confirmed the team's view that UCLan's processes gave appropriate and sound opportunities for enhancement.

70 The audit team, through its visits to partners and by reading a number of course validation reports, was able to confirm that the process of course approval was generally robust and fit for process. The team found examples of franchised and validated programme approvals which had been conducted entirely within the University standard procedures. However, the team also found an instance where a single partner was operating a franchise course not formally validated for that institution alone (see paragraph 39). The team heard and read of the particular circumstances which, in the best interest of the enrolled students, had led to this unusual situation and were reassured to hear that the course in question will be subject to an early interim review.

71 In their scrutiny of UCLan's relationship with its accredited partner, the audit team found discrepancies between the PI's annual report, the schedule for course validations, the courses being promoted in the prospectus, the approval status of those courses and the University's register of collaborative provision. The team thus came to the conclusion that the University's monitoring of course validation processes within its accredited partner was subject to some doubt.

Monitoring

72 The CPSED maintained that the annual monitoring process provides an opportunity to consider how the quality of learning, teaching and assessment have impacted on the operation of a course, to evaluate and improve course quality and to identify and disseminate good practice.

73 For UK collaborative provision the partner college course leaders prepare an AMR using a standard template which mirrors that for

in-house UCLan courses. The reports are submitted to the PDT which distributes them to the relevant UCLan Head of Department. The Head of Department aggregates the CP AMR(s) into the annual Department Report for further consideration in the annual Faculty Report. CP course, departmental and faculty annual reports are required to specify issues, actions and items of good practice in respect of the provision being monitored.

74 UK partners with a range of UCLan provision are additionally required to prepare a College Evaluation Report which consolidates data and issues for all course and subject reports operating within that partner. This report must identify generic issues to be addressed locally and those to be referred to the University.

75 In turn the PDT reviews all collaborative Partner College documentation (with the exception of its accredited partner) and prepares an AMR on Partnership Activity for ASC. The University believes the production of this separate annual report on UK partnership activity is a valuable way for the University to review its regional CP 'as a whole' and provides further evidence to partner colleges of the importance and value of the AMR process.

76 AMR processes for its accredited institution operate within the institution itself. A detailed report on the AMR outcomes is submitted to the University and is read by the Head of AQaSU and the relevant PVC. The University formally considers the report at Academic Standards Committee and a reply is drafted by the PVC. The accredited institution adopts the AMR template used by other UCLan UK based partners.

77 For international collaborative provision UCLan-based course leaders prepare the AMR using the standard University template. The reports are collated by departments for consolidating into the relevant Department and Faculty Annual Reports. Additionally, for CP offering several UCLan courses, the International Office prepares an institution-specific summary report in addition to the full International Collaborative Provision Report for ASC.

78 Annual monitoring draws on data from various sources. They include student representations, external examiner reports, progression and award data, module evaluation questionnaires and course management issues. All AMRs are action based, with last year's action plan being presented to evidence progress and a new action plan being presented for next year. The PF considers the process of annual reporting each year for its constituent members and considers the Annual Monitoring of Partnership Activity Report prepared by the University. In its recent review the Forum noted the variable quality of the AMRs and asked the University for further guidance, and which the team noted had subsequently been provided.

79 The audit team noted the University's recent review of the QA processes for accredited work-based learning which will bring the QA processes for this provision within the annual monitoring and periodic review framework, including the normal feedback from external examiners.

80 Whilst the CPSED did not present a University view of the effectiveness of its annual monitoring procedures, the team noted that its normal processes have been enhanced for CP with the introduction of summary reports for both UK and international partnerships.

81 Through its meetings with partners and reading of documentation the audit team came to the conclusion that the annual review process was effective for franchised, validated and joint programmes. The partner reviews provide a valuable oversight of partner activities and the use of common external examiners aids comparability between modules and courses offered both in-house and by partner colleges. The annual review process for accredited institution provision had been (see paragraph 49) less visible in committee than for other CP activities. The annual report had not previously been submitted in time to be considered alongside other CP. In their scrutiny of accredited partner reviews, the team noted some deficiencies. Examples included AMRs with no progression statistics and missing external

examiners reports, little evaluative commentary and report sections not fully completed. In this regard the team considered reporting from the University's accredited institution to be less effective for the University than from other CP.

Periodic course review

82 Periodic course review is a centrally managed University process the main purpose of which is to review and revalidate the courses within a department or a partner institution in a five to six-year cycle. The process is managed by AQaSU and conducted by panels comprising University Review Panel members (see paragraph 63), external advisers and others. The review panel will scrutinise relevant documentary evidence and meet staff and students. A report on the outcome is made to the department, the faculty and to the Chair of ASC. For CP the objective of course review remains the same as for on-campus courses, but with added scrutiny of the operation and management of the partnership link.

83 The CP periodic review process may vary somewhat in nature. It may consider courses within a particular partner representing a spread of subject disciplines. Such a review panel includes University and external advisers to match the spread of course expertise. In other cases periodic reviews may consider the provision of a particular joint course delivered in several partner colleges, or a single programme at a particular partner college. Institutional periodic review of a partner is within a periodic course review, but additionally requiring the review panel to comment on institutional issues such as adequacy of resources.

84 The review panel report may make conditions and recommendations about the continued delivery of the course(s) and in extreme cases recommend suspension. The University expresses confidence that the review process is in line with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, in particular *Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*, and that consideration of elements of the Academic Infrastructure are well embedded in the process. It also asserts that the recently revised process of periodic review provides a clear focus

for course review, thus safeguarding the interests of students.

85 In terms of arrangements for its accredited institution, the CPSED explained that management and development of such arrangements is laid out in the Accreditation Agreement and Implementation Statement. The audit team reviewed records from annual meetings involving accredited partners, confirming that regular exchange took place. The University reviews accreditation arrangements every five to seven years. The accredited institution itself is required to undertake a periodic review of programmes of study on a five to seven year basis, or less where major changes and/or revisions are proposed. The review is operated in a similar manner to validation events.

86 In the view of the audit team, the University's procedures for the periodic review of collaborative programmes were robust. The team saw evidence of conditions from reviews being acted upon in a timely manner and formed the view that good use was generally made of external assessors. (see paragraph 88) The team could not identify where responsibilities lay for following up on recommendations from either validation or review events (see paragraph 65). They did not appear in subsequent AMR action plans for consideration. The team considers that the University will consider it desirable to make more explicit and transparent in its documentation the way in which such recommendations are considered.

87 The audit team formed the opinion that the processes of internal approval, monitoring and review to be well founded and provided effective scrutiny of its franchise and validated provision. The team considered that the University might wish to consider some improvements to the processes in regard to monitoring provision in its accredited partner.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

88 The University requires that both validation and periodic review panel membership includes external advisers, and the current Quality Handbook states that there should be 'normally at least two', one of whom must be an academic, the other may be based in the relevant industry or profession. The audit team heard that 'normally' meant that, in certain circumstances, there might be more than two. It was also explained that it is not current practice to use external examiners in this role. It had been past practice to use external examiners, but procedures had been changed in order to bring the institution in line with the *Code of practice*.

89 In their reading of validation records, the audit team noted that, in some cases, only one external adviser had been involved; in others it was not clear whether either external adviser had an academic background. In discussion, the anomalies were acknowledged and explained. The team also heard how the annual review of validation and review processes had identified the issue, resulting in an agreement to strengthen the written advice provided to panel chairs and faculties regarding the nomination of external advisers. The team noted these changes but, given the previous experience, believes that the University will wish to continue to monitor the composition of validation panels to ensure the appropriate level of externality.

90 Examples of periodic review documentation scrutinised by the team demonstrated the involvement of a wide range of external advisers covering the full spectrum of activity under consideration, and including both externals working in relevant industry and also academics from a mix of HEIs. However, others, whilst involving a suitable range of academic expertise, appeared not to have included industrial or professional expertise despite the highly vocational nature of the provision involved.

91 In addition to validated and franchised courses the University approves for credit a small amount of accredited work-based, in-company provision (see paragraph 67). The approval process for such provision specifies the involvement of an external adviser from an HEI, and UCLan has brought this type of work further into line with other CP and now specifies the appointment of an external examiner in line with University criteria.

92 The CPSED noted that 'the University greatly values external input to its quality assurance mechanisms - to give confidence in the rigour of its processes, to confirm the appropriateness of standards set and achieved, to confirm recognition of relevant subject benchmarks and to enhance quality...'. It is the view of the audit team that the current University Course Developer's Guide demonstrates this commitment, and that despite some occasions where only limited external input was employed, the current guidelines are strong.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

93 The CPSED stated that '...the role and responsibilities of external examiners are the same for all provision, whether on-campus or collaborative...' and, indicated that in the case of a franchised course, the same external is responsible for that course at all its sites of delivery in order to ensure comparability of standards. For validated courses at PIs, the College HE Coordinator submits a nomination for an appropriate external examiner in a timely manner to the head of the University host department for agreement prior to being forwarded for formal approval. PIs quoted examples of nominations which had been returned, or subject to further discussion, demonstrating that the University gives due weight to the appointment of its external examiners.

94 All proposals originating from the University or one of its PIs are checked within faculties against the University's criteria for appointment and then forwarded to the

relevant Dean for formal approval.

Approved nominations are passed to AQaSU who notify ASC, update the database of external examiners and send out a formal appointment letter on behalf of the University. Proposals from accredited institutions are passed directly to AQaSU for formal approval.

95 All external examiners are appointed and paid by UCLan and are invited to a University briefing event prior to taking up their appointment. Those unable to attend receive briefing documentation which includes a clearly written and informative booklet setting out their roles and responsibilities. Accredited institutions organise separate briefing events to which they also invite their external examiners, at which they explain their own regulations. UCLan staff attend these events to represent the perspective of the University.

96 All external examiners are required to submit an annual report, in a standard format to AQaSU. It is disseminated to PVC (QS&I), heads of department, deans, faculties and the relevant PI HE coordinators. Heads of department, advised by course leaders, are required to respond directly to external examiners, copying their response to AQaSU. They are also expected to comment on the external's report in their AMR. AQaSU has responsibility for following up late or missing reports and can recommend termination of the examiner's appointment to the chair of ASC if no report is received.

97 The external examiner report requires comment on assessment. This can be at a detailed level, but also offers the opportunity for the examiner to reflect on assessment policy. Other areas covered include academic standards and the learning experience. A recent change has been to revise the report pro forma so that examiners are asked to categorise any recommendations as 'essential', 'advisable' or 'desirable'. The dissemination from AQaSU of reports containing 'essential' recommendations is accompanied by a request that the responsible head of department respond to the external examiner on these matters within 14 working days, with

a copy of the response to AQaSU. Failure to comply with such a request in a timely manner is pursued by AQaSU. The University believes that this will enable a clearer and more effective response to concerns and assist it in meeting the requirements of Teaching Quality Information (TQI).

98 The audit team found many examples of reflective and helpful examiners' reports in the material available and it is clear that the report structure assists in the identification of matters of concern and of good practice. However, the team was concerned to note a number of instances where examiners had failed to complete the report in the required format or had made very cursory statements in key sections. The team read evidence from external examiners which suggested that these cases and other matters of reported concern had not been followed up. Further, whilst most essential issues had been responded to by the head of department in the required way, examples were observed where the detailed response emanated from the partner college with a more cursory note from the departmental head. The team believe that the University will wish to consider whether, given its intention to involve heads of department closely in the assurance of quality and standards of courses in related areas at PIs, the guidance regarding the response to externals is providing the right support.

99 The team noted an unfortunate example where delay in responding to examiner criticism one year was followed the next year when student work was not received by the same external examiner. This situation was further exacerbated because the examiner was unable to attend the examination board. The audit team was concerned that there appeared no process by which UCLan was able to recognise that this had occurred or was able to assess any impact on academic standards. Another report indicated that marks from a professional body examination were converted to a form which would contribute towards the award of an

honours degree. Whilst in itself this is not a matter for concern, the external examiner further suggested that the way in which this was done varied from year to year. University procedures, once more, did not appear to have picked up his concern. No UCLan representative was in attendance at the examination boards concerned, albeit stipulated in various regulations sighted by the team. The University was thus unable to note the concerns at first hand.

100 For overseas franchised courses there may be a local (country-based) external examiner considering student work prior to Module Boards chaired by a senior UCLan academic member of staff. The UK external examiner is, nevertheless, provided with samples of work from the overseas location to consider alongside the UK work to ensure consistency. Examinations are normally the same in all delivery centres and are verified by the UK external. Where in-country variations to questions need to be agreed, they are approved by the UK external after consultation with the in-country external.

101 The audit team noted the appointment of a single external examiner for single programmes, at all delivery sites, be they UK or overseas. This, together with detailed and carefully prescribed moderation practices associated with networked provision, allowed comparison of standards across different sites and, as a consequence, subsequent identification in external examiners' reports of site-specific, as well as course-specific issues affecting the student experience. The team also saw examples of external examiners' reports which demonstrated that examiners took care to address comments to particular delivery sites where appropriate and took opportunities to compare the various sites.

102 The audit team came to the opinion that UCLan's use of external examiners in CP is basically sound and, furthermore, the use of single examiners for individual programmes at all delivery sites contributes to good practice in ensuring comparability of standards across networked provision.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

103 In its CPSED the University stated that it '...has integrated the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure (AI) into its own regulations, policies and procedures and advises its partners that these have been taken on board...'. Each section of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, has been considered as it was published or revised to ensure that all precepts are addressed as appropriate within the University's QA mechanisms. Officers in AQaSU conduct a comparison of existing University regulations with the precepts of the *Code* and advise the appropriate committees of AB of changes which may be appropriate. For example, the 2004 revision of Section 2 of the *Code* relating to collaborative provision led to the University requiring partners to forward copies of publicity materials as part of the annual monitoring process. Other changes include the establishment of PPAG (see paragraph 28), changes to the QA processes for in-house learning and the resulting production of a UK Collaborative Policies and Procedures document analogous to that which was already in existence for overseas provision. The team noted that, in the case of at least one overseas validation, the panel at Stage 1 commended the way in which the programme had been mapped onto the precepts of Section 2 of the *Code*.

104 In 1998 the University introduced a common template for programme specifications which was updated in 2004. Programme specifications must specify the extent to which programme aims and outcomes are in alignment with the relevant subject benchmark statements. External subject specialists on validation and review panels are required formally to confirm that the programme specifications meet this requirement. Samples of validation reports seen by the audit team did include the requisite confirmation from the external panel members. The programme specification also lists learning outcomes by academic level, and provides a statement explaining how the programme supports students' Personal Development Planning.

105 In 2000 a fundamental review of the University's academic regulations was used as an opportunity to map the institution's awards against the FHEQ and this continues as part of the validation and review processes. External subject specialists are asked to consider the framework when confirming their satisfaction with the standards set for each level of a course. The audit team was able to confirm this to be the case through their scrutiny of minutes from validation events.

106 The audit team considered that the University had taken a thorough approach to the use of the Academic Infrastructure and the *Code of practice* published by QAA and concurred with the University's view that it had appropriate procedures to respond to further changes as necessary.

Review and accreditation by external agencies of programmes leading to the awarding institution's awards offered through collaborative provision

107 Almost all QAA subject reviews in the University's partner colleges have resulted in confidence being expressed in academic standards with a significant majority of the judgements of learning opportunities classed as commendable and the remainder approved. The exception is one review in 2003 at which no confidence was expressed in academic standards. The HNC/HND provision under consideration was small and operated under arrangements with Edexcel rather than UCLan. The programmes concerned are no longer offered, and UCLan has since validated a network Foundation Degree in a related discipline area. The audit team accepts that the regionally networked nature of this provides the College with better support in the discipline area.

108 The University has been involved in two QAA overseas audits, one of its provision in the Fire Safety Engineering College in Oman (see paragraph 21), and the second of its provision at Shenzhen University in China. Both reports noted a number of positive features about the

collaborations as well as recommending that attention be paid to particular issues. In each case the University's response demonstrates that full consideration had been paid to the report with recommendations used to further develop processes and procedures.

109 More recently one PI was subject to a QAA institutional audit. The audit team was informed that the resulting report was discussed informally with UCLan representatives, but was not formally considered within the UCLan deliberative structure despite the fact that the PI had been advised to consider a number of matters relating to the responsibility for, and application of, its quality assurance processes. The team formed the view that the University should therefore consider the desirability of formalising the manner in which its deliberative structures consider reports concerning collaborative partners which emanate from external agencies.

110 The University stated in its SED that 'at present only one course recognised by a professional, statutory or regulatory body is the subject of a collaborative arrangement'. In its reading the audit team discovered that other courses are recognised by various special interest groups, and one additional course is accredited by a professional body. In meetings with staff from PIs the team also learned of a number of initiatives where courses were in the process of seeking professional recognition. The team was informed that in some cases of networked provision, the UCLan delivery was accredited, whereas at partner colleges no such accreditation was present. The team were further informed, however, that discussions were ongoing and the PSRB concerned would assess a partner college, once a cohort had completed the award at the college.

111 The University has a procedure for monitoring reports of accreditation and reaccreditation by PSRBs which requires that such reports are considered by the relevant dean, head of department and others, such as course leaders, as appropriate. Comments on the report and any actions arising from it are sent to AQaSU. The audit team heard that

accreditation outcomes and subsequent actions are reported in AMRs, and AQaSU makes an annual summary report to ASC. The central role of departments and faculties in this reporting process brings further strength to the regional networked provision.

112 After careful reflection, the audit team formed the opinion that the University's procedures for capturing and evaluating the outcomes of reviews of its CP by external agencies was basically sound. However, it was concerned to find that the University was not fully aware of all the accredited awards or the professionally recognised status of a number of courses.

Student representation in collaborative provision

113 The University states that student representation is required within all its CP. The audit team heard that meetings of course or staff-student committees to which student representatives are invited is the usual mechanism by which students have a formal voice. In the case of networked franchises, partner staff attend course committees convened by UCLan and report on issues arising from student feedback in their local committees. For international partnerships the practice for student feedback is to follow what is customary and culturally acceptable in the partner's country. Of particular note, the University makes use of student representatives in the periodic review and validation process; UK collaborative PIs are asked to nominate a student representative to join the University Review Panel.

114 Partner staff-student committees exist at both course and school level. In its meetings with students, the audit team heard that such committees comprised PI staff and students, and would generally not include representation from the University. Students also indicated that feedback from formal committees was sufficient and appropriate. The team heard that whilst most courses did have student representatives, the opportunities offered to represent their peers was not always taken.

Students indicated that training was rarely offered to student representatives and that whilst full-time students were generally aware of the committee framework, it was less so the case for those studying part-time. The team heard that in UK PIs, class sizes were often small, and that communication between staff and the student cohort was frequent and informal. The view was expressed that most issues are resolved this way. Whilst there is no UCLan forum for students on collaborative courses, the team heard frequently that communication from students to UCLan staff always received a speedy response. Students regularly expressed interest in a cross-partner student committee for networked courses, and the University may wish to consider the benefits that may be gained from such an arrangement.

115 The audit team heard that most students on UCLan courses in PIs are members of the UCLan Students' Union (SU) but found that few have knowledge of its activities and services. The SU does attend some partner college induction activities but the team discovered that in other PIs students were not easily able to join. Union officers explained the challenges in representing partner college students, both in terms of regular communication channels and in the dissemination of information. The SU has representation on the Partnership Forum. SU officers acknowledged that whilst they must give priority in working with students on the main UCLan campuses, they wished to continue working with the University to enhance student representation in PIs.

116 UCLan's policy is for staff to visit overseas partners at least three times per year. They meet students and sit in on staff-student committees. In its meetings, the audit team discovered that for overseas partners, local course leaders or administrators maintain close contact with student representatives. Where they exist, staff-student committees meet two to three times per year. The team heard that some student groups have established their own interest groups to which they invite

lecturers. Students indicated that they invariably had the opportunity to annually meet with UCLan staff.

117 Whilst the audit team recognises variability in practice, they found that students are satisfied with their experience, feel that their voices are heard and their concerns resolved. They formed the opinion that student representational channels were sound.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

118 In its CPSED the University stated that it uses student feedback to help ensure that the students' experience at PIs is equivalent to that at UCLan. The University publishes clear and consistent expectations of matters such as the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback, communication regarding teaching arrangements, the development of employability skills and the provision of careers advice.

119 Student feedback is built into University quality assurance procedures. The audit team heard, for example, that meetings with students during periodic reviews permit those studying in PIs to comment directly on their course and their learning experience and to feed issues raised into the agenda for the main meeting. Review panels meet with a group of the institution's students.

120 UCLan requires that modules contributing to its awards are evaluated using Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ). PIs previously had a choice between using a standard University MEQ or a local variant. In order to better enable comparison between courses and sites, UCLan now requires all provision to use a common MEQ which contains limited provision for local tuning. The audit team heard that overseas partners generally include outcomes from student feedback within their AMR, but recognised that partners would themselves find it difficult to reflect upon comparative performance with other delivery centres. The new process has only been in use for one academic session, and the team read that for collaborative provision it is not yet fully

embedded. This was confirmed in meetings with students who reported that MEQs were not used uniformly across the University's collaborative provision.

121 UCLan has taken student feedback through a University-wide Student Satisfaction Survey at least every other year since 1993. The surveys are conducted on a census basis and data for specific groups, such as those at PIs, is available for detailed analysis by interested parties. Of approximately 20,000 students included in the 2005 survey, 11 per cent responded, and 6 per cent of the responses received were from students studying at PIs. The results enable comparison of PI cohorts with those of all respondents. However, some PIs had no student response and no PI had more than 20 responses; the audit team read that the response rate within UK PIs was only 3.47 per cent.

122 The survey has permitted issues relevant to PI students to be identified. For example matters relating to students' affinity with the University and regarding communication between the University and its collaborative students have been identified. Such issues have informed the agenda of the PDT which has worked alongside the SU to improve students' relationship with UCLan. Innovations have included a welcome booklet to be distributed to all PI students which explains the partnership relationship and outlines the facilities and services available to students. The processes for contacting off-campus students, both to raise awareness of the survey and to distribute it, are currently being reviewed in order to raise the response rate from this group of students for the 2006 survey. In its meeting with students, the audit team found that many students felt somewhat isolated from the University, and concluded that the University will no doubt wish to focus upon initiatives to address this.

123 The audit team read that as yet it has not been possible for the University to include its overseas-based students in the satisfaction surveys and acknowledges this as one particular area which could be improved to enhance their international student

community. The International Office is exploring ways in which the International website might be used to facilitate such developments.

124 The audit team formed the opinion that whilst the University had sound mechanisms for eliciting and making use of student feedback, they believe that it will consider it desirable to continue to seek ways to improve the response rate from students in partner colleges to the student satisfaction survey, and to put into practice its intention to extend this survey to students on UCLan awards at overseas partners.

125 In its reading, the audit team was told that the introduction and expansion of Foundation Degrees has strengthened the involvement of employers in the design of programmes with CP, both in the UK and at UCLan. Employers have been routinely involved in the validation and review process for these vocational awards. At some PIs, the team read that the involvement has extended beyond the areas of course design and validation due to the PIs local footprint and employer links. One example quoted was the use of professional Advisory Boards which had employer membership, which had led to the retention and strengthening of industrial placements. However, auditors found that the University had not always made use of the recommended number of externals (see paragraph 89) and felt that this might impact particularly on those proposals in which work-based learning was a key element. The audit team recognised the positive aspects of taking feedback and input from employers, and would encourage the University to build upon the good practice they observed where employers were engaged in the development and delivery of Foundation Degrees based in PIs.

Student admission, progression, completion and assessment information for collaborative provision

126 Students, in PIs both at home and overseas, are considered to be UCLan students, are issued with UCLan ID cards, and they see UCLan as providing the specification and contents for their

study. Although the PI provides the formal link to UCLan, students were aware that they were able to make personal contact if circumstances made it necessary.

127 The University has recently established a Student Information Management Unit; it oversees the information systems and procedures associated with the collection, storage, validation, manipulation and data extracts relating to the student records system. Full reports highlighting trend analysis is available for the various University committees engaged in monitoring and review. The University maintains full data records on its students, both those based at the University, or those in PIs. The only exception is data on students studying with its accredited partner; the accredited institution is responsible for maintaining such records. The University plans, in due course, to give access to its student record system to PIs.

128 Data analysis available for partner colleges includes progression, withdrawal and completion rates, together with analysis suitable for both monitoring and planning purposes. The University plans to issue these annual statistics electronically to each PI, together with a commentary that highlights trends. The audit team observed examples where the University, in its annual evaluation of networked courses, identified a college with retention concerns. The University, as part of its follow-up action, funded a retention project to address the matter, and continued to monitor the outcomes of the work. The team did, however, note a limited number of AMR reports from an accredited partner which presented little data and evaluation. They were concerned that the lack of analysis and information had not been identified within the University monitoring processes, and believe that the University will wish to ensure that its monitoring operates as planned in the future.

129 In its discussions with students, the audit team found that students clearly understand UCLan's general, and their own course-specific, module assessment and course progression criteria. Students explained that their

expectations prior to joining their course had generally been met, and that the information they received regarding their course and its assessment had been accurate. Where they existed, students appreciated the opportunities to network with students from other colleges; the University will no doubt wish to maximise such opportunities in the future. Although not all students were aware of the appeals and complaints procedures pertinent to their course, most had received the appropriate information or knew where to find the details; indeed in their discussions it became apparent to the team that many students receive both UCLan and local college handbooks as sources of support and advice.

130 Over the course of their scrutiny, the audit team formed the opinion that student admission was conducted with integrity, that material regarding admission, delivery and assessment was largely accurate, and that the data used for monitoring and analysis of collaborative provision was accurate.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff in collaborative provision; appointment, appraisal, support and development

131 The CPSED indicates that the University adopts two approaches to the assurance of staff quality. It devolves responsibility for the quality of staff at its accredited partner directly to the institution. The accreditation agreement requires the curriculum vitae (CVs) of new staff to be submitted to the University with the annual report. The audit team were able to review the annual report of the accredited partner and noted that although CVs were not appended, annual changes in staffing were recorded. For all other PIs, the University assures itself of the quality of staff teaching on programmes through the scrutiny of CVs at validation and review events. Any subsequent changes in staff teams are notified to the UCLan host department and approved by the head of department either on a rolling basis or in a statement at the start of the academic year. The University acknowledges the difficulties in ensuring a consistent approach across all

partner colleges. The team noted the UCLan guidelines on the qualifications and experience of staff appropriate for the different levels within the FHEQ and encourages the University to promote better use of these by the colleges in drawing up person specifications for appointments.

132 Validation and review events routinely include the discussion of opportunities for staff development for staff at partner colleges as well as addressing staff timetabling and resource issues. The audit team noted that in one UCLan PI, staff who deliver CP are employed on HE-only contracts. Statistical data available to the team confirmed that in many instances HE teaching at partner colleges is often to relatively small class sizes. The CPSED expresses the University's intention to discuss inconsistency in work planning practices for HE teaching staff in PIs at the annual meetings between the Director of Advancement, Head of the PDT and college senior staff.

133 Opportunities for staff development for staff engaged in CP is varied and broad and includes course fee reduction, staff development events, team teaching on modules, attendance at university review panels and validation events and membership of University committees. The University recognises that overseas partners do not have the same access to University events and had established an International Development Fund. This provides opportunities for staff from overseas institutions to engage in postgraduate courses at UCLan, to engage in research to support curriculum development and to improve pedagogical techniques.

134 The audit team also noted the use of the International Development Fund and heard that partner colleges welcomed the introduction of a fund available for small-scale teaching development. They were told of the positive manner in which these were viewed within the PIs. The team noted that staff development opportunities extended to administrative staff in support of CP.

135 The audit team concluded that the University's mechanisms for assuring the quality of teaching staff in CP were broadly supportive

of the University's strategy for collaboration. In particular they felt that the variety of small scale funding initiatives available to staff in partner colleges was good practice, but would encourage the University to extend to overseas partners the good practice in encouraging attendance at validation events and review panels.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

136 In its CPSED, the University indicated that students on collaborative programmes have access to the learning resources of the University, either directly or remotely. Furthermore it indicates that Library and Learning Resource Services (LLRS) provide a wide range of library, information and IT support services to meet the needs of the students, and the University believes that the LLRS provides an equitable service to the students studying at PIs. Such students are classed as full members of the LLRS, as are on-campus students, and have access to exactly the same resources. In addition, the LLRS provides resources to regional partners through the Virtual Academic Library of the North West (VALNOW) service. It provides students with access to the book stock of the University Library, delivered to them locally in the PI; photocopies of journal articles; access to e-resources; and access to subject and IT specialists. Induction sessions are offered, on-site at the PI, or at the University's Preston Campus. A steering group and a PI user group recommend strategic objectives and manages VALNOW service. The audit team read and heard of the yearly VALNOW conference which looks at topical issues, guided by the needs of the PI library staff. Surveys of library services are undertaken in alternate years. Students enrolled on international franchise programmes are provided with access to UCLan on-line resources which allows them access to provision remotely. Collaborative students are invited to give feedback on LLRS services using an electronic suggestions box.

137 The audit team heard that many UK PI students do not receive their university registrations until the second semester, leading

to difficulty accessing library services. Despite the aspirations of the University, students indicated that access to the UCLan library was not seen to be straightforward. Library, IT and practical facilities at PIs are perceived to be good but there were indications that students in one partner believe commercial activity to be given higher priority in the use of the practical facilities than the students. Whilst the team heard this as a concern of students they met, they acknowledge that there was no supporting evidence for this in the student surveys or in the AMRs. The team, in its scrutiny of AMR reports, observed that feedback from students routinely addressed matters concerning learning resources.

138 In its meetings, the audit team heard that whilst some PIs use the same virtual learning environment (VLE) as the University, others have procured different systems. There was some confusion amongst both students and staff from PIs regarding their access to the UCLan VLE, although students were generally of the opinion that they had appropriate access to electronic resources either at their college or at UCLan. Use of the VALNOW e-library and postal service for books is widespread and the facilities are much appreciated by students. Overseas students have access to UCLan on-line materials, supplemented by optional access to libraries in local universities. The team read that students in one Indian PI are eager to use the UCLan e-learning environment and noted in another case that when there is a lack of specialist equipment, alternative arrangements are provided by UCLan.

139 Learning resources are scrutinised as part of the University validation process. A Resources Audit Form is used to record the resources available for consideration during the approval process. The audit team read a number of reports from validation and review events and noted evidence that conditions of approval are appropriately placed in respect of deficient learning resources.

140 In the view of the audit team, the University uses effective mechanisms to ensure the appropriateness and quality of learning resources in PIs. Student views are heard and addressed leading to opportunities for enhancement.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

141 The audit team read that arrangements for student support and guidance are a central consideration during the validation process. Validation panels review support arrangements for students with disability and/or learning difficulties, arrangements for induction, placements, periods of study abroad, supporting academic progression and advising those with personal problems. The team further heard that these matters were continually monitored through student feedback and in the AMR reports. In their scrutiny of validation and AMR reports, the team was able to confirm the detailed consideration given to these matters and acknowledged the benefits which accrued from the generally smaller class size in the regional PIs.

142 The audit team also found evidence to support the University's commitment in supporting its PIs in specialist discipline areas, and also in advising students with disabilities and learning difficulties. The team read that through the PF, the University's Student Disability Service provides a range of services to staff in PIs and also coordinates an annual support event for partner colleges.

143 Progression from study at PIs to courses at UCLan campuses is an academic challenge for many students; often moving from small to large group teaching. The UCLan course leader or year tutor visit PIs at various times during the academic year. The team heard of a 'progression day' when all cohorts on a course meet together at UCLan and undertake a range of induction activities, some curriculum based, others social. Campus tours are provided and UCLan students provide tours for their new peers. A Student Survival Guide is also provided for new students. In their discussions with students and graduates it became apparent that not all students were aware of the support arrangement made for progression, but in general they were complimentary regarding the guidance and support arrangements.

144 For international partnerships the University has recently reviewed its systems and procedures for student support overseas. The audit team read that specialist staff have been appointed in partner countries to provide integrated support from the point of enquiry, through the admissions process, the academic learning experience, and where appropriate through the visa application phase, transition to the UK, and integration into the UK cultural and learning environment. To support students progressing from collaborative programmes, faculties have appointed international coordinators whose role is to liaise with the International Office and in-country support teams.

145 Assessed English language modules are integrated into all franchise programmes in China. A University language coordinator has been appointed in Southern China to oversee the delivery of in-country language provision. The audit team found that the University vets the appointment of in-country language staff, language module design, assessment, quality assurance and language staff development.

146 For those progressing from overseas PIs to UCLan, students are assigned an International Buddy on arrival at the University. Buddies are existing students, themselves mainly international, who are trained to help all new international students. There is also a dedicated orientation programme which provides a cultural induction to the University and social activities to integrate students. These arrangements have attracted positive comment from earlier overseas audits.

147 In its visits to PIs, the audit team met a broad range of students. Discussions were positive, and students demonstrated ownership of their study. Whilst careers guidance was rarely embedded in the curriculum, the team heard that students had access to professional advice as required. Students reported that both personal and academic support, including feedback on assignment work, was good. Students and staff from partners all demonstrated a sound knowledge of UCLan frameworks and processes, including the appropriate routes to pursue for both complaints and appeals. The

students explained that they had opportunity to engage in personal development planning, and were able to access support in the development of study skills during their studies.

148 The audit team found mixed practice in the relationships between UCLan staff and UK PI students. Some UCLan tutors meet with partner college students during their course whereas others rarely meet. In overseas PIs there is no formal requirement to establish a personal tutor system. Students did however report that they developed close contact with course leaders and administrators, and were aware that they could contact University staff directly.

149 The audit team formed the view that CP students receive appropriate guidance and support. The University's monitoring of guidance and support through the validation and annual review process is effective. The team noted several examples of differing practice, and the University may wish to consider issuing stronger guidelines in order to enhance consistency.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

The experience of students in collaborative provision of the published information available to them

150 The University provides a range of supporting information to the students studying at collaborative partners. The PDT and the International Office each take responsibility for providing dedicated web-based information support to UK and International students. The audit team heard that in the case of some international students, access to this information was limited, due to poor access to the necessary computers. In terms of franchise provision, the audit team learnt that the host University department has responsibility for ensuring that students have access to approved course handbooks.

151 In its reading, the audit team observed that leaders of collaborative courses are required to submit all promotional materials relating to their provision with their AMR report. This information is checked by either the department or the PDT. The University has recently extended this practice for overseas provision. On UK franchised provision the University has recently introduced 'The Card' (defining a series of commitments made by the University to its students); a copy of which is received by all students. During a visit to an accredited institution, the team was shown a comprehensive booklet of student information which had been well received by students.

152 In its meetings with students, and from their reading, the audit team was able to conclude that the information available to students was sufficient and generally accurate.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information on collaborative provision leading to the awarding institution's awards

153 Information particularly relating to CP is published using both on-line prospectuses and paper-based documents. In addition, the audit team was able to confirm, through its reading and in discussion, that UCLan was making adequate progress in providing the required TQI data for its awards delivered through collaborative arrangements.

154 Although the audit team saw very full, informative and largely accurate documentation relating to proposed new courses, some failed to state that this was subject to validation by the University. In addition, not all documentation relating to course information clearly indicated the awarding body. The University will no doubt wish to review its processes for ensuring that the status of partnership awards is appropriately reflected in published information.

Findings

Findings

The effectiveness of the implementation of the awarding institution's approach to managing its collaborative provision

155 An audit of the collaborative provision (CP) offered by the University of Central Lancashire (the University or UCLan) was undertaken during the period 27 to 31 March 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited four of the University's collaborative partners. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice in its collaborative arrangements.

156 The University sees the development of CP as a key component in its strategy of widening participation (WP) both regionally and internationally. Such development is implemented through partner institutions by:

- provision of courses with opportunities to progress to an honours degree at the University
- the development of higher education in areas of vocational expertise
- providing opportunity for international students to acquire UK qualifications not available in their domestic education structure.

157 The audit team considered the operation of the WP principles and processes to be particularly well developed within the regionally based partner institutions (PIs) who provided both encouragement and support for students to proceed in higher education. The commitment to wider participation was universally owned by PI and University staff alike.

158 The University acknowledges variations between the management of UK and international CP but ensures that all aspects of CP are subject to the same strategy regarding quality and standards. The Director of Advancement is given delegated responsibility for the operation of UK provision and the Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) Quality/Standards and International (QS&I) retains direct responsibility for international provision and accredited institutions.

159 The academic standards of awards and Quality Assurance (QA) of CP are managed well within a framework which includes a comprehensive set of systems supported by procedures manuals and handbooks, shared external examiners and common Award Boards for both in-house and collaborative provision. Appropriate provision is made for student representation on liaison panels or their equivalent.

160 The oversight of PIs and their provision is exercised through annual monitoring review mechanisms which consider both individual courses and the institution's general provision. The responsibility for this institutional oversight may vary between UK and international provision but is nevertheless similar.

161 The University's management of academic standards and QA in its accredited partner varies from its other CP. Responsibility for QA is delegated to the PI and monitored through an annual return which hitherto has undergone a less robust deliberative process than the similar reports from University faculties for the oversight, reflection upon and aggregation of issues (see also paragraphs 71 and 81).

162 The student experience provided by CPs is monitored in terms of the inputs to and outcomes of the student learning experience. The former include the quality of teaching staff and the learning resources available, the outcomes are assured by the use of shared modules on franchised courses, the subsequent shared moderation of assignment tasks and student submissions; the use of common external examiners; standard learning outcomes, credit frameworks, grading criteria and award frameworks.

163 The audit team welcomed the wider participation opportunities afforded to students through the CP of the University and the robust framework and processes for the management of quality assurance and within that the student experience. However, the audit team considered the QA processes relating to the accredited PI to be potentially less rigorous than for other CP.

The effectiveness of the awarding institution's procedures for assuring the quality of educational provision in its collaborative provision

164 The University separates the approval of new collaborative partners from the subsequent validation of courses to be delivered by the PI. The University has clear procedures for both processes; institutional approval requires a matching of mission statements and a due diligence exercise, including both the financial and legal aspects of the collaboration. A UK partner approval process will require an institutional visit to prepare a portfolio of information from which approval is evaluated. The visit may be waived by the PVC (Academic) if certain criteria are met.

165 Programme approval panels are drawn from the University Review Panel (URP) membership and are joined by external advisers. The validation process is in two stages; the first is designed to aid course teams to refine proposals, check marketability and ensure compliance with academic regulations; the stage two validation considers the proposals against a set of University agreed approval criteria. Unlike in-house validation events, the process is not devolved to faculties but managed centrally. Overseas validations are subject to an interim review of the first year of operation, although regulations do permit this requirement to be waived by the chair of Academic Standards Committee (ASC). Processes to ensure that conditions of approval are met are clear, although mechanisms for following up on recommendations from validation and review panels are less transparent.

166 Annual monitoring is course based with departmental and faculty wide consolidated reports aggregating common issues. The institutional overview of a PI is either prepared by the UK college itself, or by the International Office in the case of international PIs, and it is subsequently considered by ASC. Annual reviews include inputs from students, external examiners and course managers.

167 The five to six-yearly cycle of re-approval and review of programmes offered by partner colleges is similar to initial validation using the services of the URP and external representation and is managed centrally. The review process may vary in nature; it may consider courses at a particular partner spanning a spread of subject disciplines, or it may consider the provision of a joint course across several partner colleges. Institutional periodic review is an extension to the college based review process.

168 The University's accredited partner manages its own validation, review and monitoring processes, overseen by the University. The partner makes an annual return to the VC's office of the University. The audit team found the quality and content of this annual return to provide a less rigorous base for evaluation than the processes for other types of PI.

169 Validation and review reports show that robust use is made of external assessors in the process of programme approval and periodic review. Scrutiny of documentation by the audit team indicated the University has an effective overview of the quality and academic standards of its collaborative courses offered by partners.

170 The University considers student feedback and representation to be key factors in the maintenance and enhancement of its academic provision, including CP. Feedback is collected using standard Module Evaluation Questionnaires and at course level by the use of staff-student liaison panels, or their equivalent. Minutes of liaison meetings are made available to students and outcomes are reported within the Annual Monitoring Reports. The University course leader makes regular visits to the partner

each academic year and seeks student opinion regarding the operation and quality of the course. Cultural variations for international partners may result in differences in practice regarding student feedback. However, such cultural barriers to gaining relevant feedback are to some extent overcome during the course leaders' personal visits. Feedback from graduates and employers is less systematic, although professional body and employers may be represented on validation and review events.

171 The University is confident the procedures and processes for assuring the quality of educational provision in its CP is effective. Overall, the audit team concluded that broad confidence can be placed in the University's current procedures for assuring quality of learning opportunities offered to its students studying through collaborative arrangements. Nevertheless, the team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to ensure greater transparency in the consideration of recommendations from validation and review events and also for it to exercise its full responsibilities with regard to the monitoring of quality and standards within its accredited partner.

The effectiveness of the awarding institution's procedures for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through collaborative provision

172 The assurance of the academic standards of UCLan's awards is one of four main objectives of its quality strategy. The University believes its validation process to be the cornerstone of its QA processes. Programme specifications are included in validation documentation and contain learning outcomes relating to the appropriate higher education (HE) level. External panel members on validation panels are specifically asked to comment on the standards of the proposed provision and the extent to which the programme aims and outcomes align with any relevant benchmarks.

173 External examiners play a key role in the assurance of standards; the roles and responsibilities for examiners on CP are identical to those examining provision on-campus. A clear written description of the role is provided and new examiners are invited to an induction event. A single examiner is appointed to cover all deliveries of a course, including those overseas and the audit team noted that this, together with the careful moderation process used for networked deliveries, allowed cross-provision comparisons to be made, thus ensuring the maintenance of a common standard. External examiners make their reports on a standard form which provides ample opportunity for reflective comment on the standards being achieved. Most examiners reports available to the team made full use of this facility.

174 The audit team noted that both the Accreditation and Implementation agreements with the University's accredited partner quite appropriately left some operational matters relating to QA to be defined within the partner's quality manual. It was therefore concerned to note that UCLan representatives did not attend examination boards although University membership of such boards was specified in the relevant partner regulations. The University is advised to consider exercising in full its responsibilities with respect to such boards to ensure that it can monitor standards within its partner institutions.

175 In general the University will only validate provision in subject areas where it has similar provision on-campus. The audit team found a number of cases where well established partners were widening provision to encompass subject areas new to higher education and where there was no comparable provision at UCLan. The team was satisfied that the University took great care in such cases to ensure standards by using, for example, the involvement of relevant PSRBs in the development processes and by the appointment of well qualified external examiners.

176 The audit team formed the view that broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

The awarding institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision

177 The University states that it has 'integrated the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure into its own regulations, policies and procedures and advises its partners that these have been taken on board'. Sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (code of practice)*, published by QAA and other national guidance are considered by staff in the Academic Quality and Standards Unit as they are produced or revised and necessary changes to the regulatory framework are then processed through the appropriate University committees. The last fundamental review of academic regulations was used as an opportunity to map awards against the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. Benchmark statements are used in the design and review of courses whenever appropriate.

178 Programme specifications must be available for all programmes as part of the validation and review procedures. These make explicit reference to any relevant benchmarks and are required to include learning outcomes relating to the appropriate HE level. External members of validation panels confirm in writing that this has occurred prior to the event.

179 The audit team considered that the University had taken a thorough approach to the use of the Academic Infrastructure, the *Code of practice* and other national benchmarks and guidelines. It concurred with the University's view that it had appropriate procedures to respond to further changes as necessary.

The utility of the collaborative provision self-evaluation document as an illustration of the awarding institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations in collaborative provision, and to act on these to enhance quality and safeguard academic standards

180 The audit team found the CPSED to be a clear descriptive document that explained the various models of collaborative provision and the relevant QA procedures. It described clearly both the different models of collaboration used by the University, and the arrangements that the University has in place for the maintenance and enhancement of quality and the academic standards of its collaborative provision. It provided a good reflection of both UK and international CP at a strategic and institutional level. The team felt that the reflection on the effectiveness of student-facing services and actual work practice for some of the partner students did not fully describe the position it later read and heard about. Overall, the team found the CPSED to be a fair illustration of the University's capacity to reflect on its own strengths and limitations in its approach to CP.

Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of its management of quality and academic standards in its collaborative provision

181 The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) identified clearly the University's future plans with respect to the development of collaborative provision, especially within the region and described how UCLan was taking a leading role in some. It described how the University will work to realise the potential of its web-enabled support material and its virtual learning environment for students studying on CP. The University, in support of its international strategy, has established a regional office in Delhi and a representative office in the Ukraine. Further opportunities for joint campus ventures are being explored.

182 The audit team concluded that the review of the international activities was timely and appropriate and would provide the opportunity for the University to build upon good practice identified in the assurance and enhancement of quality and standards of its collaborative provision. The team also concluded that the greater use of virtual learning tools by some of its collaborative partners was a timely development indicating the maturity of some of the relationships. The audit team acknowledged the mature relationship developed through its accreditation partnership which will no doubt contribute significantly to the wider development of HE in the North West of England, but concluded that, until such time that a different relationship was in place, the University should ensure that all responsibilities relating to quality and standards in collaborative agreements are exercised in full.

Reliability of information provided by the awarding institution on its collaborative provision

183 Information particularly relating to collaborative provision is published using both on-line prospectuses and paper based documents. In addition, the audit team was able to confirm that UCLan was making adequate progress in providing the required Teaching Quality Information (TQI) data for its awards delivered through collaborative arrangements.

184 Although the audit team saw very full, informative and largely accurate documentation relating to proposed new courses, some failed to state that this was subject to validation by the University, indeed, not all documentation relating to course information clearly indicated the awarding body. The University will no doubt wish to review its processes for ensuring that the status of partnership awards is appropriately reflected in published information.

Features of good practice

185 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the collaborative provision audit, the audit team noted in particular:

- i the manner in which the Partnership Forum operates both as an integrative mechanism for relationships between the partners and the University, and amongst the partners themselves (paragraphs 35, 50, 53, 56)
- ii the contribution made by the University and its regional partners to opportunities for wider participation in higher education within the region (paragraphs 24, 25, 50)
- iii the process for ensuring comparability of standards across networked provision (paragraphs 45, 50, 101, 111)
- iv the variety of small scale funding initiatives available to staff in partner colleges (paragraphs 134, 135).

Recommendations for action

186 The University is advised to:

- i ensure that it exercises in full its responsibilities under the terms of its agreement with its accredited partner in order to ensure that its processes for monitoring quality and standards are clear and effective (paragraphs 47, 49, 71, 81, 87, 99, 109, 110, 112, 128, 131, 154).

In addition, the University may wish to consider the desirability of enhancing its quality management arrangements by:

- ii making more explicit and transparent in its documentation the way in which recommendations arising from validation and periodic review are considered (paragraph 65, 86)
- iii seeking ways to improve the response rate from students in partner colleges to the student satisfaction survey and to put into practice its intention to extend this survey to students on UCLan awards at overseas partners (paragraphs 123, 124).

Appendix

The University of Central Lancashire's response to the collaborative provision audit report

The University welcomes the team's judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of its awards and the effectiveness of its management of collaborative arrangements. The University was pleased to note the many strengths identified throughout the body of the report as well as those singled out as features of good practice.

The University will ensure that action to address the recommendations of the report is carried out:

- the fulfilment of the agreement with University's accredited partner will be monitored carefully
- steps have already been taken to make more explicit the way in which recommendations arising from validation and periodic review are considered
- as recognised by the audit team, work is ongoing to raise the response rates for the Student Satisfaction Survey from students in partner colleges and it is pleasing to note that the results of the most recent survey show a distinct improvement. The University is also working on a tailored survey for students studying at partner institutions overseas.

