University of Lancaster

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 Lancaster (the University) from 27 to 31 March 2006 to carry out a collaborative provision audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards 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 process, the team visited one of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video-conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from a further two partner organisations, one overseas and one UK partner.

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 resources 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)* -

September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

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

Outcome of the audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view 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 role of the course consultant as a critical friend to the associate colleges, the resources invested in facilitating the role and the contribution of the annual meeting of course consultants to the sharing of good practice

- the annual December meeting of programme leaders from the associate colleges as an effective mechanism for discussing annual programme reports and sharing good practice

- the support provided for students on 2+2 and similar programmes to prepare them for study at Lancaster, including visits by University of Lancaster staff and the provision of information, induction and bridging programmes; and the ongoing support and monitoring of their progress at the University of Lancaster

- the allocation of a proportion of the tuition fee income from overseas collaborative programmes to provide staff development for staff of the partner institution.

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 the standards of awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained.

Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- to review and strengthen University processes for ensuring that it has appropriate oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through tripartite arrangements with an accredited college

- to review University procedures for ensuring the accuracy, consistency and clarity of information provided to students through programme handbooks.

Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to consider developing an operational handbook/procedures manual for staff in the University and partner organisations involved in the management and delivery of collaborative provision, in order to provide a single point of reference

- in the light of its further strategic developments in overseas partnerships, keep under review the mechanisms for initiating, developing and monitoring those partnerships operating outwith the Office for Associated Institutions

- to review the terminology used across all types of collaborative provision to enhance consistency and understanding

- to clarify, with all associate colleges, University requirements for responding to external examiners reports and the provision of a formal written response to each examiner, in order to ensure consistency across all partners

- to accelerate progress towards the use of common data sets for the monitoring of student admission, progression and achievement.

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 findings of the audit suggest 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, published by institutions in the format recommended by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in the document *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance (HEFCE 03/51)*. The audit team was satisfied that the information the University and its partner organisations are currently publishing about the quality of collaborative programmes and the standards of the University's awards was reliable and that the University was making adequate progress towards providing requisite teaching quality information for its collaborative provision.

Main report

Main report

1 A collaborative provision audit of the University of Lancaster (the University) was undertaken from 27 to 31 March 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

2 Collaborative provision audit is supplementary to the institutional audit of the University's own provision. It is carried out by a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. It provides a separate scrutiny of the collaborative provision of an HEI with degree-awarding powers (awarding institution) where such collaborative provision was too large or complex to have been included in its institutional audit. 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) - September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).*

3 In relation to collaborative arrangements, the audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its collaborative provision; and for the discharge of its responsibilities as an awarding institution. As part of the process, the audit team visited one of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video or telephone-conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from a further two partner organisations - one overseas and one in the UK.

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

4 The University was established by Royal Charter in 1964 and founded as a collegiate institution and has eight undergraduate colleges and a graduate college. The University has over 40 departments, specialist institutes and centres and, following a recent restructuring, is organised into three faculties: Science and Technology, Arts and Social Sciences, and the Management School. There is also a School of Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation which offers Foundation Degrees and freestanding certificates.

5 There are currently 30,000 full and part-time students registered for programmes leading to awards of the University, of which 17,000 are on collaborative programmes. The University's Register of Collaborative Partnerships lists 40 collaborative relationships of various types.

6 The University has two principal types of collaborative partnership with institutions in the UK, defined as accredited and associate colleges. The two accredited colleges offer Foundation Degrees, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to some 15,385 students. The two associate colleges offer programmes to some 1,530 students studying at Foundation Degree, honours and postgraduate levels. A smaller number of partnership arrangements in the UK are based on memoranda of agreement with a range of different types of organisations.

7 The University's international collaborative arrangements are also governed by memoranda of agreement covering a variety of arrangements including University staff delivering teaching at overseas sites, 2+2 (or similar variants)

articulating programmes where successful completion provides entry to later parts of a University programme, and consortial arrangements. There are currently 163 students studying on the University's overseas collaborative programmes and although this represents a relatively small proportion of the total collaborative provision, it is an area that the University identifies as offering scope for further development and growth in the future.

8   The University's mission is 'to pursue high quality research of international importance, to create a stimulating and innovative learning environment for all students and staff and, in and through international, national and regional collaboration to enhance economic, cultural and social well-being', and the University believes that its collaborative activities therefore permeate its aims, objectives and goals

Background information

9   The published information available for this audit included:

- the institutional audit report, June 2004

- the University of Lancaster and the Universidad Pontificias Comillas overseas collaborative audit report, October 2000

- the Foundation Degree review of Criminology and Criminal Justice, April 2005

- the Foundation Degree review of Management (Business), May 2005.

10   The University provided QAA with the following documents:

- the self-evaluation document for collaborative provision (CPSED)

- the register of collaborative provision

- documentation linked to the CPSED

- documentation relating to the partner organisations visited by the audit team and to those with whom it conducted meetings by video and telephone-conference.

11   In addition, the audit team had access to a range of the University's internal documents in hardcopy or on the University's website, including the intranet. The team is grateful to the University for the access it was given to this information.

The collaborative provision audit process

12   Following the preliminary meeting at the University in July 2005, QAA confirmed that between the briefing and audit visits there would be three visits to partner organisations to include two 'virtual' visits involving meetings conducted by video or telephone-conference. QAA received the CPSED in November 2005 and documentation relating to the three partner organisations in January 2006.

13   The University's students were invited, through their Students' Union (LUSU), to contribute to the audit process in a way that reflected the Union's capacity to represent the views of students in partner organisations offering the University's awards through collaborative arrangements. At the briefing visit, the audit team was able to meet an officer of LUSU as part of a wider student group, and the team is grateful to LUSU for its engagement with the audit process.

14   The audit team undertook a briefing visit to the University from 13 to 16 February 2006 with the purpose of exploring with senior members of University staff, senior staff from partner organisations, and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the CPSED and the linked documentation. At the end of the briefing visit a programme of meetings for the audit visit was agreed with the University. It was also agreed that certain audit trails would be pursued through specific case-studies prepared by the University.

15   During its visits to the partner organisations (including the 'virtual' visits) the audit team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives of the partner organisations. The team is grateful to the partner organisations for their help in

furthering its understanding of the University's processes for managing its collaborative arrangements.

16   The audit visit took place from 27 to 31 March 2006 and involved further meetings with University staff and students. The audit team is grateful to all those who participated in meetings.

17   The audit team comprised Professor C Clare, Mr CEJ Griffiths, Dr F Haddleton, Professor A Holmes, auditors, and Ms J Baylie, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

18   The institutional audit of the University took place in June 2004. The report highlighted good practice including: the range of opportunities for students to become involved in many aspects of the University at all levels of its operation; and the thoughtful and reflective approach to course design, teaching and student learning in a number of academic departments.

19   Advisable recommendations listed in the report included that the University: ensures that, in developing its chosen approach to the management of quality and standards, it is able to demonstrate consistency in approach between departments and the equitable treatment of students based on agreed principles that reflect those to be found in the *Code of practice*; accelerate the development of its framework for the management of quality and standards; ensures that sufficient resource is provided centrally to enable the University to meet its various responsibilities for the implementation of quality assurance procedures; and ensures that the ongoing project to construct a university-wide quality manual is completed without delay.

20   A desirable recommendation was to ensure that there are clear implementation plans and strategies for taking forward the agreed recommendations of working groups and pilot projects in a timely and coherent manner.

21   The CPSED did not specifically address developments since the institutional audit, but the audit team was provided with a summary of the subsequent actions taken by the University. During the course of the audit, the team found that progress had been made in addressing the recommendations in the audit report not least the University's development of a more coherent management framework for quality assurance. There is still however some progress to be made, including the need to expedite any actions outstanding.

22   The institutional audit report 2004 also noted that significant organisational changes were planned, including a new faculty structure. Since the audit three faculties have been created, Science and Technology, Arts and Social Sciences and the Management School 'providing more authority for Associate Deans for teaching, greater integration between teaching and policy committees, and a more direct interface between the centrally based teaching quality support offices and the three faculties'.

23   As part of these developments there is a new School of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning with the remit to work with faculties and schools in the delivery of the access and continuing education agenda. The Director of the School chairs the Committee for Associated Institutions (CAI). The post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Student Experience has also been created, although this role focuses on the University's campus based students rather than those studying at the accredited or associate colleges. The University has set up a working group to develop further and broaden its regional strategy.

24   From the minutes of various committees, such as CAI and the Committee for Overseas Collaborative Provision (COCP), it is apparent that there is continued planned growth in the University's collaborative arrangements. Since the institutional audit new partnerships have been established with several partner

organisations in the UK and overseas to deliver programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; One partnership has ended by mutual agreement after 10 years of collaboration.

25 The reaccredidation of St Martin's College and Edge Hill College of Higher Education took place in 2004-05 and particular cognisance was taken of the revised Section 2 of the *Code of practice* on collaborative provision. Both colleges were reaccredited and have applied to QAA for taught degree awarding powers. Edge Hill College has received notification that it has been awarded such powers and the University is now in the process of agreeing transitional arrangements.

26 Since the institutional audit of the University in 2004 there have been a number of other QAA institutional audits and reviews in relation to its collaborative provision. In each instance the University has considered the reports and responses at the appropriate committee, Accredited Colleges Committee (ACC), Committee for Associate Colleges (CAC); or the Foundation Degrees Board (FDB) and appropriate action has generally been taken.

27 The audit team was informed that the University is also involved in a number of developments which may impact on its future collaborative arrangements within the region. In particular the establishment of the University of Cumbria which will involve the merger of St Martin's College of Higher Education and the Cumbria Institute of Arts; the development of a Lifelong Learning Network for Merseyside and West Lancashire; the creation of the East Lancashire Consortium and its bid for additional student numbers which is supported by the University as a validating institution.

28 The audit team noted that there had been a significant number of developments since the 2004 institutional audit. In considering the University's response to the audit report, the team formed the view that the University either had taken or is planning to take appropriate action to meet the recommendations which might impact

on the quality assurance and standards amongst its partner institutions, although the team would encourage the University to expedite its actions (see paragraph 43).

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

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

29 The University's strategic approach to collaborative provision is to build on the long established partnerships with colleges in the region, while aiming for significant increases in its activity with overseas institutions.

30 In the case of the regional collaborations, the CPSED acknowledged that the University is just one of a network of institutions with university status providing higher education (HE) in the North-West region, but that there remain areas of both 'rural and urban deprivation' with under-provision in HE in a number of key subject areas. The University's strategy for collaborative provision therefore is, according to CPSED, to 'seek partners of high quality with which to forge partnerships in order to address that under-provision..[and]..to widen access and increase participation at levels from year zero to master's level awards'.

31 The University's collaborative provision falls into three main categories. The first is in respect of the accredited colleges where the arrangement is exclusive in that the colleges only provide the University's awards. The relationship between these colleges and the University dates back to 1964 and 1974 respectively, but was formalised by Senate in 1993 as the result of a working party on the University's relationships with external educational institutions. At that time the Office for Associated Institutions (OAI) assumed responsibility for managing collaborative provision and CAI was established.

32 The second category relates to the two long-standing associate colleges where the colleges are able to run programmes validated by the University but may also make awards validated by other institutions. Currently there is also one overseas associate college and there are plans for a university college in Malaysia to be considered for associate college status.

33 The third category covers collaborative provision arrangements managed through memoranda of agreement. Such agreements have been set up with both UK and overseas organisations. In the UK more recent arrangements have been agreed with two colleges and other specialist institutions and in both instances the arrangements are more restricted and are limited to a small number of awards. Overseas collaborations in this category include '2+2 admissions or similar variants', offshore teaching by University staff, single and multi-programme agreements (similar to associate college links) and agreements for various other consortium arrangements where part of the programme takes place at the University and part in one of a number of partner organisations.

34 International collaborations have been established at the University for a number of years and in December 2002 the University undertook a useful review of its international relationships through the International Strategy Group. The international dimension of the University's collaborative provision is firmly embedded in its strategic plan where Goal Four aims for regional, national and international partnerships.

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

35 The framework for the management of quality and standards is complex, partly due to the different types of collaborative provision and their loci of responsibility. The executive structure for accredited colleges and associate colleges works through the OAI, whose head,

the Secretary of the OAI, reports through the Academic Registrar to the University Secretary. There is also a Director of Regional Outreach, who reports to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Development), and whose role it is to consolidate and integrate the University's regional activities and to develop new initiatives. Part of the job description specifies working with the OAI to develop policies and strategic relationships with accredited and associate colleges, but it was not clear to the audit team how the two offices integrate operationally.

36 A feature of the relationship between the University and associate colleges at programme level is the course consultant. The course consultant is appointed early in the life of a particular collaborative programme to act as a critical friend and adviser. The course consultant assists in the development of the programme but cannot be a panel member at its validation. Part of the role is to interpret and help the programme team act on any recommendations and conditions arising from validation or review. Course consultants also attend examination boards and submit an annual report to the University.

37 The audit team was informed that course consultants were resourced effectively by the University including the provision of timetable relief for individuals undertaking this role. There is also an annual meeting of course consultants to enable them to share concerns and to disseminate good practice. The team considered that the way the role of the course consultant is designed and made operational to enable effective monitoring of standards and quality, and to take the enhancement agenda forward, was an example of good practice.

38 Collaborations outside accredited and associate colleges are mainly overseas partnerships and these are managed through the faculty and departmental structure, although the OAI is responsible for the development, approval and review of all institutional agreements through COCP. They are supported by the Overseas Programmes Unit (OPU), which reports to the OAI through

the OAI Secretary, the Marketing and Recruitment Director and through to the University Secretary.

39   The deliberative structure for collaborative provision is also complex, involving different reporting lines for accredited and associate colleges and the other forms of collaboration administered through the faculties. The main committee is the CAI which is a subcommittee of Senate. CAI has four subcommittees: ACC; CAC; FDB and COCP.

40   ACC receives reports and deliberates on issues relating to the two accredited colleges. It has the responsibility for the monitoring of academic standards and quality in the colleges on behalf of CAI and Senate. A feature of the accreditation agreements with the two colleges is that they allow for tripartite arrangements where one of the accredited colleges validates a programme to run in one of its own partners. As such a programme is still a University award, the responsibility for standards rests with the University and it is ACC that should act on behalf of Senate to discharge this responsibility. Having reviewed the structure and documentation relating to this arrangement, the audit team formed the view that the current arrangements may not be sufficiently robust to detect, sufficiently early, emerging problems with standards or quality in tripartite arrangements (see paragraph 72).

41   CAC performs the same role as ACC but for the associate colleges. FDB is responsible for overseeing quality and standards of Foundation Degrees delivered through the associate colleges. The fourth subcommittee of CAI is COCP. This has recently been reconstituted, partly to oversee the increasing number of planned overseas collaborations. COCP can, if required, report directly to Senate to expedite decisions on overseas collaborations (see paragraph 106).

42   Most of the overseas collaborations are considered through the faculty and departmental committee structure in terms of the validation, review and monitoring of programmes. COCP has a role in considering the approval of the collaborative partner at the institutional level, but the programme itself is considered by the relevant faculty teaching committees and University Undergraduate Studies Committee or Graduate School Committee. There is a link back to CAI from the faculty and University teaching committee for development of the memorandum of agreement.

43   The Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures, developed in response to the recommendations of the previous institutional audit (2004), (see paragraph 19) includes a section on collaborative provision (section 6). At the time of the audit the Manual was still in draft form and was due to be presented to Senate in May 2006. A draft of section six was made available to the audit team and offered some guidance on the role of the OAI and the various committees in approving and validating collaborative arrangements. The University was advised to develop such a manual without delay by the institutional team and it is disappointing that it was still not complete at the time of this audit. The audit team considered that codification of what is a very complex set of procedures is required as a matter of urgency.

44   The audit team would also recommend that the University consider developing an operational handbook/procedures manual for staff in the University and partner organisations involved in the management and delivery of collaborative provision, in order to provide a single point of reference for the day-to-day management of this provision.

45   The audit team noted the University's plans for increasing its overseas collaborative provision. At present, the majority of the oversight of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities is the responsibility of the committees and managers within the faculty and departmental structure. This does not necessitate full involvement of the OAI and the committees it services; consequently the University may be missing an opportunity to make full use of the expertise of the OAI, to ensure consistency of approach or

to disseminate good practice across all its collaborative provision. The team would recommend as desirable the University, in the light of its further strategic developments in overseas partnerships, to keep under review the mechanisms for initiating, developing and monitoring those partnerships operating outwith the OAI.

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

46   The University has identified and taken a number of actions to enhance the management of its collaborative provision. The COCP was set up in 1999 to ensure consistency of approach across the University's overseas provision, but was suspended in 2004 having fulfilled its requirements under its terms of reference. It has since been reinstated with new terms of reference (June 2005). The audit team was informed that the overarching purpose of the Committee is to provide a system for appropriate consideration of new initiatives at an early stage and that it is key in bringing together parallel partnership developments. The COCP also makes recommendations to the CAI and Senate on institutional obligations arising out of proposals for overseas collaborations. It has therefore both a strategic, and quality and standards, function.

47   The role of the FDB, which was set up to manage initial and subsequent Foundation Degree development that came under the aegis of the Lancaster Consortium involving all regional accredited and associate colleges, was reviewed in 2003. As a result the role of the FDB has been modified and now the approval of Foundation Degrees is delegated to the ACC and the CAC. The audit team noted that the FDB now has a more strategic function but retains a monitoring role to ensure that the appropriate equivalence is maintained across all Foundation Degrees within the Lancaster Consortium which lead to a University award.

48   The audit team was informed that the CAC and ACC are key fora for the sharing of good practice as the membership of both committees includes representatives from partner institutions. The ethos of the University is to nurture relationships in order to facilitate greater autonomy in the partners. The University is not prescriptive on how quality assurance procedures and policies and quality enhancement are managed within the partners but claims to have appropriate monitoring procedures in place to assure itself that quality and standards are secure.

49   The audit team saw evidence that the academic equivalence review, which takes place in the accredited colleges, and the triennial review of programmes within the associate colleges, provides an opportunity to share good practice between partners and the University. The quinquennial review of the partnership and annual programme review also draw out both issues and good practice which can facilitate the enhancement of the management of collaborative provision. As academic equivalence review has developed, the focus has moved to themed reviews that focus on particular areas, for example there have been thematic reviews on student services and careers and there is currently a thematic review on academic malpractice.

50   The University has developed new guidance for external examiners including a new external examiner report form and has broadened the role of the external examiner 'to provide input into content, balance and structure of programmes'. Guidance notes on institutional approval have also been produced for departments. The audit team was informed that the annual programme review process now included specific questions about collaborative provision and how departments are managing and enhancing the provision. The process for validating departmental collaborative developments has also changed and there is now a twin-track method whereby the OAI takes responsibility for the assurance of the institutional quality of a potential partner and the Teaching Quality Support Office (TQSO) work with the faculty to ensure the academic quality of the programme.

51   The audit team noted that as part of its enhancement agenda the University had asked all associate colleges to review their alignment with the *Code of practice* and to report back to CAC which they had done.

52   The University has made a number of appointments that will enhance its management of its collaborative provision. The post of Director of Regional Outreach reflects the commitment of the University to its role in the region, and the appointment of a Head of the Overseas Programmes Unit demonstrates the University's commitment to enhancing the quality assurance of its overseas articulation arrangements. The OPU is actively involved in developing overseas partnerships, considering proposals, undertaking a risk analysis, working with faculties and drawing up the memorandum of agreement. Further support for quality assurance in respect of collaborative arrangements is provided through the role of the Secretary for the Associated Institutions. As part of the remit of the role the Secretary oversees and ensures the quality assurance of the experience for those students who are not registered on awards managed by the University's faculties and departments.

53   The audit team noted that further support is now provided at faculty level for quality assurance and enhancement by the creation of the posts of faculty Teaching Quality Support Officers who inter alia assist with the internal and external teaching quality assurance process. The team also found that the enhanced role for associate deans for teaching provided greater synergy between quality assurance and enhancement. This is further supported by the merger of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) and the TQSO with the aim of developing greater integration between quality assurance and enhancement activities. Finally the University has established a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee which not only considers strategic developments in learning and teaching but also facilitates the integration of quality assurance and enhancement throughout the University.

54   During the visit the audit team found evidence that the University is actively engaged in enhancing the management of its collaborative provision. The team concluded that changes which have taken place to the overall management framework as it relates to the University's collaborative provision appear to operate effectively. However given proposals to continue to increase the number of partners an ongoing review of the management process, to ensure that it continues to meet the University's and partner institutions' needs, should be considered.

The awarding institution's internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Partner and programme approval

55   The CPSED described the processes of validation at institutional level and noted that the 'Instrument of Memorandum is the primary document that sets out the responsibilities of the University and the collaborative partner'. The audit team found some confusion in the use of terms across the different types of collaboration as exemplified by the use of memorandum of understanding, memorandum of agreement, memorandum of accreditation, and agreement of cooperation indiscriminately. The team would recommend as desirable that the University review the terminology used across all types of collaborative provision to enhance consistency and understanding.

56   The University operates, according to the CPSED, a 'risk-based strategy' and a risk analysis using criteria informed by the QAA Academic Infrastructure for assessing new partner institutions. The risk analysis is undertaken by OAI or faculty, depending on the likely nature of the collaboration. It is based on a template and guidelines to determine high and low risk elements of the proposal. The report of the analysis is scrutinised by CAI or COCP for initial approval if the collaboration is to be progressed.

57   If the proposal is approved, documentation is developed to support an institutional approval event at the partner site.

The audit team was informed by the University that this event should involve external panel members but consideration of relevant documentation by the team appeared to suggest that this does not always happen (see paragraph 78). For particularly complex proposals, there are preliminary visits to test the feasibility of the proposal or to inform the decision on whether to proceed.

58   The CPSED described the validation process of both programmes and institutions and noted that 'Lancaster operates its collaborative programmes through validation rather than franchising'. There are separate procedures for programme validations at accredited and at associated colleges.

59   For the accredited colleges, the validation of new programmes is seen as the responsibility of the college. An initial approval request is presented to ACC. If approval to proceed is given, the development of the programme progresses towards a validation event at the College. This will involve a panel which includes representatives of the College and a subject expert external to both the College and the University. The report from the validation event, together with the response from the programme team is presented by OAI to Senate.

60   In the case of the associate colleges, a proposal for a new programme is presented to CAC by the proposed college course development leader. After approval to proceed is given, a course consultant is appointed from the University to advise and guide the programme development team. The development proceeds to a validation event held at the College. The event is chaired by a senior member of the University and the panel includes subject experts from the University, and representation from OAI. There are no panel members that are external to both the University and the college; the University considers members of its own staff, who have had no part in the development of the programmes at the college, to provide a sufficient degree of externality. The report of the validation event, together with a response

to any conditions and recommendations, is subsequently presented to CAC and then reported to CAI and Senate.

61   For programmes from outside the accredited and associate colleges' process, the initial validation is handled through University faculties and departments. The department will appoint a development team who present the proposal to the Faculty Teaching Committee. No panel members external to the University are involved as the University considers staff who are independent of the development team to provide appropriate externality to the process. Following amendments to meet any recommendations, the proposal is presented by the faculty to either the University Undergraduate Teaching Committee or the Graduate School Committee. Successful proposals are ratified by Senate.

62   A new methodology for the validation of Foundation Degrees is currently being piloted during 2005-06. Each new Foundation Degree will be validated through an event at the partner college and the panel membership will include college representatives; two representatives from the University, one of whom is a subject specialist with no prior involvement in the development of the programme, and one from OAI; and a subject expert external to both the College and the University.

63   The audit team considered that the approach taken by the University to the scrutiny of institutions for collaborative partnerships was appropriate and that due diligence is applied to the selection and approval of the partner institutions. Although the procedures for programme approval align broadly with the *Code of practice*, the team noted variations in the approach to the validation of new programmes across the different forms of collaborative partnership. In particular, it noted the different interpretations of externality inherent in the processes and would encourage the University to review these procedures to ensure that the maximum benefit is obtained from external advice in the validation of new programmes.

Periodic review

64   The CPSED described the periodic review procedures which vary between the different types of collaborative partnership. In both accredited and associate colleges the main institutional review is the quinquennial review and the audit team saw evidence that confirmed these were taking place effectively. Review events are based on an evaluation document and are chaired by senior members of the University, normally a Pro-Vice Chancellor. The panels include members external to both the college and the University and examine the structures, plans, staffing, staff development and the student experience in the partner. The panel for these events meets with the Principal, senior staff, support staff, teaching staff and students. The full report, together with responses to any recommendations, are considered by ACC or CAC and then by CAI and finally Senate.

65   There are other forms of periodic review in accredited colleges which take the form of 'academic equivalence reviews'. The review considers a programme at the college and compares it with the nearest equivalent at the University and/or at the other accredited college. The review is normally chaired by a member of the University and the review panel consists of subject experts from the University or the other accredited college. The guidelines state that no panel members external to the University or college are used unless there is insufficient subject expertise within the University. There are occasions, however, where University subject experts may not be involved and where externals are not used. The reports of the academic equivalence reviews are considered by ACC and CAI.

66   According to the CPSED ACC agreed that there would be a second cycle of academic equivalence reviews for 2005-06 but with a thematic focus running alongside the discipline-based reviews. This follows the experience of having themed equivalence reviews of learning resources and a disability services audit.

67   The audit team considered that academic equivalence reviews were an effective way of determining that appropriate standards were being maintained across the colleges but that the process may be strengthened further by the consistent inclusion of panel members that were external to the University and the accredited colleges.

68   In addition to the quinquennial review, periodic review at associate colleges takes the form of triennial reviews of programmes by small panels of staff, chaired by a senior member of the University and involving OAI staff. These consist of a documentation review and a short visit, and the panels do not involve any members external to the University. The report of the review, together with the response to any conditions or recommendations from the partner college, is considered by CAC.

69   Periodic review for programmes outside accredited and associate colleges fall under the auspices of the faculty and departmental review processes. These consider subject areas or departments and involve a panel visit based on departmental documentation. The panel normally involves members external to the University. The report is considered by the appropriate Faculty Teaching Committee before being presented to either the University Undergraduate Committee or the Graduate School Committee.

70   The audit team considered that the procedures for periodic review of collaborative programmes were appropriate and aligned with the *Code of practice* but, as with programme approval, the team noted that different approaches were taken across the different forms of collaboration. The team also formed the view that the processes could benefit from the consistent use of panel members who are external to the University in triennial reviews in associate colleges and in academic equivalence reviews.

Annual monitoring

71   The CPSED stated that in the annual monitoring process for accredited colleges, responsibility is 'shared between the University and the institutions themselves with the

colleges playing a substantial role'. Annual quality review reports at institution level, commenting on academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and planned developments, are considered by the ACC. There are also institutional analyses of external examiners' reports that are presented annually to ACC.

72   Although this is a robust process the audit team was not convinced that it is sufficient in the case of programmes validated under a tripartite arrangement. These are programmes that the College validates to run at one of its own partner institutions. However, these are University of Lancaster awards and the responsibility for monitoring the standards rests with the University. From the evidence it saw, the audit team considered that the University did not have sufficient overall oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through these arrangements to ensure that issues are identified and addressed. The team therefore advises the University to strengthen its processes for ensuring such oversight.

73   At associate colleges, course leaders are required to produce an annual review report, to a University template, that is considered by CAC. These are informed by the external examiners' reports and by an annual report produced by the course consultant. Any issues raised in either report have to be addressed. The audit team noted that the revised University template does not include a requirement to discuss staff issues or staff development. The team were told that the template is used across all programmes and that resources were checked by other means (see paragraph 137).

74   The annual reports are considered by a special meeting of CAC each December, to which all course leaders from the associate colleges are invited. Course leaders present their own reports and are able to witness the presentation of colleagues' reports. The audit team considered that this was an effective way of monitoring standards and the quality of provision, and provided an excellent

opportunity for the dissemination of good practice. This was seen as an example of good practice on the part of the University.

75   Annual review of other forms of partnership arrangements, including overseas programmes, is specified in the individual memorandum of agreement with an annual written report as a minimum requirement. These are considered by a Faculty, Undergraduate, or Graduate Teaching Committee. These then contribute to faculty annual reports that are presented to the University Undergraduate Committee or the Graduate School Committee. These procedures are in common with the annual monitoring of other non-collaborative programmes within the departments.

76   While this form of annual monitoring is effective for the monitoring of University courses, the audit team formed the view that, as the number of such collaborations increases in line with the University strategy, there is limited opportunity to compare programmes linked to different departments and faculties in order to identify common areas of concern or to disseminate good practice. The team would encourage the University to review its procedures to see whether OAI or another similar body could play a greater part in coordinating the monitoring of these programmes.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

77   The CPSED stated that the University considers that externality 'at crucial stages' of the collaborative process is 'critically important'.

78   The CPSED stated that initial institutional approval may include 'external expertise where appropriate'. A decision on whether to seek such advice is made at an early stage as a result of the formal risk analysis conducted through the OAI. Where the risk is adjudged to be low, the approval event involves a visit of one or more University staff to the potential partner, but where higher risk is identified the approval

event involves a formal visit by an institutional approvals panel which will include an external member from another institution. The audit team noted that in practice external involvement in institutional approval was sought appropriately.

79   The CPSED noted the use by its accredited colleges of 'external members of validation committees and panels' affords it confidence of the appropriateness of such arrangements. A recent QAA report indicated that effective use had been made of external experts in an accredited college. However, there is no formal requirement with regard to external participation in validation of programmes by the University in respect of associate colleges. In these cases advice is sought from colleagues 'external to the design and delivery of the programme', but usually this will be a colleague from within the University or, where relevant expertise may not be found within the institution, from an accredited or associate college partner. In particular cases advice may be sought from outside the University and its partners and, where they fulfil the requisite criteria, such individuals assisting at validation may also be nominated by the partner as the first external examiner.

80   Following changes to the terms of reference for the FDB with regard to validation, and the harmonisation of validation arrangements for accredited colleges, it was decided that from 2005-06 Foundation Degree validations for the associate colleges will include an individual external to the University. The audit team noted that this system was operating, and that the external input was adding a valuable dimension to the discussions and outcomes of events.

81   Participation by external assessors, that is colleagues from outside of both the University and its partner institutions, is explicitly required for re-accreditation or institutional review of accredited and associate colleges respectively, which normally takes place on a quinquennial basis.

82   External membership is also required for major periodic review of programmes governed by memoranda of agreement and subject to departmental and faculty requirements, but not for triennial review in associate colleges where the panel is normally made up of University staff not previously directly involved with the programme.

83   It is clear that the University believes the level of external participation in approval, validation and review across the range of its partnerships to be appropriate, and that it aligns fully with the requirements of the *Code of practice*.

84   While the audit team accepts that the University's definition of externality was entirely consonant with that of the *Code of practice* and acknowledges the professionalism of the University's approach to obtaining objective advice on collaborative provision, it noted that the practices and requirements with regard to external participation appeared to lack consistency across the range of partnerships, especially in regard to validation and monitoring. Given the University's commendation of the extensive use made by its accredited colleges of advice from colleagues from outside either institution in the quality process, the team would encourage the University to consider expanding its own use of external advice both with a view to achieving a greater consistency across its provision, and to affording itself the benefits of an even greater degree of external participation in its monitoring processes.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

85   The University claimed in the CPSED that its arrangements for external examining for collaborative provision are a key to its exercise of control over the assessment practices and standards of its awards. External examiner reports are critical to the annual review process and material from these reports appears in the public domain and through the Teaching Quality Information (TQI), contributes to the public reputation of the institution.

86   External examiners for all programmes covered by collaborative provision arrangements are appointed by the University through the Senate and receive letters of appointment from the Secretary of the OAI. The appointment is normally for three years, although with the agreement of the Senate appointments may be extended for one further year. The criteria for appointment are the same as those laid down for programmes within the University. Nominations from partners are submitted to OAI and are approved by the appropriate faculty through a member of CAI or by the Director of Regional Outreach. External examiners are informed of their duties and responsibilities upon appointment and full information is provided on the OAI website. External examiners may also be briefed by partner colleges or by colleagues from the University involved in the development or delivery of the programme, although such contacts appear to be informal arrangements, rather than a requirement of the University.

87   Annual external examiner reports are submitted both electronically and in hard copy on standardised forms to the Vice-Chancellor. The OAI monitors the timely receipt of reports in respect of accredited and associate institutions and requests reports from external examiners where these have not been submitted by due date. External examiners do not receive fee payments until the University is in receipt of a report. Reports receive initial consideration by the Academic Registrar and by the External Examiners' Administrator in OAI. Where a report has been particularly critical or has raised potentially serious issues the University will require a timely response from the programme team, the production of which will be monitored by the OAI. Routinely, however, reports are forwarded by means of the OAI to the heads of the institution concerned.

88   External examiner reports for collaborative programmes managed by departments follow similar procedures. Receipt of reports in this instance is monitored by the Student Registry which also conducts an initial scrutiny. Reports are then passed to heads of department.

A formal response to the examiner by the head of department or associate dean is required in all instances.

89   External examiner reports seen by the audit team was generally comprehensive and thorough, and confirmed the comparability of the standards of the awards to those offered by other institutions. External examiners confirmed in the reports that they had been able to actively and fully participate in the assessment processes, and many praised the enthusiasm of teaching staff, their professionalism and their responsiveness to suggestions and comments. For their part, staff in partner institutions that met the team recognised the important role of external examiners in safeguarding standards and spoke appreciatively of their interactions with external examiners, which in many instances were considered to contribute significantly to their own professional development.

90   A very small number of the reports, seen by the audit team, for programmes in associate colleges were so brief as to be of little use, but the team was informed and minutes of the CAC confirmed that such reports would in future be returned by the OAI to the examiner with a request for further comment.

91   The audit team noted that in accredited colleges and in programmes operating under departmental requirements, formal responses are sent to examiners following the receipt of their reports. It is expected that such responses normally would fulfil the requirements of annual monitoring and would feed into that process at an appropriate stage. With regard to associate colleges, however, it appears that no such formal requirement exists although the reports and programme team/departmental responses to them are considered as part of the annual monitoring process through CAC. University members of CAC noted this inconsistency at the 2005 annual monitoring meeting and it was suggested, when considering the substance of a particular report by an external examiner, that if University requirements had applied, the issues raised would have already been subject to dialogue between the programme team/department and

the examiner concerned, in order to try to resolve matters. The same meeting also noted that a number of team/departmental responses failed to address in a sufficiently focused way all points raised in reports from external examiners.

92   The audit team was also informed that in one overseas link (described in the Register of Collaborative Provision as an associate college) a response is only made to the examiner verbally at the next annual exam board, and in the view of the team this practice appeared to have contributed to the considerable delay in addressing substantially similar issues raised in two successive reports.

93   Over the collaborative provision as a whole there appears to be a lack of consistency with regard to the question of whether teams/departments in collaborative partners are required to engage directly with external examiners in responding to their reports through formal written responses. There appear to be different requirements in place for different types of partnership, and while the audit team did not consider this to seriously compromise standards or quality, they could not see a sufficiently robust rationale to fully justify the differences between current practices.

94   The audit team considers it desirable that the University clarify its requirements for responding to external examiners' reports, and should extend, to all associate colleges, the current practice of requiring a formal written response to be provided to each external examiner in respect of their reports.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

95   The institutional audit of the University in June 2004 reported that the University was engaged with the *Code of practice* and was addressing emerging issues effectively. The CPSED, in describing the policies and procedures that govern the management of collaborative provision, stated that the Handbook of the Council of Validating Universities and Section 2 of the *Code of practice* 'offer a backcloth to the University's own structures'.

96   In October 2004 ACC discussed the implications for the accredited colleges of the newly revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* and identified a small number of areas, including University oversight of the production of transcripts by partners, that required further consideration. CAC also discussed the application of the *Code of practice* with regard to associate colleges and identified a number of action points. Minutes for subsequent meetings of both committees showed that issues identified were being pursued and addressed in an effective manner. However, while the immediate question regarding the identification of courses as University validated programmes on transcripts issued by accredited colleges had been addressed, a longer-term mechanism for routinely exercising appropriate oversight did not appear to have been put in place at the time of the audit visit (see paragraph 132).

97   It was suggested to the audit team by the University that both accredited and associate colleges, as mature institutions in their own right, are fully conversant with the *Code of practice* and engage with it as part of their own internal quality processes, and that this is further shown by the outcomes of a number of QAA reviews that partners independently have undergone in recent years. The team was also assured that all partners are engaged in an active and ongoing dialogue with the University on matters arising from the *Code of practice* and its application to their provision.

98   The audit team broadly concurred with the view of the University in this respect. Partners have successfully undergone reviews at both institutional and subject levels by QAA and other external agencies, and the outcomes of such reviews have generally confirmed appropriate engagement with the *Code of practice*. Where issues have been raised, these have been considered and responded to through the appropriate deliberative bodies of the University. Evidence of the ongoing dialogue with associate colleges was provided in a request by the University to its associate colleges to review their alignment with all aspects of the *Code of*

practice. The team saw evidence that this review had been completed although the result, which indicated significant progress towards alignment on the part of the colleges, had yet to be discussed at CAC.

99   The audit team noted that there was a keen awareness on the part of the University of the risks inherent in developing overseas partnerships with regard, for example, to issues such as standards and quality of the student experience, and was assured that in developing new overseas partnerships the University and its officers insisted that requirements of the *Code of practice* formed the starting point for negotiations, even if the requirements such as external examining were unusual in the country of the partner. While the University is sensitive to differing cultural expectations and practices in the overseas academic context, the team found evidence to confirm that the University was sharing in depth its understanding of the *Code of practice* with potential partners at an early stage in negotiations. It was also the case that the requirements of the *Code* formed part of agreements that were being developed for presentation to and final approval by Senate. It was clear that memoranda of agreement and the supporting instruments are framed so as to ensure that the University's requirements with regard to the *Code of practice* are met. In the case of existing overseas partnerships ongoing alignment with the *Code of practice* is monitored and achieved through programme review and, where necessary, memoranda of agreement can be revised.

100 The audit team learnt from overseas partners whom it met that they were keenly aware of the regulatory framework that underpinned the links. They showed a clear willingness to adapt their procedures in line with requests from the University and spoke appreciatively both of the way in which the University endeavoured to share the framework with them, and of the added value that they believed is brought to their own provision.

101 Benchmark statements, where appropriate, form a major point of reference in the academic equivalence reviews conducted

with the accredited colleges. Since their initiation in 2000 the reviews have focused on output and have demonstrated consistency of academic standards across the institutions thereby enabling the University to assure itself that awards granted in its name are consistent with QAA guidelines. Themed reviews that focus on particular areas of provision, for example disability support, have offered a further means of testing alignment with sections of the *Code of practice* across the three institutions and opportunities for sharing good practice. It is understood that the University intends to develop such thematic reviews further, running alongside continuing academic equivalence reviews, to cover areas such as feedback to students, resources and quality assurance procedures.

102 Engagement with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) is addressed at validation and programme specifications are produced for this event. In developing the materials for validation the support and advice of course consultants is important in ensuring that partners have a clear understanding of the framework. In discussions with course consultants and colleagues in partner institutions it was clear to the audit team that this is a continuing role, which ensures the embedding of the framework in collaborative provision, and provides an informal element of professional development for colleagues in partner institutions.

103 The audit team concluded that the University was engaged with the Academic Infrastructure in the management of its collaborative provision. The University, through its administrative and quality processes, has demonstrated that it is able both to share knowledge and promote understanding of the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure with collaborative overseas partners unfamiliar with the UK HE sector. The memoranda of agreement governing overseas partnerships provide a means of embedding the framework in the management and operation of the link. Ongoing support from course consultants in appropriate cases, and monitoring through

external examiner reports and periodic review, ensure alignment with developing UK requirements to safeguard both quality and standards and the student experience in general. The University through its deliberative structures and, in respect of its associate colleges through the role of the course consultant, has demonstrated that it is able to achieve successful communication with its UK partners with regard to issues relating to the Academic Infrastructure. Furthermore, it has in place a deliberative structure, albeit somewhat complex in nature, generally capable of considering and monitoring alignment with the *Code of practice* and the Academic Infrastructure across the full range of its collaborative provision.

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

104 The CPSED described the processes through which the University engages with external agencies and their review of provision offered through collaborative links. For accredited colleges both QAA and Ofsted reports are received by ACC and while any matters arising from the latter are considered internally by the college concerned, the reports and responses to the former are discussed by the committee. Associate colleges are offered support from the University, provided principally through the course consultant, during preparation for external review. As in the case of accredited colleges, reports and responses to them by the partner are considered by the University, on this occasion through CAC. External reviews in respect of overseas collaborative provision are received and considered by COCP. Institutional overview is achieved through CAI to which all three committees report.

105 Evidence gathered by the audit team showed that the deliberative structures of the University, responsible for collaborative provision, are able to give proper consideration

to reports from external agencies and to manage an appropriate response when significant issues have been raised. For example, the University took steps to respond to the outcomes of two QAA institutional reports for two overseas partners in a timely and considered manner. In one instance a revised bilateral agreement was produced for each partner and in the other, a clearer definition of the nature of the partnership was established and the Academic Infrastructure embedded further into the operation of the partnership in relation to external examining, student representation and annual monitoring. In addition COCP itself was created with a remit that included the oversight of the development and monitoring of overseas collaborative partnerships, which was perceived as a weakness in the overseas institutional audit report.

106 The audit team formed the view that the University welcomes external scrutiny of its collaborative provision and that it was ready to engage in an appropriate way with external agencies. It noted, however, that overseas links appeared to have given rise to most concerns coming out of such reviews. Given the University's declared intentions to develop further its international collaborative provision, the team welcomed the recent decision to revive COCP and considered that in the light of the complexity of new and emerging relationships, this committee has a vital role in maintaining a central oversight of departmentally-based overseas collaborative links, together with those being developed as a result of University strategic decisions, such as the proposed link with a university college in Malaysia.

107 The University is committed to offering students on its collaborative programmes the same opportunities as students at the University itself, including professional accreditation. However, given the validation model employed by the University through which programmes are developed by the collaborative partner, the onus is on the partner institution to seek accreditation. Where accreditation is required, for example for programmes in education and health, the University requires that this is achieved as part of the approval process. Where

professional accreditation is considered by the accredited colleges to be an enhancement of the student experience, the University will engage in dialogue with partners to test the case for accreditation, but will not normally communicate directly with the professional body. In associate colleges, while the prime responsibility for seeking accreditation also rests with the partner, it is part of the role of the course consultant, through annual and triennial review, to advise whether professional accreditation should be sought in appropriate cases. It is also part of the role of the course consultant to support the course team in the application for accreditation, and instances of where this had been achieved were brought to the attention of the audit team. The team formed the view that partner institutions seeking professional accreditation received appropriate support from the University, in keeping with its devolved approach to collaborative provision.

Student representation in collaborative provision

108 The CPSED stated that the University strongly encourages student representation at its partners in a way that is similar to its own practices, and monitors these as part of the periodic review process. The majority of Memoranda of Agreement seen by the audit team referred to the need to 'gain written views of students' rather than outlining a student representation system (in keeping with the University's philosophy of devolvement), in contrast some Agreements made no reference at all. Nevertheless, the need for the development of a student representation system is discussed with partners as part of the institutional approval process and the effectiveness of the system in operation at partners is considered during academic equivalency review or institutional review.

109 Students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with opportunities for student representation at the programme and institutional level. Students considered that issues were being dealt with and were sufficiently confident in these local procedures to feel that University representation was not needed. A number of the students met by the team noted that details of their student representatives were provided through the programme website, others did not know who their representative was but did know with whom to discuss their issues, usually a programme tutor or administrator.

110 The CPSED noted that there is some variability in the extent of student involvement across partnerships, with cultural issues for overseas students at some institutions limiting their involvement. In most cases the student representative is a member of a programme committee; in others, the written views of students are supplied to the committee instead. The audit team noted that a student representation system is deemed to be unnecessary in a number of programmes due to the maturity of the students concerned. A past QAA overseas audit has recommended improvements to the student representation system in place at a partner institution. The team saw evidence that this has been responded to by the University, with suitable systems implemented.

111 Students at associate colleges are able to make their concerns known to University course consultants. Where course consultants meet with students during a visit to the partner any issues are fed back to both the partner and the University. Faculty-administered collaborative programmes also have a University contact, either a course consultant, a member of University staff teaching on the programme or a programme administrator with whom students can raise issues.

112 Students who articulate to the University from partner institutions are represented through standard University processes, although the LUSU provides additional support for international students through an International Student Officer who convenes an international students committee and campaigns on behalf of and represents international students.

113 The CPSED stated that all complaints and appeals by students studying at partner institutions follow the local procedures previously agreed with the University and monitored at periodic review. Students from associate colleges who have unsuccessfully made representations through these procedures may appeal firstly to a Standing Review Committee of the University and then to the Vice-Chancellor. Students from the accredited colleges who have been unsuccessful through their local procedures may appeal directly to the Vice-Chancellor of the University. Any student registered on a collaborative programme has the final safeguard that they cannot be permanently excluded until a University appeal has been heard, which extends to an appeal on any matter apart from academic judgement. Faculty-administered collaborative programmes are subject to University regulations and thus the University appeals processes.

114 Programme handbooks were identified as the means by which advice on appeals procedures were communicated to students. The audit team looked at a sample of handbooks and noted that some lacked information about the procedures for appealing to the University, although college internet sites available to current students gave accurate advice. Most students whom the team met were aware of the local appeals process but many were unaware that they had the right to appeal to the University if these processes were exhausted.

115 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University has generally effective procedures for student representation within its CP. The University has recognised the particular challenges of securing the representation on its overseas programmes, and the team would encourage it to continue its efforts to develop and spread good practice in these areas.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

116 In keeping with the University's approach to collaborative provision it is normally the responsibility of partners to seek feedback from students which is achieved in a number of ways, including the completion of end-of-module feedback questionnaires and/or end-of-programme evaluations.

117 The feedback is used to inform annual programme review, and the audit team saw evidence of this activity. Students were also aware that their evaluations were used for this purpose and that their feedback was valuable in the context of programme development. Annual programme review panels also speak to students, and ask for examples of action taken in response to issues raised in questionnaires. The effectiveness of the system in operation at partners is considered during academic equivalency review and periodic institutional review, where it is acknowledged to be a valuable method of evaluation.

118 It is acknowledged that gaining student feedback is problematic for some partners, despite measures to encourage participation. This has been recognised by the University, both at programme review and within departmental review, and alternative systems for collection of student feedback are being sought.

119 There is varied opportunity for students to provide feedback at the institutional level; students at accredited colleges can feedback on individual aspects of institutional provision such as library and careers services, but associate college students can not. Students who articulate to the University follow standard feedback mechanisms and therefore get the opportunity to comment on particular aspects of its provision (library, student support services, etc.) which have been responded to by the University.

120 In line with national policy, accredited college students, as members of an HEI, also take part in the National Student Survey whereas students in associate colleges, which are directly funded, do not. While the University is in favour of the survey it recognises the difficulty in differentiating between its home programmes and those delivered at partner colleges.

121 The 2004 institutional audit report identified the shortage of feedback from alumni, and encouraged the University to further develop ways in which this feedback might be obtained. It was confirmed to the audit team that there is no formal graduate or employer feedback mechanism for collaborative programmes (with the exception of Foundation Degrees) although some feedback is captured through informal mechanisms, for instance, overseas alumni events. The team heard that accredited and associated college alumni are treated as the alumni of the partner college rather than of the University, and so their feedback should contribute to annual and periodic review. However, the team saw no evidence of this taking place.

122 The audit team was able to confirm that the development of Foundation Degrees delivered at partner colleges has involved consultation with employers, and that their ongoing involvement in these awards is providing further feedback.

123 The audit team noted that student feedback (both current and graduate) is currently the subject of a University working party, aiming to maximise its usage and value. The University is encouraged to expedite this work and to disseminate its agreed practices to all of its collaborative programmes.

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

124 The CPSED stated that 'student rolls are held on a database by the OAI where the partnerships are maintained through [that] Office, or directly on the University's student information database (LUSI) for overseas students' registered on faculty-administered collaborative programmes. The rolls are updated to record student awards, and the same database is used for the production of certificates. Admissions and performance-related data is prepared from LUSI for faculty-administered collaborative programmes, and by the accredited and associate colleges for programmes delivered by them.

125 The adherence to entry requirements (agreed with the University) is monitored by means of the academic equivalence reviews for the accredited colleges and by annual programme review for provision in the associate colleges. In the case of faculty-administered collaborative programmes, University staff monitor the quality of intake.

126 There is no institutionally agreed dataset for consideration of admission, progression and completion information within annual programme review. The institutional audit report (June 2004) encouraged the University to ensure that its project to make such information available to departments and other stakeholders proceeds to a successful and timely conclusion. Although the University now produces some data for departments internally, interpretation of what data is required for annual programme review varies. This has lead to a University working party to define the required dataset and will include consideration of collaborative provision.

127 Partners each have their own datasets to be considered at annual programme review. The audit team noted that the University provides little guidance on the nature of the data set required for annual programme review, often partners do not provide any data and when it is produced it is often limited. The team recommends as desirable that the University accelerates its progress towards the use of common datasets for the monitoring of student admission, progression and achievement.

128 The University analyses comparative performance of students in collaborative partners through academic equivalence reviews at accredited colleges, periodic review at associate colleges and the consideration of associate college annual programme reviews presented to CAC. This latter activity is considered to be an effective means of comparing the performance of cohorts across programmes and partners. ACC also considers the comparative data on student performance at the University and the accredited colleges, examining the relationship between admission

data and final classification of award. Faculty-administered collaborative programmes are analysed through departmental review. However, because of the nature of these departmental reports it is difficult to analyse performance to the same extent.

129 Prior to the arrival of articulated students at University, their progress is monitored by means of annual visits by staff of the OPU to the students' home institution. On arrival, OPU continues to monitor these students' progress on behalf of OAI, through annual tracking studies. This manual analysis is a suitable method of tracking the performance of the small number of students that presently articulate to the University. However, if numbers increased significantly the University should consider a method of tracking using the existing LUSI.

130 The University is involved in the final stages of the examinations and assessment process in the accredited and associate colleges. Each college assessment board normally includes an independent senior academic representative of the University and a senior administrative officer, with staff of the OAI in attendance. The checking of proposed degree classifications, the preparation of pass lists and the interface between assessment boards and Senate is undertaken by staff of the OAI. University Senate considers recommendations from the college assessment boards alongside similar recommendations from internal boards of examiners to ratify final awards.

131 The CPSED stated that the University does not produce transcripts for students involved in collaborative provision. The responsibility rests with the partner institution unless the student is enrolled directly onto a University award as the students are then entered on LUSI. Within the accredited colleges the Academic Registry of the respective college takes responsibility for the production and accuracy of the transcripts. The Memoranda of Agreement for the associate colleges include an obligation on the partner to create and maintain, in a form agreed with the University, a transcript containing the full record of the courses being taken by each student'.

132 The audit team found that there was no explicit method within the University for checking that partners were producing transcripts according to agreed guidelines. Although the team saw evidence that the University had, in a particular instance, identified an anomaly, there did not appear to be a procedure for routinely exercising appropriate oversight (see paragraph 96). The team would encourage the University to institute such a procedure as soon as possible.

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

133 Although there was little reference in the CPSED the audit team was informed that the process for assuring the quality of staff is considered as part of the institutional approval and programme validation process. The guidance provided by the University on institutional approval requires the risk analysis, informed by the partner, to acknowledge the use of non-University staff as potentially high risk and then for staffing and staff development to be discussed in detail at the institutional approval event. The initial proposal template for a new programme contains a section on resources which also includes staffing. If the programme is subsequently validated the Memorandum of Agreement may contain obligations on the partner in respect of staff development and the approval of staff curriculum vitae (CV); although the memoranda vary somewhat in detail.

134 The University informed the audit team that the accredited and associate colleges are required to have their own staff development policies in place which also cover appraisal. The team found some evidence to support this and also that staff development needs are identified as part of the appraisal process. It was explained to the team that it is part of the role of the course consultant to maintain an overview of the appropriateness of staff and staff development. The course consultant receives the CVs of staff appointed to teach on

the programme post validation and is expected to comment on staff and staff development in their annual report. The course consultant may also act in an advisory role in respect of staff development. Although course consultants are not required to undertake staff development with the partners, there was evidence that they have provided some in-house staff development or arranged for staff and students to attend workshops at the University.

135 The audit team found that where there are 2+2 arrangements, the University has normally agreed that 10 per cent of the tuition fee will be used to provide staff development opportunities for the partner institution. These opportunities include higher degrees, research visits or collaborative research projects. The fund is managed by the OPU. This arrangement was considered by the team to be an example of good practice.

136 Associated partner staff receive a discount from the tuition fee when undertaking higher degree programmes offered by the University and it was evident that a number of partner staff had taken up and welcomed this opportunity.

137 Academic equivalence review considers the level of staffing and the quality of the staff through the consideration of staff CVs. While annual programme review was used to facilitate consideration of staffing issues and staff development, the revised report template no longer requires this. However the audit team was told that any issues may be addressed in the course consultant's annual report which is appended to the annual programme review report. After considering a sample of course consultant's reports the team noted that these reports rarely comment on staffing or staff development.

138 Staffing and staff development are a standing item at triennial review. The college is expected to provide CVs of the course team, and details of staff development. The review panel is expected to ask about: the level of staffing, how staff absences are managed, induction and staff development; expertise and

research areas. The college provides an official response to any issues raised in the review report which then goes to the CAC. Institutional review (quinquennial review) also considers the overarching support for staff development and the panel is provided with an opportunity to discuss this with partner staff. The operating arrangements including staffing are then reflected in the new Memorandum of Agreement.

139 Although course consultants may sit on appointments panels in the partner institution, the audit team was informed that this had not occurred. However all CVs are forwarded to the course consultants for comment and recommendation; for example the team was informed that course consultants had suggested that particular staff should undertake higher degrees.

140 The University informed the audit team that while the emphasis is on the partner institution to take responsibility for the development of its staff, it is expected that the merging of the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning with the Teaching Quality Support Office will provide a forum for the consideration of staff development within the partners through the Secretary for the Associated Institutions.

141 While the extent of the expectations placed on the partner institutions in respect of staffing and staff development is not always made explicit through Memoranda of Agreement, the audit team found that, through validation, review and the role of the course consultants, the University was able to satisfy itself of the quality of the teaching staff in the collaborative provision.

Assurance of the quality of distributed and distance methods delivered through an arrangement with a partner

142 The University has little distributed and distance learning that are delivered through its collaborative provision; only a small number of modules at the accredited colleges can be delivered in this way.

143 The University is reviewing its internal structures and is considering the merger of CELT with the TQSO under the Head of the Student Registry. Part of the rationale for this is to enable the more efficient dissemination of good practice in e-learning and to help develop, within the faculties, greater learning and teaching through blended learning methods. The audit team noted this development and would encourage the University to complement it with the codification of guidance to faculties and the development of policies and procedures for distance and e-learning provision.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

144 The University identifies the learning infrastructure as critically important to student success. Memoranda of Agreement usually identify the partner institutions as being responsible for learning resources, with University resources also being available to students. Students who met the audit team were generally satisfied with the resources available to them, both at partner institutions and the University, and were particularly positive about the responsiveness of partner libraries. Recent external reviews at two associate colleges reported favourably on the creation of an HE-specific area within each college to provide students with a sense of identity, in addition to good teaching resources and excellent support from academic and library staff.

145 In the case of new academic ventures or where current provision is being extended, physical resources and associated technical support available to students are considered at the initial approval stage. A previous overseas audit (2000) indicated that approval of resources had not always been considered within the approval process, however, the University has addressed this and the audit team saw evidence that it is now a required part of any approval.

146 Thematic reviews have also been undertaken in the accredited colleges, leading to the identification of good practice for dissemination to all partners and issues for consideration by individual partners. These, and the discipline-based equivalency reviews, have proven to be a valuable tool for promoting equivalency of provision between the University and its accredited colleges.

147 The audit team saw evidence that resources are considered at periodic review. The course consultant also has an important role in the ongoing monitoring of resources during visits to partner institutions, with a reporting line back to CAC through the course consultant's annual report. However, the annual programme review no longer considers resources and staffing. The University informed the audit team that resources are monitored through different means, such as the course consultant reports, periodic reviews and external examiners reports. However, in cases where University staff teach on the programme there is no course consultant, and instead a member of University staff prepares the annual programme review report and has no role in monitoring resources and staffing. The external examiners' report template does not appear to provide the opportunity for comment on resources and while the University stated that external examiners are expected to comment on learning support resources, the team could find little evidence to support this from the external examiner reports it considered. There is little ongoing opportunity to reflect on programme resources in between periodic review events. The audit team formed the view that the University may wish to reflect on their procedures for reviewing the resources available to programmes, both on an annual and a periodic basis.

148 The University makes the resources of its library available to all collaborative provision students, including borrowing rights. However, because accredited and associate college students are directly funded to the partner institution, the University is unable, by the Copyright Licensing Agency licensing laws, to provide them with access to its electronic databases or other information technology infrastructure. Students who met the audit

team confirmed this restricted access but added that they had access to electronic resources at their home institutions for a small fee. Not all the students met were aware of their access rights at the University, others were informed of them in programme handbooks. Students on faculty-administered collaborative programmes have access to on-line journals, inter-library loans and specialised software in the same way that home students do.

149 There are plans to extend the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) to certain partners, notably those with articulation agreements, to support students who will be transferring to the University to study. There are currently no plans to extend the VLE to other partners as many already have their own VLEs and the added value of doing so would be negligible. This does not preclude the University from extending its VLE in the future.

150 In the view of the audit team, University procedures to assure itself of the quality of learning resources in collaborative provision are generally effective. However, it was also the view of the team that recent changes to annual and triennial review templates may test the University's capacity for monitoring the appropriate provision of learning resources at programme level and the team would encourage the University to review the impact of these changes at an early opportunity.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

151 The CPSED noted that student support in collaborative provision is the responsibility of the partner institution. For example the University does not guarantee any specific support for special needs if the programme is delivered at a partner.

152 The Memoranda of Agreement seen by the audit team, including the template, require partners to 'provide counselling and other appropriate student support' but do not outline any specific expectations of the University. Where Lancaster staff deliver part of an overseas

programme there is shared responsibility for personal support and project supervision.

153 The accredited and associate colleges have their own advisory and student support networks. Students met by the audit team considered it appropriate that support was offered locally. Previous external reviews have reported good student support mechanisms at the colleges visited.

154 The suitability of support mechanisms is tested at validation and institutional review; and the audit team saw evidence to confirm that student support systems and the need for equivalent student experience in partner institutions are also discussed as part of institutional approval. The CPSED noted that 'ongoing monitoring is through academic equivalence reviews, annual programme review for associate colleges and by visits of University staff to locations at a distance'. The team saw evidence to support this.

155 The CPSED acknowledged some differences in the provision of support. This was also confirmed by the students who met the audit team; but there was general satisfaction expressed with partner processes and examples provided of good support from partner and University staff.

156 All students are supplied with programme handbooks with accurate and relevant information on support mechanisms and how to access them. The audit team saw clear evidence that the University has responded to earlier overseas audit where deficiencies in handbooks had been identified.

157 Overseas students who articulate to the University to complete their awards are supported both prior to coming to the University and after as they integrate into the University. The OPU make four visits to partners, providing support to both prospective students and staff. When students reach the University, they attend pre-sessional English language and cultural orientation sessions, aligned with the particular requirements of their chosen subject area. Thereafter they become

assimilated into the relevant University department, with a designated member of departmental staff offering advice and support. All articulated students are registered on a study skills course in parallel with their normal studies, and in some programmes a credit bearing module at level two on 'British Culture and Society' has been included. Articulated students complimented the excellent role of the OPU in supporting them, both prior to their arrival at the University and during their studies. The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements to support articulating student were effective and an example of good practice.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

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

158 A range of information is made available to the students in partner institutions, including student handbooks and prospectuses. The CPSED stated that the information supplied to students is approved prior to publication by the University, although the audit team noted some variation in how this was undertaken. Prospectuses normally go to either the OAI or to Marketing for approval, unless the relationship is tripartite where the accredited partner will approve the text on behalf of the University. The team saw some evidence, in relation to accredited and associate colleges, of publication taking place without prior approval from the University. For collaborative provision governed by Memorandum of Agreement each agreement contains a clause that determines how the approval of the prospectus and publicity material is to be managed. The normal requirement is for the partner to consult with the University prior to any such material being published although there is some variation. Where overseas agents are used,

University requirements for the publication of information are outlined in the agency agreement. The team was informed that the University through the OAI also monitors the website of all its partner institutions.

159 The institutional audit report (June 2004) noted that the University had commissioned a review of departmental handbooks and websites. The report found that the material in handbooks was generally accurate but that there were some inconsistencies across the University. The audit team confirmed that such inconsistencies still existed in relation to collaborative provision. The students met by the team considered that the published information including prospectuses, websites and additional information was accurate.

160 It was noted that the University does not provide templates or guidance for its partners with respect to student handbooks or programme specifications and it was unclear to the audit team how consistency and accuracy were assured. The course consultants receive copies of student handbooks for the programmes for which they are responsible, although they do not have a formal role in checking for accuracy. University staff met by the team stated that student documentation provided by partnership institutions was generally impressive.

161 The audit team formed the view that while there were opportunities for the University to check the accuracy of the published information on an ongoing basis, the system was rather ad hoc as evidenced by the continuing inaccuracies in some programme handbooks. The team would recommend as advisable that the University review its procedures for ensuring the accuracy, consistency and clarity of information provided to students through programme handbooks.

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

162 In accordance with national policy, the two accredited colleges must provide their TQI information on their own TQI websites; the audit team was able to confirm that this took place. The format of the external examiner's report from which this information is drawn has been agreed with the University and the ACC. The TQI reports of the associate colleges are presented on the University TQI website as departments of the University, in order to clearly identify them. The University provides suitable guidance to associate colleges regarding the TQI requirements. The OAI takes responsibility for uploading the information relating to the associate colleges, which is taken directly from section B of the External Examiners report. The team was informed that reports were uploaded as they came in. However, the team had difficulty identifying the reports relating to the partner institutions.

163 The audit team found that the University was aware of its responsibilities in respect of TQI and was doing what was required to fulfil those responsibilities.

Findings

Findings

164 A collaborative provision audit of the University of Lancaster (the University) was undertaken by a team of auditors from QAA during the week 27 to 31 March 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and by making recommendations to the University for improving on current practice.

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

165 The collaborative provision at the University falls into three main categories. The first is in respect of the accredited colleges, where the arrangement is exclusive in that the college only provides University awards at higher education (HE) level. The second category relates to the two long-standing associate colleges that are validated to provide University awards but may also make awards accredited by other institutions. Other, more recent, associate college partnerships have been or are currently being established. The third category covers collaborative provision arrangements managed through Memoranda of Agreement. These have been established with both UK and overseas partners and include, in the UK, arrangements with specialist institutions, and overseas 2+2 articulation arrangements or similar variants, offshore teaching by University staff, single and multi-programme agreements (similar to associate college agreements) and agreements for various other consortium arrangements. Both UK based and international collaborative provision is firmly embedded in the University's strategic plan which aims for regional, national and international partnerships.

166 The audit team identified that there was some confusion in the use of terms, especially those used in collaborations that are not accredited or associate colleges, and the team would recommend as desirable that the University review the terminology used across all types of collaborative provision to enhance consistency and understanding.

167 The framework for the management of quality and standards is complex, partly due to the different types of collaborative provision. Responsibility is primarily with the centre, through Office for Associated Institutions (OAI) for UK based and some overseas collaborations, and through the faculty structure for the majority of overseas collaborations. The deliberative structure is also complex, involving different reporting lines for accredited and associate colleges to those for other forms of collaboration. In the context of this complexity the audit team would recommend as desirable that the University consider developing an operational handbook/procedures manual for staff in the University and partner organisations involved in the management and delivery of collaborative provision, in order to provide a single point of reference for the day-to-day management this provision.

168 Interaction between the University and the partner institutions is maintained at a number of levels. A key part of the relationship between the University and associate colleges at the programme level is the course consultant, who acts as a critical friend and adviser. The audit team viewed the role of the course consultant and the support given by the University to this role as an example of good practice.

169 The audit team was informed of the University's plans for increasing its overseas collaborative provision. The responsibility for the oversight of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities for overseas provision fall mainly to the committees and managers within the faculty structure. The involvement of the OAI and the committees it services is currently limited and the team felt that the University may be missing an opportunity to utilise fully the expertise of the

OAI, ensure consistency of approach or to disseminate good practice. It therefore recommends as desirable that the University keep under review the mechanisms for initiating, developing and monitoring those partnerships operating outwith the OAI.

170 The audit team considered that the structures for both the deliberative and executive management of its collaborative provision, although complex, were effective and aligned broadly with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education,* published by QAA.

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

Approval, monitoring and review

171 The CPSED described the approval process of institutions using a risk-based approach, and provided separate descriptions for programme validations at accredited colleges, at associated colleges and for programmes initiated and administered through the faculties. The audit team found evidence to support the University's view of the way these processes are operating.

172 For the accredited colleges, the validation of new programmes is seen as the responsibility of the partner college. Following approval of the initial proposal by Accredited Colleges Committee (ACC), the validation reverts to the college's processes, but the report from the validation event, together with the response from the programme team is presented by OAI to Senate for final approval. In the case of the associate colleges, a proposal for a new programme is presented to Committee for Associate Colleges (CAC). A course consultant guides the programme development team towards a validation event held at the College, chaired by a senior member of the University. The report of the validation event, together with a response to any conditions and recommendations, is presented to CAC and then reported to Committee for Associated Institutions (CAI) and Senate for final approval.

For programmes from outside the accredited and associate college procedures the initial validation is handled through the faculties, using the standard faculty and departmental procedures. Successful proposals are ratified by Senate. The methodology for the validation of Foundation Degrees, being piloted in 2005/06, involves each new Foundation Degree being validated through an event at the partner college with the panel involving representatives of the University.

173 Periodic review in both accredited and associate colleges includes a main institutional review, known as the quinquennial review. The reports, together with responses to any recommendations, are considered by ACC or CAC and then by CAI and finally Senate. Periodic review in accredited colleges also takes the form of academic equivalence reviews, where a programme at the college is compared with the nearest equivalent at the University and/or at the other accredited college. There is also the facility for equivalence reviews centred on particular themes within the academic provision. The reports of the academic equivalence reviews are considered by ACC and CAI. In addition to the quinquennial review, periodic review at associate colleges takes the form of triennial reviews of programmes which consist of a documentation review and a short visit, chaired by a senior member of the University. The report of the review, together with the response to any conditions or recommendations is considered by CAC. Periodic review for programmes outside accredited and associate colleges fall under the University's faculty and departmental review processes which focus on subject areas or departments. The reports are considered by the faculty teaching committees before being presented to either the University Undergraduate Committee or the Graduate School Committee.

174 Annual monitoring processes for accredited colleges involve annual quality reviews at institutional level, commenting on academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities and reports are considered by the

ACC. These are supplemented by analyses of external examiners' reports which are also considered by ACC. The audit team was not convinced that the annual review process, in the case of programmes validated under a tripartite arrangement, provides the University with sufficient oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through these arrangements and recommends, as advisable, that the University strengthen its processes for ensuring such oversight.

175 Associate colleges are required to produce annual review reports on a programme basis that are considered by CAC at a special meeting each December, to which the course leaders are invited. This aspect of the review process was considered by the audit team to be an example of good practice. Annual review at other forms of partner institution centres on an annual written report considered by a faculty undergraduate or graduate teaching committee. These contribute to faculty annual reports that are presented to the University Undergraduate Committee or the Graduate School Committee.

Feedback from students and other stakeholders

176 Student feedback is used to inform annual programme review in different ways depending on the nature of the collaborative provision and gathered through module evaluation questionnaires, student committee representation and some end-of-programme evaluations. Student feedback is also used to inform programme development and review. There is no formal mechanism to gather graduate or employer feedback for collaborative programmes.

177 Obtaining student feedback through representation is acknowledged to be difficult in some partnerships and alternative systems for improving mechanisms for student representation and feedback are currently being investigated by a University working party, which is aiming to maximise usage and value. Nevertheless, the audit team was satisfied that the University has established opportunities for student representation and feedback.

Staff development

178 The audit team found that the University provided little detailed guidance to its partner institutions on levels of staffing or on its requirements for staff development, appraisal and peer observation. However there was evidence that the level of staffing and the quality of the staff teaching on the University's awards are considered as part of the partner institutional approval and programme validation process. The ongoing monitoring of this is then considered at triennial review, annual programme review and academic equivalence review.

179 The University informed the audit team that the accredited colleges and associated colleges were required to have their own staff development policies which covered appraisal and peer observation. Accounts given by staff in meetings with the audit team and the partner visits confirmed that these processes were in place and effective in ensuring that adequate and effective staff development is provided at the partner institutions. A more formal arrangement had been developed for facilitating staff development with overseas partners in 2+2 agreements, whereby the University sets aside 10 per cent of the tuition fee to support study for higher degrees, research visits or collaborative research projects. The team considered this to be an example of good practice.

180 The course consultant also has a documented responsibility for overseeing the adequacy of the quality of the staff and ensuring that staff development is taking place. The course consultant may also act in an advisory role in respect of staff development.

181 The staff at the associate colleges clearly valued the effective liaison and support provided through the course consultant and also the OAI. The course consultants who met the audit team understood their roles and appeared to be extremely committed to supporting the partner institution. On the basis of the available evidence, the team found that the University was ensuring that effective procedures existed to review the suitability of staff engaged with collaborative programmes.

Learning resources

182 The University identified the learning infrastructure as critically important to student success and all agreements with the partner institutions state that partners are responsible for learning resources, although collaborative students can access University resources, including the library. The audit team was able to confirm that partner institutions were clear about the University's expectation of them and that learning resources are considered as part of all new academic ventures or where current provision is being extended.

183 The audit team also noted the value of the thematic reviews and equivalency reviews, which take place in accredited colleges, in ensuring a comparable student experience. The annual programme review template used in all collaborative provision, and the triennial review template used in associate colleges, no longer considers resources and staffing as the University considers that these are monitored through different means: through course consultant reports, external examiners reports and periodic reviews. However, in some areas of collaborative provision there is no course consultant and the external examiners' report template does not appear to provide the opportunity for comment on resources.

184 The audit team concluded that the University's procedures to assure itself of the quality of learning resources in collaborative provision are generally effective. However, it was the view of the team that recent changes to annual and triennial review templates may test the University's capacity for monitoring the appropriate provision of learning resources at programme level and the team would encourage the University to review the impact of these changes at an early opportunity.

Academic guidance and personal support

185 In keeping with its devolved approach to collaborative provision student support is the responsibility of the partner institution with partners expected to 'provide counselling and other appropriate student support'. The audit team saw evidence that guidance and support is provided to students in the partner institutions and that these two areas are considered appropriately at institutional approval, programme validation, periodic review and annual programme review. The team considered that the University's procedures to assure itself of the quality of the academic guidance and personal support received by collaborative provision students are effective.

186 The audit team also noted that the University provides particularly effective support to overseas articulating students through: the visits by OPU to partners prior to the student's arrival at the University; the pre-sessional English language and cultural orientation sessions, the study skills courses, the credit bearing module on 'British Culture and Society' available on some programmes, and the continued support provided by the OPU while the students are studying; and this was an example of good practice.

Conclusion

187 From the evidence available, the audit team concluded that the University's procedures are fit for purpose and carefully operated so as to be effective in ensuring that programmes were properly approved, monitored, and reviewed with exception of one tripartite arrangement, with quality assurance and enhancement sought.

188 From scrutiny of the material made available to it, and from meetings with partners, institutional staff and students, the team concluded that the quality of the educational provision in collaborative programmes was appropriate.

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

189 The University has in place a range of formal structures and procedures, through which it is able to safeguard the standards of its awards gained through its collaborative

provision, but which vary to a greater or lesser degree in relation both to the type of partnership involved, and to where primary responsibility for the partnership rests; whether at departmental or University level.

190 Procedures for the approval of suitable partners, validation of new programmes and ongoing monitoring of an annual and periodic nature ensure that the University is able to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities and support offered to students by its partners will be and is comparable to those available at the University. While recognising the extensive use already made of external advice at critical moments in these procedures, the audit team noted some inconsistency in this matter across the range of partnerships. The team formed the view that the University might wish to consider this matter, in the light of its own commitment to the principle of externality, in order to derive even greater benefit from this demonstrably valuable source of advice.

191 External examiners, appointed by and responsible to the University itself, allow the University, through appropriate consideration of their reports, to monitor and demonstrate that the standards of the awards gained through its collaborative provision are in line with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and comparable to similar awards both at the University and in other HEIs in the UK.

192 The audit team also noted, however, apparent variation with regard to the University's requirements for engagement with external examiners across the range of associate colleges and recommend as desirable that the University clarify its requirements to partners in this regard.

193 The University also uses student achievement data, where available, to monitor the standards of its awards. Data for consideration at annual programme review are prepared centrally from the University's student database in the case of faculty-administered collaborative programmes, or by the accredited and associate colleges themselves. Although in

the latter case this data is often limited. There is no institutionally agreed dataset; a matter that was identified for action in the institutional audit report (2004) and has led to a University working party to define the required dataset. The audit team recommended as desirable that the University accelerates its progress towards the use of common datasets for the monitoring of student admission, progression and achievement.

Conclusion

194 Overall the audit team found that the University had in place a range of formal structures and procedures which enabled it to safeguard the standards of its awards gained through collaborative provision. The team found the level of external participation and the general robustness of the external examiner system sufficient to support its judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of standards in its collaborative provision.

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

195 The University aims to ensure that the Academic Infrastructure underpins all collaborative links, both home and overseas. In developing new partnerships, especially overseas where there may be a lack of familiarity with UK high education requirements, the University makes clear to prospective partners its expectations in respect of the Academic Infrastructure at an early stage in negotiations, and it further ensures that Memoranda of Agreement establish a firm basis for achieving alignment with the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure.

196 In respect of mature partnerships, both home and overseas, the University has in place a range of effective, formal structures to monitor ongoing compliance with the requirements of the Infrastructure. However, it was also notable that the University has been able in a number of ways, for example, through the work of course consultants and through some thematic equivalence reviews, to develop

a shared sense of ownership of the Infrastructure between itself and its partners. Partners clearly appreciate the spirit of collegiality in which discussions about the development of the Infrastructure itself and its incorporation into their provision take place, in some instances recognising the outcome as creating added value to their own provision, and appear as committed as the University to engaging with the Infrastructure in all aspects in order to maintain standards and generally enhance the quality of the student experience.

197 The audit team concluded that the University makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure both to safeguard the standards of its awards, and to maintain and enhance the quality of the student experience in its collaborative provision. Additionally the team recognised that the University, through its overseas links and, generally, the way in which these are initiated and developed, is helping to introduce an awareness of the Infrastructure to the global academic community as a whole.

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

198 The self-evaluation document for collaborative provision (CPSED) provided by the institution was a carefully-written, descriptive document, and provided a useful starting point for the audit team. It lacked clarity in parts and as a result the team often had to rely on additionally requested documentation and meetings with institutional and partner staff and students to provide it with a detailed understanding of the effectiveness of the University's internal quality assurance structures and mechanisms for its collaborative provision. In some of its meetings with the staff the team found evidence of a considerable preparedness for self-evaluation, not reflected in some parts the CPSED.

199 The CPSED did not always cover the full scope of its complex arrangements for collaborative provision, often describing the formal processes and procedures for its UK-based collaborative provision without extending this to include its overseas arrangements, or vice-versa.

200 The audit team concluded that the CPSED was an adequate illustration of the University's capacity to be evaluative. However, the document did not always reflect fully the range or quality of the activity being undertaken in the University and its partner institutions to assure quality and standards.

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

201 The University has an established history of managing collaborative provision. It is committed to expanding its collaborative provision, both regionally and overseas. As a result, the University continues to review and modify the framework for enhancing the management of its collaborative provision. The audit team found that these changes related directly to the University's strategy for the development of collaborative provision; for example the reinstatement of the Committee for Overseas Collaborative Provision (COCP) and the changing role of the Foundation Degree Board (FDB) reflect the current and future direction of the University's strategy; as does the creation of the post of Director of Regional Outreach and the appointment of a Head of the Overseas Programmes Unit.

202 The University is not prescriptive as to how quality assurance policies and procedures are managed within the partner institutions although the initial validation of the collaborative partner is used to determine whether the University is satisfied that the partner has satisfactory procedures for the management of quality and standards. These will then be reviewed as part of triennial and institutional review. The feedback from the accredited colleges to the audit team suggested

that the University's approach of enabling and empowering the partner institutions over a period of time to take responsibility for quality and academic standards had led to successful outcomes in respect of their applications for taught degree awarding powers.

203 The role of the ACC, CAC and CAI, as well as the OAI and course consultants make a significant contribution to the University's management of quality and academic standards in its collaborative provision. These are then supported by the quality assurance procedures which are verified within the partner institutions and reported on through the various reviews. While the University takes a risk based approach in determining future partnership developments, as its collaborative provision grows it will need to monitor and review the framework for managing quality and academic standards to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose. The team also felt that it would be desirable for the University to develop an operational handbook/procedures manual for staff in the University and partner institutions to ensure consistency of approach, guidance on its expectations and to provide a single reference point on quality processes and procedures.

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

204 The University has procedures in place for the approval and verification of publicity material. Procedures vary depending on the type of partnership arrangement and, in the case of the collaborative provision under the auspices of Memoranda of Agreement, between the agreements set up. Generally prospectus information is approved by the University prior to publication although the audit team found examples where this did not occur. The University monitors the websites of all its partner institutions.

205 Transcripts are produced by the partner institution unless the student is enrolled as a student of the University; guidance is issued to the partner institutions by the University. The

audit team found that there was no explicit method within the University for checking that partners were producing transcripts according to the agreed guidelines. Although the team saw evidence that the University had, in a particular instance, identified an anomaly, there did not appear to be a procedure for routinely exercising appropriate oversight. (see paragraphs 96, 132). The team would encourage the University to institute such a procedure as soon as possible.

206 Other published information such as programme specifications and programme handbooks are considered as part of the validation and review process. However the audit team found that some inconsistencies existed in the information provided to students through programme handbooks and therefore recommends as advisable that the University review its procedures for ensuring the accuracy, consistency and clarity of this information.

207 At the audit visit the University provided an account of its progress in relation to Teaching Quality Information (TQI). It reported that it had uploaded all TQI requirements to date, including all external examiner reports for the associate institutions. In contrast the accredited institutions were responsible for maintaining the information on their own TQI sites. Although the audit team was informed that the associated colleges were designated as departments for the purposes of the TQI information, the team was unable to find all of the information on the TQI site. The team concluded that the University was in the process of taking appropriate action to fulfil its responsibilities in relation to TQI and was aware of the requirements of the *HEFCE 03/51* document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*.

Features of good practice

208 The following features of good practice were noted:

i   the role of the course consultant as a critical friend to the associate colleges, the resources invested in facilitating the role

and the contribution of the annual meeting of course consultants to the sharing of good practice (paragraphs 37, 74, 169)

ii   the annual December meeting of programme leaders from the associate colleges as an effective mechanism for discussing annual programme reports and sharing good practice (paragraphs 79, 176)

iii   the support provided for students on 2+2 and similar programmes to prepare them for study at Lancaster, including visits by University of Lancaster staff and the provision of information, induction and bridging programmes; and the ongoing support and monitoring of their progress at the University (paragraphs 135, 158, 187)

iv   the allocation of a proportion of the tuition fee income from overseas collaborative programmes to provide staff development for staff of the partner institution (paragraphs 74, 180).

Recommendations for action

209   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

i   to review and strengthen its processes for ensuring that it has appropriate oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through tripartite arrangements with an accredited college (paragraphs 40, 72, 174)

ii   to review its procedures for ensuring the accuracy, consistency and clarity of information provided to students through programme handbooks (paragraphs 159, 161, 206).

210   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

iii   to consider developing an operational handbook/procedures manual for staff in the University and partner organisations involved in the management and delivery of collaborative provision, in order to

provide a single point of reference (paragraphs 44, 167, 203)

iv   in the light of its further strategic developments in overseas partnerships, keep under review the mechanisms for initiating, developing and monitoring those partnerships operating outwith the Office for Associated Institutions (paragraphs 45, 169)

v   to review the terminology used across all types of collaborative provision to enhance consistency and understanding (paragraphs 55, 166)

vi   to clarify, with all associate colleges, its requirements for responding to external examiners reports and the provision of a formal written response to each examiner, in order to ensure consistency across all partners (paragraphs 94, 192)

vii   to accelerate its progress towards the use of common data sets for the monitoring of student admission, progression and achievement (paragraphs 127, 193).

Appendix

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

The University of Lancaster welcomes the report of a collaborative provision audit conducted in March 2006, and the outcome of broad confidence both in the soundness of its present and likely future management of its academic standards and in its capacity to make available learning opportunities that are managed effectively and meet the institution's requirements. Lancaster is glad that the non-standard nature of its collaborative provision has been accepted as fit and appropriate for purpose without undue regimentation of academic partners.

The University notes the features of good practice identified by the audit team and intend that these processes and procedures will continue and be further developed.

The audit team advised the University to review and strengthen its processes to ensure it has appropriate oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through tripartite arrangements with an accredited college. The programmes in question are now the responsibility of another institution. Nevertheless, the University has tightened its procedures for tripartite arrangements to ensure that in future it has even more direct input into the quality assurance of such arrangements.

The university has agreed an improved quality assurance manual for its undergraduate programmes and further work in this area will continue and will cover all provision, both internal and collaborative. The institution will also consider each of the team's recommendations for desirable action as part of its regular annual review processes.

The University remains committed to the provision of high quality collaboration, both in the North-West region, including with the evolving University of Cumbria and the Higher Education in East Lancashire consortium, and in countries around the world that have educational objectives and quality standards that meet those of Lancaster.