University of Greenwich

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 Greenwich (the University) from 20 to 24 March 2006 to carry out an audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

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

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

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

and distributed learning (including e-learning), 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

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

Outcomes of the collaborative provision audit

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

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements

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

Features of good practice

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

- the genuine sense of partnership that characterises the relationship between the University and its collaborative partners

- the effective use made by the University of external examiner inputs, and its development of an innovative web-based reporting system

- the support provided to all off-campus students by Off-Campus Services, Contact and Remote Support, and

- the role of link tutors in supporting and developing partnership activity.

Recommendations

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

- further develop its collaborative provision strategy to address the management challenges of a   growing portfolio

- clarify the locus of responsibility for decision-making within the University on issues related to collaborative provision, and

- clarify the policy on periodic review in all types of collaborative provision with a view to ensuring robust central oversight.

The audit team also considers it desirable that the University ensures:

- timely implementation across the University of the recently identified quality enhancement initiatives, and

- that the improved provision of statistical information is rolled out across all types of collaborative provision and that the data is used effectively to inform the management of quality and standards.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision.

In due course, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance. The audit team was satisfied that the information the University and its partners are publishing currently about the quality of its collaborative programmes and the standards of its awards is reliable, and that the University is making adequate progress towards providing TQI data for its collaborative provision.

Main report

Main report

Section 1: Introduction

1 A collaborative provision audit of the University of Greenwich (the University) was undertaken from 20 to 24 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 institutional audit of the University's own provision. It is carried out by a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (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 four of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met staff and students.

The institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision

4   The University traces its roots back to the foundation of Woolwich Polytechnic in 1890. Its regional focus is on Southeast London and Kent, with the majority of its non-collaborative provision students coming from the surrounding area. It has three main campuses: Maritime Greenwich, situated in the Old Royal Naval College, Avery Hill, in Eltham, and Medway at Chatham.

5   The University is organised into nine schools, each comprising a number of departments with a particular discipline or subject focus, ranging across the academic spectrum, from vocational programmes in nursing or architecture to the more traditional academic disciplines such as philosophy. The School of Pharmacy is a joint endeavour with the University of Kent.

6   There are three main types of collaboration: the Partner College Network, the Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) network, and Full-Cost Partnerships. The Partner College Network consists of eight regional further education colleges (FECs) with a total of 1,566 students and involves almost all schools. The PCET network consists of 20 partners with a total of 1,820 students and works entirely with the Department of Post-Compulsory Education and Training in the School of Education and Training. It is a network of linked FECs offering blended learning programmes whose aim is to help to meet the national teacher training requirement for FE teachers. Full Cost Partnerships include 17 overseas partners with a total of 1,254 students and seven specialist UK partners with a total of 353 students. In summary, there are 52 partner institutions with 4,993 students. Two partner institutions provide programmes in specialist subject areas which are not offered by the University; one of these is a member of the Partner College Network. Discussions are currently under way about whether the other will join the Partner College Network in the near future. There are also two collaborations with other universities in the region.

7   The Vice-Chancellor joined the University in 2004. She instigated the integration of the Division of External and Combined Studies (DECS) and the Learning and Quality Office (LQO) into the Division of Learning Enhancement, Access and Partnership (LEAP).

8   The University's Mission Statement makes reference to 'serving a range of international, national and regional communities'. There are two key strategic objectives relevant to CP: 'to develop effective local, regional, national and international partnerships with other educational institutions, professional bodies, and public and private enterprises' and 'to engage with local and regional communities, and to provide services which meet their needs and encourage participation in University activities'.

9   The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) stated that the overall rationale for collaboration is based on a desire to enrich the curriculum offered on campus and by partner institutions through, for example, internationalisation and the development of global perspectives for all students; to generate income for all partners and support diversification of the University's income; to share good practice and enhance the student learning experience for the students of all partners; to broaden and stimulate the experience and horizons of staff; to support staff development and exchange; to develop related collaborative activities, for example in research and consultancy; and to raise the University and partner profile regionally, nationally and internationally.

Background information

10   The audit team had access to the following published information:

- Microcenter Institute of Technology (Bahrain) overseas audit report (2005)

- institutional audit report (2004).

11   The University made available to the audit team a large range of internal documents and papers including the CPSED, Articulating a Strategy for Collaborative Provision, Collaborative Provision: Policy and Practice

and the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH). In addition, the team had access to a range of documentation from the four partner institutions.

The collaborative provision audit process

12   A preliminary meeting was held between representatives of the University and a QAA officer in July 2005. Following this meeting the University was informed that the audit would include three visits to partner institutions and one 'virtual' visit to a partner institution. The selection of the partners to be the subject of a visit was decided by the audit team after an initial reading of the University's CPSED, which was received in November 2005. Further documentation pertinent to the four visits was received in January 2006.

13   The audit team undertook a briefing visit to the University on 1 and 2 February 2006. The purpose of the briefing visit was to explore with senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management and enhancement of quality and standards of the University's CP raised by the CPSED and other documentation provided for the team. During this visit, the team signalled a number of areas for investigation for the audit visit. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was developed by the team and agreed with the University. The team decided not to undertake any thematic reviews.

14   In the period between the briefing and audit visits members of the audit team undertook one day visits to the three partner institutions and met with senior staff responsible for the collaborative link with the University, subject staff who taught on named programmes and students who studied on collaborative programmes. During the virtual visit members of the audit team had meetings with a similar range of staff and students by means of a video conference link.

15   The audit visit took place between 20 to 24 March 2006 and included further meetings with University staff. The audit team comprised Mrs H Alder, Prof T Dugdale, Dr H Fletcher and Professor C Morris as auditors, and Mr M

Wainman as audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for the QAA by Dr A J Biscoe, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit (2004)

16 The Institutional Audit report (2004) identified a number of features of good practice and recommendations the following of which are relevant to CP: the holistic approach to reporting and planning through the Annual Reporting and Planning Document (ARPD), combining in a single process and a single document both the academic quality and standards, and human and financial resources aspects of schools' activities, thus providing the University with a valuable instrument for managing its current and future portfolio. The University inter alia was advised 'to provide schools with more explicit guidance on the expectations for reporting on matters relating to the quality assurance of provision through the ARPD, in order to improve consistency and comprehensiveness and thereby to make the ARPD a more effective channel for institutional oversight within the University's framework for managing quality and standards', and 'in the interests of improving transparency in the information provided to students, to expedite the process of determining those aspects of assessment policy that should be universally applicable and either incorporated in the Academic Regulations (for taught awards), or standardised across schools' assessment policies'. It was considered desirable for the University to make 'explicit [it's] approach to maintaining consistency of its procedures with the Code of practice, including how central and local responsibilities are to be distributed' and 'to give greater priority to promoting the involvement of students in quality management, including working more cooperatively with the Student Union of the University of Greenwich (SUUG) to reinstate training for student representatives and encouraging all schools to adhere to regular meeting schedules'. The CPSED suggested that these recommendations could be broadly described as 'suggestions for adjustments' in the new relationship between corporate authority and local responsibility 'primarily in order to enhance the student experience and the sharing of best practice - where devolution had resulted in some lack of coherence, in duplication of effort or in relatively labour intensive processes'.

17 In response to the findings related to the ARPD the University revised the school ARPD template and added guidance notes to the majority of its sections, reshaping both the quality and standards and the collaboration sections. However, the ARPD has subsequently been perceived to be too cumbersome and bureaucratic and so it has been amended again for 2005-06 to give a greater strategic and analytical steer and to link academic and resource planning. In addition, during 2004-05 the University introduced a revised partner institution Annual Institutional Report (AIR) which mirrors the requirements of the ARPD in greater detail than it had previously. This new AIR includes a commentary on the ways in which the link with the University has been managed over the preceding year by both partners. The University has also decided that overseas partners with multidisciplinary provision involving several schools in the University should produce an AIR.

18 Learning and Quality Committee (LQC) in January 2005 was updated on the actions taken in response to the recommendations. In addition to the above, the University has revised the academic regulations governing progression and completion of degree awards at undergraduate and postgraduate level to produce a single framework document for taught awards, and has revised the regulatory framework to produce a single University rule governing inter alia penalties for late submission of coursework. It has been agreed that all revisions to the Code of practice will be dealt with at LQC and the Learning and Quality Unit (LQU) will identify responsibilities for ensuring consistency at local and institutional level; and more training for student representatives is now provided.

19   The findings contained in the overseas audit report of the Microcenter Institute of Technology (Bahrain) (2005) noted the following features of good practice: the well-established risk-based approach to selecting a partner institution at both school and university level; the systematic monitoring, particularly in the early stages of the partnership, which has resulted in support commensurate with need; the well organised process for the admission of students; the coherent approach to the assessment of students; the effective arrangements for liaison and administration which exploit a variety of communication channels; and the priority given to implementing relevant information, representation and feedback systems for students.

20   The report recommended that the University consider: the impact of continual change to structures and reporting lines relating to CP on their effectiveness and the ability of staff to maintain a clear understanding of how they operate; further ways of improving communication lines between committees and ensuring that their decisions on collaborative activities are adequately recorded; the possibility of articulating clearly in memoranda of agreement the residual obligations to students in the case of termination of a partnership; specifying more precisely the duration of the programme and the schedule for the component courses, while also improving the transparency of this information in publicity material and the student handbook; and communicating more clearly to students the procedures relating to both academic appeals and student complaints. In response to the recommendation relating to the impact of continual change, the University acknowledged that there had been substantial structural changes during the previous five years, but that changes to its structures and quality assurance procedures for CP had been enhancements, building on established principles and practice. In terms of improving communication between committees LQC requested that training to improve committee servicing be provided by the Office of Student Affairs with the aim of improving links between committees and from

February 2006 LQC will receive all school Learning and Quality Committee (SLQC) minutes. The University has also made recommended improvements in articulating the residual obligation to students in the event of the termination of a partnership in memoranda of agreement, and communicating more clearly to students the University's procedures relating to both academic appeals and student complaints. Since the audit the Office of Student Affairs website has been improved regarding communication with students, and student handbooks have also been improved. It was noted by the audit team that link tutors play a key role in advising partners on all matters, including the content of handbooks and publicity materials.

21   The audit team found that most of the issues raised in previous audit reports had been addressed appropriately; it agreed with the University's summation of the recommendations of the 2004 institutional audit report contained in the CPSED that 'devolution had resulted in some lack of coherence, in duplication of effort or in relatively labour intensive processes', but considered that the structures and reporting lines for CP still did not appear to be functioning in a seamless and holistic manner.

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

22   The CPSED stated that the University's CP 'has grown organically over a number of years and expansion of much activity, particularly the international, has taken place with due care and attention to clearly agreed policy and operational procedures but, until recently, without the benefit of a formally stated collaborative strategy'. In 2005 the Academic Council ratified two documents, Articulating a Strategy for Collaborative Provision and

Collaborative Provision: Policy and Practice which were intended to articulate its implicit strategy and build on the accumulated experience. The Strategy document is largely concerned with the development of new collaborations and sets out the University's general aims in this area: to strengthen multidisciplinary links, encourage a more consolidated geographical focus and develop a more sophisticated evaluation of the costs including those related to quality assurance. The team also learnt that a further criterion was a disciplinary focus, with a substantial overlap being expected between any proposed programmes and the school's subject expertise. The Policy document describes the types of collaborative programme and the procedures for quality assurance that apply to CP. The team were told that the documents had been developed through widespread discussion and were largely a retrospective consolidation of the principles governing the development of its CP portfolio.

23   The CPSED stated that the University's approach to CP could best be described as 'moderately risk averse'. The audit team learnt that in 2004-05, prior to ratification of Articulating a Strategy for Collaborative Provision and Collaborative Provision: Policy and Practice, the University authorised ten new programmes with overseas partners and a similar number with home partners. The team considered the policy document to be a helpful development enabling relevant staff in the University and in partner institutions to understand their role in CP. However, the team considered that the retrospective nature of the University's CP Strategy meant that it had only partially addressed issues of resources, responsibility and rationalisation which have been recognised by the University and inevitably arise with an expanding provision. The team therefore advise the University to further develop its CP strategy to address the management challenges of a growing portfolio.

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

24   While overall responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's awards, including those delivered in partnership with other institutions, rests with the Academic Council (AC) much of the quality assurance of CP is the responsibility of individual schools. The CPSED stated that school responsibility includes 'the approval and review of most internal, and some low-risk CP programmes; the formal monitoring of all programmes; management of the assessment cycle; appointing and responding to external examiners; responding to student feedback; maintaining links with professional, statutory and/or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), where applicable; ensuring conformity with relevant sections of the QAA Code of practice and other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, and producing an Annual Reporting and Planning Document (ARPD), which includes a sub-section on CP'. Along with the central quality committees of the University LQU is responsible for overseeing each of these areas.

25   To enable them to discharge their quality assurance functions schools are required to have a School Director of Learning and Quality (SDLQ), a School Quality Assurance Officer (SQAO), and a School Board which oversees the work of the school. One feature of the management of collaborative activity which is common across all areas of the University and types of CP is the role of the link tutor (see paragraph 30). The CPSED stated that beneath the School Board it is for schools to develop a structure that enables them to discharge their quality assurance responsibilities and to demonstrate adherence to internal and external quality assurance requirements.

26   The CPSED acknowledged that where partner institutions collaborate with a number of schools 'they can experience different approaches to the management of the collaborations', and that University templates

may be 'adapt[ed]' by individual schools. During its work the audit team came to recognise that the University's arrangements for managing the quality and standards of its CP are complex and sometimes unclear. The team therefore advise the University to clarify where the locus of responsibility lies for decision-making within the University on specific issues related to CP (for examples see paragraphs 46-47).

27   The CPSED stated that there are two major central committees that deal with CP. The Academic Collaboration Committee (ACC) is 'responsible for oversight of quality and standards within collaboration' and, following a brief period of reporting to LQC, once again reports directly to AC. The Academic Planning Sub-Committee (APSC) is 'responsible for the strategic planning of the University's portfolio of programmes'. The terms of reference of APSC include the authorisation and discontinuation of all internal and collaborative programmes. Chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Quality), APSC is a subcommittee of the Executive Committee and reports both to the Executive Committee and ACC.

28   The key documentary source for all quality processes is the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) which is available on-line, and contains an extensive range of appendices providing templates, guidance notes and other documentation for various aspects of quality processes. While the QAH sometimes lacks detail, it is supplemented by more targeted and clear documents including the Guide to Quality Assurance, The Partner College Network: A Guide to Administration, Management and Quality Assurance of University of Greenwich Programmes (the College Guide), Full-Cost Partnerships: A Guide, and the Administrative Manual for Network Centres, covering PCET. Individual schools also publish their own specific guidance on collaborations to operationalise University-level guidance.

29   The CPSED stated that quality assurance for all CP is largely devolved to schools, and that the approach to the management of CP depended upon the type of collaboration. To assist in the identification of the risks

associated with the delivery of the diverse CP, the University employs a taxonomy based on the degree of delegation to the partners. The highest level of risk occurs where all learning facilities are delegated to the partner; this is labelled as a Teaching Centre. Many full-cost and most Partner College collaborations are assigned to this category. Less risky are links operating as Learner Support Centres where the University prepared or approved the course materials and its staff are usually involved in the assessment and often in the teaching. The PCET Network, some Partner College programmes and some full-cost collaborations fall into this category. Least risk is attached to links operating as Administrative Support Centres where teaching is undertaken by University staff and the partner provides only local facilities and administrative support. This category is now of limited significance as its sole member is being phased out. The audit team were told that the University had consistently used the Teaching/Learner Support Centre distinction when applying risk analysis to full-cost CP and that it had a potential role in relation to Partner College CP.

30   The risk analysis of full-cost CP is assisted by the use of a Risk Assessment Tool which scores risk against a series of criteria. This is used to inform the authorisation process and may guide the configuration of the approval process. There is a different risk assessment tool which is intended to provide schools with a mechanism for deciding whether to conduct a formal periodic review for its internal provision, and may also be used to determine the nature of any review process for CP.

31   Oversight of the periodic review schedule is maintained by the LQU and relevant University committees, though University-level committee minutes showed little detailed discussion of individual programmes beyond the stage of initial approval. Evidence gathered by the team, suggests that in practice delegation to the school is the norm, in line with the statement in the 'Guide to Quality Assurance' that 'the implementation of the QA system is largely devolved to Schools'.

Within schools, lines of responsibility for CP arrangements are not clearly spelled out, with the Terms of Reference for school boards containing no explicit reference to CP.

32   For Partner Colleges, and for the great majority of Full-Cost Partnerships, there appeared to be a clear understanding by partners that their responsibility covered provision of learning resources, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the provision through the annual cycle of Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and AIRs, and dealing with students complaints (though not with formal academic appeals). This understanding was underpinned by a detailed mapping of the responsibilities of the school, LEAP and the partner, provided in the Guides (see paragraph 27). Discussions with Partner College staff confirmed this understanding. For those partnerships classified as Learner Support Centres, assessment, and in some cases teaching, is undertaken by University staff, with corresponding modifications to the locus of responsibilities.

33   Link tutors play a key role in the day-to-day operation of CP, and in the maintenance of standards. Discussion with senior University management and during the partner visits made it clear that link tutors carry out this role to a very high standard, that their contribution is valued by the University and partners alike, and that they are instrumental in generating the genuine spirit of partnership which informs the University's collaborative activity (see paragraphs 105, 114 and 122). The audit team had access to some of the reports produced by link tutors after each of their partner visits; these used a comprehensive template, and provided a detailed and thoughtful record of interactions between the tutor and the partner.

34   The management of assessment processes related to CP takes place within the framework provided by the Academic Regulations for Taught Awards, though much of the detail of implementation is delegated to schools. All schools now have assessment policies which have been approved centrally by the University, and a number of key aspects of assessment,

such as the handling of late submissions and extenuating circumstances, are now covered by central policies which apply also to CP and are in line with the recommendations of the 2004 Institutional Audit report. The same is true of the treatment of plagiarism and of academic appeals. However, complaints which do not fall within the definition of an academic appeal are normally dealt with locally by the partner institution. It was clear from discussion during the partner visits that the partners had a clear understanding of the division of responsibilities in this area.

35   The 'two-tier' system of examination boards in use within the University, involving Subject/Departmental Assessment Panels followed by Progression and Award Boards (PABs), is mirrored in the CP. It is usual practice for the University to provide a Chair for overseas PABs; this is not always necessary for UK-based partnerships, where staff from the partner institution may attend the relevant PAB held at the University.

36   Separate regulations apply to the joint awards with the University of Kent in relation to pharmacy and the provision with Canterbury Christ Church University. In the case of the partnership with the University of Modern Sciences and Arts (MSA) in Egypt, the University has accepted the partner's regulations but there was evidence that it was taking steps to see that the regulations were enforced and that there was an ongoing process of modification to bring them into line with the University's own regulations.

37   The University does not have a single assessment strategy for CP and the audit team learnt that the position in relation to the management of assessment varies with the type of partnership involved. In the Partner Colleges, assessment is generally carried out by college staff; however, a comprehensive system of cross-moderation is in place to ensure that standards are comparable, both between Partner Colleges and between colleges and the University. Many subject areas engage in what were variously described as 'cross-moderation days' or 'marking parties', where staff from the University and all

colleges offering particular programmes meet to discuss and compare standards of marking. The impression gained by the audit team is that this system not only works effectively as a means of ensuring standards, but also acts as a valuable form of staff development.

38   The audit team concluded that the University's framework for the management of standards and quality of CP in general operated effectively, and regarded the role of link tutors in supporting and developing partnership activity as a feature of good practice. The team noted that responsibility for the management of standards and quality including CP had largely been devolved to schools, and that, within the recently created LEAP, Educational Partnerships Unit (EPU) has a key role in coordinating CP in the Partner Colleges. However, the team concluded that the combination of the complexity of structures and processes developed by the University to manage its different types of CP, and a lack of clarity as to the locus of responsibility for specific aspects of management, allied to a high degree of devolution to schools, offered scope for inconsistency of practice. This finding is consistent with the outcome of the 2005 Bahrain Audit which noted that 'the University may wish to consider the impact of continual change to structures and reporting lines relating to collaborative provision on their effectiveness and the ability of staff to maintain a clear understanding of how they operate'. The team therefore advises the University to clarify precisely where responsibility resides within the University for decision-making on specific issues related to CP.

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

39   The CPSED listed the following as initiatives which seek to enhance the University's internal structures and procedures which it expected to enhance its management of the standards and quality of its CP: further developing its approach to the management of quality risk; improving communication between local and central committees and maximising the contribution of the School Directors of

Learning and Quality (SDLQs) to the corporate life of the University.

40   It became apparent to the audit team that the University is undertaking in addition to the above a number of other enhancements to its management of the standards and quality of its CP provision including a number of ongoing minor enhancements to quality processes, such as the introduction of the reporting template for link tutor visits (paragraph 30 above).

41   The CPSED acknowledged that one of the functions of the Principals' Strategic Planning Meeting (PSPM) is to provide a regular exchange of key development information, to complement the regular day-to-day communication, about activity at the centre of the University. This is generally transmitted through the Principals and the HE Coordinators in each of the Partner Colleges to operational members of staff. In comparison with school-based information, however, that places those staff at one remove. This dual pattern of communication between the University and its Partner Colleges, one channel of which involves only core strategic-level staff, would undoubtedly benefit from enhancement, and both LEAP and the schools are actively considering how to improve the flow of information still further.

42   The audit team noted that a scrutiny group of ACC reviewed the CP section of all school ARPDs and related AMRs, most recently for full-cost provision, to identify common issues and themes, areas of good practice, and areas of concern. ACC recommended that future programme monitoring reports should be based on preliminary data and comments from external examiners, rather than be delayed by the late availability of statistics from Planning and Statistics (PAS).

43   ACC also recommended that guidance notes embedded in the AMR pro forma should emphasise critical reflection; staff development should be provided for partner institutions; and a template should be provided for the link tutor annual report/overview of collaborations, in order to reduce the need for several iterations.

Good practice was also identified, including the establishment of school Collaboration Committees.

44   ACC's reflections on the institutional-level scrutiny process concluded that the University should revisit the process of reporting to AC on collaborative monitoring through ARPDs. It was suggested that an ACC scrutiny group might assist with the senior manager overview of the collaborative part of the quality and standards part of ARPDs, and ACC should comment on that overview prior to its finalisation by AC. Alternatively, ACC could receive the collaborative sections together with the draft report from the senior manager. ACC would still be able to request ad hoc drilling down to programme AMRs, as was being carried out on this occasion for full-cost provision. The audit team considered it desirable for the University to continue to implement the range of plans suggested to enhance the management of CP.

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

45   University processes distinguish between authorisation and approval, and between subsequent approval of a partner institution and approval of provision. A partner must be approved before provision can be approved, though, particularly in the case of overseas partners, both activities may take place during a single visit to the partner.

46   The authorisation and approval process is normally initiated by the school as part of the Academic Planning Process. The host school and the potential partner are required to provide documentation detailing the partner's academic governance and financial status, quality assurance processes, physical environment, staff development policies and student services provision. For programmes proposed within full-cost provision, a risk assessment is undertaken, within which one of the criteria will be whether the intended partner is designated as a Teaching Centre, a Learner Support Centre or an Administrative

Support Centre (see paragraph 28 above). Learning and Quality Unit (LQU) in LEAP then arranges for senior members of the University (or a panel) to visit the institution and ACC receives a copy of the report. If approved, EPU prepares a Memorandum of Agreement. The CPSED indicated that the University considers that its arrangements for CP (including, by implication, the initial authorisation and subsequent approval of partnerships) are consistent with the precepts of the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), published by QAA, and the evidence seen by the audit team led it to agree with this view. The University is, however, aware that certain aspects of the authorisation process, for example, the business plans submitted as part of that process, require strengthening; the CPSED indicates that measures are in hand to ensure that this is done.

47   Programme approval is initiated by the host school in consultation with LQU. Central to the process is the appointment of a link tutor from the host school who coordinates with staff in the partner concerning the preparation of documentation. Key to programme approval is the early drafting of a programme specification which is based on a template located in the QAH. The template requires specification of subject benchmark statements used and reference to the location of the award in terms of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ). The audit team saw evidence of the care with which this process is often followed and the effort by the University to fully involve staff at the partner institution in the programme development process.

48   Criteria for the composition of programme approval panels are clearly set out in the QAH and reports of approvals seen by the audit team indicated that in all cases panels conformed to University requirements. The panel normally includes a chair from outside the host school and a member from outside the University with appropriate subject or professional expertise. Based upon minutes of recent panels the team

considered that the panels are conducted with care and thoroughness.

49   Programme approval for delivery in collaboration with a newly approved partner normally includes, except for Administrative Support centres, a site visit by at least a senior member of University staff from outside the host school and an external subject specialist but potentially a whole panel. For existing partners a virtual visit involving an external subject specialist may replace a site visit. In practice a cautious approach is being adopted to the use of this method; however, following a pilot agreed by AC in 2004, LQC gave specific approval for future use of this approach for lower risk partnerships in January 2005. The report of the pilot was also received by ACC in May 2005.

50   The audit team noted that some validations have operated to a very compressed timescale. While staff indicated that, for courses due to recruit in September, the latest date for validations to be completed would normally be Easter, the team found evidence that some developments had been approved much later than this. On one occasion at least, a validation event had taken place only two days after APSC had given authorisation for the partner, a point which members of APSC themselves noted with some concern. A date of 16 September was set for the fulfilment of the six conditions on the validation, although the formal 'sign-off' of the validation did not take place until October, when students had already commenced their study. Moreover, one of the six conditions set, relating to the provision of resources to support the appointment of an external subject adviser, had, it appeared, still not been met at the time of the audit visit.

51   It was unclear to the team at precisely what point a programme approval might be regarded as 'completed' and a programme approved to commence delivery. The QAH provides no guidance on this point, although the audit team heard that it would be at the time of the chair of the validation panel concluding that the conditions had been met. In the case cited above, it was not apparent on what authority

the decision had been taken that the programme could commence delivery in advance of all the conditions having been met. The team would advise the University to clarify the locus of responsibility for such decisions. However, despite this reservation the audit team believes that at present the programme approval process is in general operating effectively.

52   The annual monitoring process for CP varies less with the nature of the partnership than does the programme approval process. All partner institutions are required to produce an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for each approved programme offered. The University provides a template for the report, but is working with its partners, particularly in the Partner College network, to 'dovetail' its requirements with the quality assurance arrangements already in place in the colleges, while maintaining the need for consistency between partners so that information from all partner reports can be consolidated by the responsible school.

53   Where a partner offers more than one University programme there is also a requirement to complete an Annual Institutional Report (AIR) which takes an overview of the totality of the provision. This requirement began with the Partner Colleges, but is now being extended to other types of partnership which are multidisciplinary in nature. However, where only one programme is offered by a partner, the roles of AMR and AIR are combined into a single document.

54   AIRs and AMRs are received by the host school and also by LEAP. The Partnership Advisor within LEAP analyses all reports received from Partner Colleges, and produces a summary for ACC. Within schools the outcome of monitoring and review is reported through the school's ARPD alongside the reporting on internal provision. ACC and AC then receive a report compiled by LEAP on the collaborative sections of all school ARPDs. The CPSED indicated that 'a wealth of information' is provided by the monitoring process; however, it also acknowledged that 'the scale of the material and the differing perspectives' might

lead to the overlooking of some trends, good practice or potential risks. The University has sought to address this matter by the introduction of a further overview, produced by the LQU, to consider 'any overarching issues'. The CPSED stated that 'the monitoring process identifies issues and proposes actions at programme, school and University level and the University regards it as compatible' with Section 2 of the Code of practice, published by QAA.

55   Discussion during partner visits indicated to the audit team that the monitoring systems are well understood by partners, and effective support in compiling reports is provided by the link tutors. There was however a feeling expressed that feedback was sometimes slow in reaching partners, perhaps because of the complexity of the dual routes for receipt of the reports within the University. The team considered that the introduction of the additional overview report mentioned above might further compound this problem.

56   The quality of AMRs, AIRs, school ARPDs and the overview documents seen by the audit team indicated that University threshold standards for reporting were being met, and in some cases considerably exceeded. The team was therefore confident that the annual monitoring processes were operating effectively, and that the University was taking an adequate central overview of these processes and their outcomes.

57   The QAH states that '[I]n view of the higher level of risk involved in any CP, these programmes are always approved for a finite period and then subject to review'. The periodic review process is outlined in the QAH and schools are responsible for organising individual reviews. A review may cover a single programme, a cluster of academically related programmes or a group of partners that deliver the same programme. The review process is similar in design to the programme approval process except that it requires a critical appraisal and input from current and past students on the quality of the programme. All periodic reviews are reported to the host SLQC;

in addition periodic reviews for all CP are received and discussed by ACC. Institution-level reviews of Partner Colleges take place once every five years.

58   Although the QAH stipulates that collaborative programmes are always approved for a finite period the audit team learnt that in practice there was 'some limited flexibility' available to schools in determining the period between approval and review. The degree of flexibility allowed requires discussion with LQU; evidence from one review seen by the team suggested that there had been discussion within the University as to the extent to which an external review by the QAA can take the place of a full periodic review. The team also learnt that there is considerable variation in the amount of time between approval and reviews or rereviews.

59   Variable quality of minuting, particularly at school level, made tracking of decisions through the committee structure by the audit team somewhat challenging, and it appeared that central committees other than ACC spent little time on discussion of periodic reviews or their outcomes. However, the team was able to determine that in a number of cases the interval between periodic reviews of collaborative programmes either exceeded the stated five-year limit, or had been subject to modification without a clear reason for doing so. For example, a table of CP in a recent ARPD from the School of Architecture and Construction showed that for one overseas full-cost programme, the period between reviews had been seven years.

60   In another example an external review in February 2000 was followed by what was described as a 'light touch' review in June 2000. However, a Summary of that event stated that 'as the event had not been a conventional programme review, the Panel was loath to approve the programme for a five year period'. Approval was therefore given for a further three years. The host SLQC agreed in September 2002 that the review be deferred until 2004-05. The audit team learnt that the review had once

again been rescheduled. However, the point at which the review had been further deferred could not be traced in committee minutes. These deferrals took place notwithstanding the fact that limitations in learning resources, identified at the original approval in 1996, were commented on in the 2000 external review.

61 The CPSED indicated that there could potentially be wide variations in the nature of the periodic review process, and that it was for a school, in discussion with LQU, to determine the level of intensity, based on the level of risk. The audit team learnt that intensity of review may be as 'light' as a discussion during an SLQC meeting, informed by written comments from an external specialist where a well-established partner institution with 'very stable programmes' is concerned. During the audit visit the University provided a brief summary document, 'Reviews of Collaborative Provision' which indicated that the relevant section of the QAH was 'perhaps remiss in not making clear that for collaborative programmes there is very limited flexibility of level and scope of the process … [and that] this is well understood by all those dealing with collaborative programmes in the University'. However, there is no suggestion that LQU's advice is either mandatory or binding.

62 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University has an effective periodic review process. However, evidence both from specific cases and from formal University documentation, suggested a lack of clarity with which periodic review processes are specified, and about the effectiveness of the University's central oversight of the periodic review process. It therefore advises the University to clarify its policy on periodic review in all types of CP with a view to ensuring robust central oversight.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

63 The Institutional Audit report highlighted 'the tendency for the University to link together the concepts of externality and cross-representation'. The CPSED stated that the guidance in the QAH on externality had

been strengthened to make it clear where representation from outside the University is required. However, the audit team saw evidence that there remained some confusion about the precise meaning of 'externality'. For example, the 'Guide to Quality Assurance' in its section on 'Externality as Good Practice' covers processes internal to the University (but external to the host school), as well as processes involving inputs from experts outside the University. The team suggest that the University might wish to consider further clarification of its documentation in this area.

64 The audit team learnt that externality is not necessarily required for the approval of a new partner institution, though where this is combined with programme approval, an external member will in any case be present. For programme approval however, the QAH states that 'the University requires external involvement in the process, with a senior manager from outside the host school, and at least one external specialist from outside the University'. For programme review the QAH states that there should be 'a minimum of one academic specialist and one practitioner' from outside the University for vocational programmes, and 'one or more academics' for non-vocational programmes. According to the QAH the chair of a panel, whether for initial approval or periodic review, should normally be a senior manager from outside the host school.

65 Evidence seen by the audit team, in the form of reports from a number of both course approval and periodic review events suggests that these requirements are being met, with panel membership including both independent external academics and practitioners where appropriate. The 'Proposal Form for External Panel Members' is signed off by the school Director of Learning and Quality.

66 Notwithstanding reservations concerning the specification of the process, the audit team concluded that, on the basis of the evidence available to it, the University is making robust and appropriate use of externality at all points of its quality assurance cycle, and that its practices in this respect reflect the relevant parts of the Code of practice.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

67   For all collaborative activities at Level 2 or higher, or where Level 1 contributes to an ungraded award, schools are required to appoint external examiners to oversee and report on the standard of the award. The CPSED stated that the procedures for the assessment of students on collaborative programmes 'reflect the methodology applied to the University's internal programmes … so that a common quality assurance and standards framework obtains across all of the University's provision'.

68   Appointment of external examiners is a function of AC, but in practice it is delegated to school boards with LQU maintaining a central record and oversight. Where possible, external examiners may be appointed for both internal and CP programmes so that they can make comparisons. The School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences (CMS) has appointed two external examiners solely for CP programmes but the team was told that they would have access to internal programme data as well. The Academic Regulations for Taught Awards, which are owned by AC, set out the appointment criteria.

69   The Academic Regulations stipulate that where delivery of the programme takes place overseas, examiners with experience of the local context may be appointed but they must also have experience of UK higher education. Similarly, provision for exceptional cases where the medium of instruction is not English is at the discretion of AC, and criteria include the fact that the external examiner must be fluent in the relevant language. In one such case, a condition of approval imposed by ACC was that the external examiner should have knowledge of the local education system and that there should be two UK based externals, one academic and one practitioner. Each school has its own moderation strategy, but examiners are required to report using a standard template, thus balancing the school's autonomy with consistency in the reporting framework.

70   External examiners submit an annual report using a standard template with tick and commentary boxes for assessment, standards and comparability of student performance, all of which once completed are posted onto the Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) website. Reports are submitted electronically and receipt is automatically notified to the PVC (Learning and Quality), the Head of LQU, LQU quality managers and senior school staff. This system was successfully piloted by the School of Engineering and CMS during 2004-05. It became clear to the audit team that the system had major advantages in that it streamlined distribution to partner institutions, eradicated duplication of record keeping and provided a facility for schools and LQU to respond to the report. Heads of school told the team that it provided them with notification of the arrival of a report and an incentive to coordinate responses to a report and the Head of LQU reported that it had provided a basis for improved analysis of the reports. With some adjustments to meet feedback from users, the system is to be extended in 2005-06 to all schools and external examiners.

71   The reporting format provides external examiners with opportunity to comment on the implementation of assessment policies and the audit team saw evidence that, working with link tutors, they play an active role in this respect. This was particularly the case with an overseas partner unfamiliar with a UK assessment culture. External examiners for the Partner Colleges participate in cross-moderation exercises at which internal examiners from the colleges are present (see paragraph 34). The minutes of these meetings record the external examiners' comments and there was evidence from Partner Colleges that this was a valuable staff development experience.

72   The audit team learnt of the importance that the University attaches to external examiners' reports through an audit trail of a critical report through to the termination of the programme in question. From the initial report in March 2004, the issue was considered through the link tutor's report and meetings of the SLQC and Sector Skills Council (SCC) to the final decision to allow a one year run-off

extension in September 2005 to enable completion by continuing students.

73   The Academic Regulations require issues raised in reports from external examiners to be formally addressed by the programme team with feedback to the heads of school for inclusion in the school ARPD. Reports are also considered as part of programme monitoring leading to programme AMRs. The University gains oversight of the content of external examiners' reports through two separate reporting processes. The first is through school ARPDs, and the second since 2003-04, is produced by LQU for LQC in the form of an overview report. The overview reports of 2003-04 and 2004-05 contained a separate analysis of CP reports. They identified good practice and the former, in particular, noted positive comments about the commitment of staff delivering the programmes, the design of assessments and feedback to students. The reports summarise the main recommendations for University action. In the 2003-04 report these included steps to ensure that student feedback systems were operating at all sites, mechanisms for dealing with clearly identified threats to standards in examiners' reports, and labelling of work for review from every centre where delivery was across more than one centre, with the recommendation that reports should be made on the standard of each centre where the external examiner is responsible for a multi-centre programme.

74   The CPSED noted that in respect of the composite external examiners' report for PCET, centre-by-centre comment has been made an explicit requirement. The 2004-05 LQC overview report in draft form also noted the value of visits to partner institutions by external examiners and suggested making this an institutional requirement. It noted that while there were some 55 recommendations for action for schools to consider, none of these indicated that any threats to standards were evident. The minutes of both ACC and LQC meetings record both discussion and endorsement of the actions proposed by LQU.

75   The CPSED stated that the University had 'a robust external examiner system that enables independent identification of themes that need to be addressed' and that its 'dominant viewpoint is that the standards maintained by the University's partners are comparable to those of the University's peers in the UK'. Based on the documentation and what was heard in meetings and partner visits, the audit team is satisfied that the external examiner system is working effectively and contributing both to the assurance of standards and the development of good practice. The separate overview of external examiners' reports on CP is a helpful basis for identifying good practice and issues of concern. The team noted as a feature of good practice the effective use made by the University of external examiners' inputs, and its development of an innovative web-based reporting system.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

76   It is a condition of programme approval for all awards including CP that a programme specification containing learning outcomes that conform to the FHEQ and subject benchmarks is published. As part of the process external assessors are required to assess the extent to which the proposed programme reflects subject benchmarks and ensure that it is appropriate to the designated level. External examiners are required to make comparison with the appropriate benchmarks and the FHEQ as part of their annual report. Where the programme is developed by a partner the host school works with the partner to ensure the programme design reflects the subject benchmarks and FHEQ. The audit team saw evidence of the extensive use of the FHEQ and benchmarks in the approval process for programmes delivered by both UK and overseas partners, and noted that schools had undertaken extensive staff development at partner institutions to reinforce understanding of the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements.

77   The CPSED stated that the University, having mapped its procedures against the Code of practice and identified actions needed, was 'confident that its systems of quality management are designed in such a way as to ensure adherence to its precepts'. As part of the review process the revised section on collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (FDL) was reviewed by the LQU in 2004 and recommendations in respect of CP were submitted to ACC for consideration. The audit team noted that LQC and ACC had discussed the issue in January and February 2005 and that ACC had noted the responsibility of schools in helping to familiarise external partners with the Code of practice. The team was told that SDLQs would identify issues to be passed on to partner institutions arising from University discussion of the Academic Infrastructure, and had been deliberately raising the profile of the Code. The May 2005 LQC noted that a task force was required to review the FDL part of the Code. From its consideration of the PCET blended learning provision the team was satisfied that there was compliance with the FDL part of the Code.

78   The institutional audit report (2004), while satisfied that initial alignment with the Code of practice had been achieved, was unable to identify any systematic process for monitoring consistency over time and was concerned that the University's use of 'spot audits' would be insufficient, given the highly devolved structures, to inhibit drift from the aligned position. The CPSED stated that in response to this concern, LQU was auditing the distribution of responsibilities for engagement with the Code and has allocated overall responsibility for the CP aspects of the Code to ACC and identified which unit was responsible for each of the Code's precepts. For some precepts, particularly those allocated to schools, further identification of the relevant process or documentation may be helpful.

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

79   The University's link with the Microcenter Institute of Technology (MIT), Bahrain, was reviewed by the QAA as part of its audit of CP in the Gulf States in 2005. The report identified a number of positive features in the management of the link and, in particular, a satisfactory balance of central oversight and local management at school level. The report commented that its findings supported 'a broad conclusion of confidence in the University's stewardship of academic standards and oversight of the quality of the student experience in its overseas CP'. The University has highlighted two main points which need to be addressed: improvement of communication lines between committees and communication of information about University procedures to students. LQC noted that improvements were being made to committee communication by a new reporting line from school LQCs to the central LQC and by staff training; and to student communication by the production of a guide for the management of overseas CP. ACC considered the updated Action Plan in February 2006 and concluded that almost all the issues raised by the QAA had now been addressed. The detailed report on follow-up action seen by the audit team indicated that the response to the audit has been effective and positive.

80   A number of PSRBs accredit some of the University's CP delivered in the UK and overseas including, for the UK, the Landscape Institute, the Institute of Biomedical Sciences (IBMS) and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). The institutional audit report considered it desirable for the University to 'ensure that PSRB reports are routinely considered centrally for the purpose of identifying generic issues, emerging themes or good practice'. Hence, PSRB reports are now sent to LQC. LQC has decided that from 2005-06 schools should highlight items of University significance in their reports and that LQU should produce an end of session overview.

81   The audit team was satisfied that the University engages effectively with reports from external bodies including PSRBs. The team considered that the University had responded effectively to the institutional audit report with work to meet the advisable recommendations complete and that to meet the desirable recommendations complete or ongoing. The University had identified further points for consideration from the main text of the report and work had been commenced to meet these.

Student representation in collaborative provision

82   The CPSED stated that the 'University regards student representation and feedback as essential to the enhancement of its academic provision' and acknowledges the value of both informal and formal mechanisms for gaining student feedback. All CP is required to have a system which enables student representatives to feedback issues of concern. This usually takes the form of a programme committee meeting normally attended by student representatives, teaching staff and the local programme leader.

83   Link tutors and, in Partner Colleges, the College HE Coordinator receive the minutes of the programme committees. The audit team read a number of programme committee minutes and met with a number of student representatives from partner institutions. The team learnt that meetings were taking place with student representation but that in some cases the meetings were sometimes scheduled for times when student representatives were unable to attend. The University acknowledged that formal representation at programme committee does not always occur, and suggests that cultural reasons or student malaise can impede the process. The University therefore places emphasis on alternative means by which students can make representation utilising existing partner institution methodologies.

84   The audit team heard evidence that student representatives are prepared for their role in a number of ways from informal briefing to more formal processes (for example, those arranged through the College Student Services). The team heard and read that students perceive direct contact with staff, facilitated by small cohort sizes, as the most effective means of representing their concerns.

85   The institutional audit report suggested it would be desirable for the University 'to give greater priority to promoting the involvement of students in quality management, including working more cooperatively with the Students Union to reinstate training for student representatives and encouraging all schools to adhere to regular meeting schedules'. While this recommendation has been addressed with regard to University campus provision resulting in the 'Be Involved To Evolve' (BITE) training programme for student representatives developed and delivered by SUUG, the training programme is currently unavailable to students studying in partner institutions. However, the audit team learnt that the University is evaluating the BITE project and will discuss with SUUG how good practice may be disseminated to partner institutions.

86   The audit team was told that the University is convinced that the student voice is heard. Monitoring the effectiveness of student representation is vested initially in link tutors and thence embedded within the monitoring processes and documentation through the normal reporting structures. The team concluded that the systems enabled the student voice to be heard but that central oversight such as it is, is not proactive and could be more focussed.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

87   The CPSED acknowledged the 'complex and challenging issue' of gathering formal student feedback in CP and stated that 'what matters is that there is an active dialogue between students, staff in partner institutions and the University about the health of its programmes'.

88   The CPSED outlined a number of mechanisms by which the University gains feedback from students on collaborative programmes including meetings with students

during periodic reviews, and in some cases meetings between external examiners and students in both the Partner College Network and in full-cost and overseas partnerships. However, the lack of a standardised process and confidence in informal feedback from students has prompted the University to place increased emphasis on the role of link tutors, who now hold regular half yearly meetings with students outside the formal committee structure, in order to ensure student concerns are identified and addressed. Their reports are fed into the College HE Forums and through annual reporting mechanisms to school committees for action. The School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences (CMS) has opted to collect CP student feedback through electronic means. The University has consciously decided not to roll-out its student satisfaction survey to include partner institutions as it prefers not to duplicate mechanisms that may already be in place in the partners. Where there is insufficient differentiation between student populations, for example between HE and FE students, then students are asked to complete specific questionnaires on completion of courses. Feedback mechanisms to students vary according to the partner institutions. The audit team read that 'overall the University is confident that the student voice is heard and acted upon on a regular basis'.

89   Students in partner institutions met by the audit team commented that they were provided with opportunities by the University to express their views, but were not always clear about the impact of their comments and did not always receive a formal response which caused them to question the value of their feedback. This was exacerbated when issues recurred over a number of years. The team saw evidence of commentary on student feedback and follow-up action proposed in AMRs, ARPDs and AIRs and the compilation of issues identified from student feedback across the Partner College network. The team noted however that the style of commentary was descriptive and proposed actions were not always time limited or assigned to a named

individual with responsibility for implementation to enable regular monitoring of progress. The team would encourage the University to consider reviewing its approach to action planning in this regard.

90   The CPSED outlined the difficulties of gathering feedback from CP graduates, especially as many of them progress onto internal University programmes and thus become indistinguishable from other University students. For overseas provision, however, the CPSED stated that the mechanisms for gathering graduate feedback 'will vary from country to country'. The most common method is through informal contact with alumni associations. The audit team heard evidence of ongoing contact with former students who may return to share their subsequent experiences with current student cohorts or feed into formal processes.

91   In terms of feedback from employers the CPSED stated that the 'diversity of programmes encompassed under the heading of collaborative provision also means that there is no single way in which feedback is sought and no standard level of involvement by employers'. The audit team saw evidence of employer feedback informing new programme development through approval panel membership and periodic review reports. The team saw evidence of a wide range of employer linkages in Partner Colleges which enable feedback on current employer practice. Feedback is sought to inform curriculum design through Employer Forums, and some Foundation Degrees have been developed in direct response to employer need.

92   PCET and programmes in Health and Social Care have particularly strong and integrated employer links because of the nature of the programmes and employer feedback is direct and extensive. Professional accreditation of programmes provides a further means for gaining feedback on the quality of provision and the preparedness of graduates for the workplace from an employers' perspective.

93   ACC maintains an oversight of employer feedback and involvement in CP programmes in Partner Colleges through the summary of AIRs produced annually by LEAP. However, it was not clear to the audit team how the University achieves full oversight through the inclusion of feedback from its other collaborative partnerships, and the team would encourage the University to consider ways of ensuring more comprehensive oversight.

94   The audit team concluded that in general there is an active dialogue between students, staff in partner institutions and the University about the health of CP programmes, but noted that understanding of students' experience is largely achieved through the monitoring processes with summaries only at strategic level. University processes for gathering and scrutinising graduate and employer feedback of its CP are not systematic.

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

95   The CPSED stated that 'individual programme AMRs and the Partner College AIRs are required to report on and offer commentary on admissions, progression and completion data'. Schools, in their ARPDs, are required to comment separately on statistical indicators for Partner College, PCET and full-cost provision.

96   The data is made available in the form of a 'statistical digest' which is provided to schools, and more recently has also been made available to partner institutions. The CPSED stated that during the current year the University will be moving to a 'more sophisticated system' based on a data warehousing approach. At the time of the audit training on the new system was about to commence for staff of Partner Colleges as well as for internal University staff.

97   The current version of the digest sent to Partner Colleges includes data for all eight colleges in the partnership. This has the advantage of permitting college managers to make inter-college comparisons of parameters such as retention rates; however, the data is

very extensive and not presented in a particularly 'user-friendly' manner. At present the system does not cover the Full-Cost Partnerships, and while there is an expressed intention to extend at least partial coverage to this area in the future the University recognises that issues such as training present problems, particularly where overseas partners are concerned.

98   The Institutional Audit report recommended that the University should address the 'considerable variation' in the detail of statistical analysis carried out by schools in their APRDs. The University has responded by providing more detailed guidance as to what is expected from schools, and this has been extended to cover the AIRs provided by Partner Colleges. Very helpful Guidance Notes are now attached to the template for Partner College AIRs. In contrast, the corresponding template for full-cost multidisciplinary partners does not include a requirement for any kind of statistical analysis.

99   Analysis and comment on statistical data on CP has until recently been the province of the schools with little central scrutiny of separate CP data taking place. However, ACC recently requested the provision of summary data for its February 2006 meeting, on the basis of which it will make a report to AC. The minutes of this meeting indicate that ACC has a number of concerns. For example, the timing of issue of the final version of the statistical data is linked to the annual Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) submission date of 1 December which creates difficulties in the timely preparation of reports. It is suggested that in future, reports should be based on preliminary data, which could be issued somewhat earlier in the academic cycle. The minutes also suggest that further discussion needs to take place to determine the appropriate location of responsibility within the central structures of the University for a full analysis of statistical data relating to all CP, both full-cost and Partner Colleges.

100 The CPSED, while indicating that the University recognises the need to move forward in the provision and central scrutiny of data,

and is taking appropriate action, does not explicitly offer a view as to the effectiveness of the current arrangements. Discussion by the audit team with relevant staff, both within the University and in partner institutions, suggests an awareness that, while systems in this area are definitely improving, there is considerable work still to be done, particularly in relation to the provision of data for Full-Cost Partnerships.

101 The audit team examined a number of reports which included, or offered the opportunity for, an element of statistical analysis, including a Partner College AIR, individual programme AMRs, school ARPDs, and the overview of Partner College AIRs prepared by the EPU. The individual AMRs contained little or no statistical analysis; indeed, the template for the AMR misleadingly requests 'Commentary (not statistical analysis) upon student progression and attainment'. Consideration of the data in both the AIR and the overview report was more descriptive than analytical, and it was not clear to the team how analysis of the data translated into action at a local level.

102 In terms of the accuracy of the data, the audit team was informed that there were difficulties in ensuring that data held centrally was up-to-date, since the University relied upon the partner institution to maintain duplicate copies of all information, and to keep the University informed, for example when students' personal data changed. A number of 'audits' of University and college data sources, carried out over the academic year, are intended to bring to light any discrepancies and to enable reconciliation to take place.

103 The audit team concluded that the provision and use of admission, progression, completion and assessment information is adequate to meet basic information requirements. However, the team consider it desirable for the University to continue with planned developments in this area, in order to ensure that the improved provision of statistical information is rolled out across all types of CP and that the data is used effectively to inform the management of quality and standards.

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

104 The CPSED stated that the assurance of CP teaching staff on the programmes and levels allocated to them 'is essentially an ongoing-process'. Staff CVs are scrutinised as part of the approval and periodic review processes. Full-Cost Partnerships proposing to deliver Level 3 or postgraduate courses 'will normally be subject to additional scrutiny for their institutional capacity for teaching at these levels', and more recently a protocol has been developed to encompass non-specialist Partner Colleges wishing to teach at Level 3. The University expects to be notified by means of the link tutor in advance of any changes in teaching staff, especially programme leaders, and a CV should be submitted for approval to the head of school prior to appointment. More routine monitoring of staff turnover is achieved through the AMR, the AIR and the ARPD. In addition the link tutor has a role in monitoring ongoing staffing arrangements.

105 While formal appraisal of staff is the responsibility of the partner institution, as part of the approval process the University requires a system to be in place. Locally operated staff appraisal systems are used to inform the University of CP staff development needs. Key to this process is the link tutor, the AMR and, where relevant, the partner's AIR. For Partner Colleges EPU produce a Staff Development Programme from an analysis of needs identified in AIRs which has been well received by the University and the Partner Colleges who welcomed the level of engagement they had had in developing the programme.

106 The audit team learnt that consistent reporting of staff changes in a sector characterised by high levels of staff turnover is not easy for the University to maintain. However, the team saw evidence that the University is monitoring staffing issues in Partner College CP through LEAP, and is continuing to enhance its management of staffing in CP.

107 The audit team saw and heard evidence of a wide variety of staff development activity available to the range of staff engaged in the delivery and support of HE in partner institutions. Provision may be curriculum focussed for programme teams facilitated by link tutors and University teaching staff, related to student administration, for example Banner Web, or for support staff. It may comprise meetings of specific groups of colleagues, for example the Partnership Planning Group who meet regularly to share and enhance practice on particular issues on a reciprocal basis. Partner College librarians meet termly with the team which provides Off-Campus Services, Contact and Remote Support (OSCARS) and members of the Information and Library Services (ILS) staff. The team heard and read that joint curriculum activity including cross-moderation is regarded as an effective means of staff development. The team also saw extensive evidence of genuine partnership, with the University welcoming the input of staff in partner institutions in a number of ways. At the highest strategic level this is demonstrated in the Partner College network through the thrice-yearly meetings of the Principals' Strategic Planning Meetings. An elected member of the Partner College network sits on AC. In addition the team saw evidence of regular meetings between the senior management teams in Partner Colleges and their School counterparts, and Partner College membership of some school Learning and Quality Committees. Schools with larger CP have established an annual 'executive meeting' attended by HE coordinators across its CP with the aim to share practice and plan for the future. Similarly, some schools with large international provision organise conferences and events to enable colleagues to meet and share practice and new developments. PCET regularly holds professional development conferences to address curriculum development and enhancement issues. At the operational level the team saw and heard examples of teaching exchanges, and jointly run development workshops as well as staff shadowing and joint bid-writing. In addition, the University Staff Development Focus Group facilitates access by staff in partner institutions to postgraduate or specialist qualifications offered within the University portfolio.

108 An overview of staff development in CP is presented to ACC through the summary report of the AIRs published by EPU and from an analysis of the CP section of school ARPDs. The team noted that while this will provide information as to the increasing diversity of staff development activity available, it does not indicate the level of participation and thus the potential for enhancement of quality and standards may be reduced.

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

109 A desk-based study on blended learning in the PCET network provided an insight into the long-standing arrangements provided for students in this network. Extensive support is provided through OSCARS, including the On-Line Campus (OLC), a postal book service, off-campus access wherever possible to electronic journals and databases, and a journal-article photocopying service. Students can also register for the UK Libraries Plus scheme and the SCONUL Vacation scheme. Tutor time is allocated to each student based on the number of courses they are taking at any one time, as well as three study days at Greenwich spread over the year. The OLC is virtual learning environment (VLE)-like software and includes a discussion forum, e-resource centre, real time chat room, and e-administration centre. Help is available from OSCARS in person, by telephone, or email. All students can access their grades through the University's VLE.

110 This approach to blended learning used by the PCET network is grounded in the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05. The e-Learning Strategy, ratified by AC on 1 March 2006, adopts an e-Learning 'fan'. This provides a new definition of blended learning that has been adopted by the University. Full roll-out of this will take some time for the University, but it

is acknowledged that the work in the PCET network is using many of the facilities that are yet to be used by the rest of the University.

111 The University has devoted much time and effort into discussion of the Code of practice regarding distance learning in both old and revised versions. Internal and external discussion of Part B of the revised Code has delayed full mapping of this on to provision. The team, however, saw much evidence of necessary activities to ensure that the learning opportunities offered to students in the PCET network are satisfactory, and appropriate for study leading to the award. In particular, the documentation for PCET and the ARPD for Architecture and Construction regarding overseas distance learning programmes provided evidence of thorough cross-moderation in these types of CP.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

112 The University's approach to the provision of learning resources for CP students is to take account of the nature and extent of learning resource provision within the partner institution. The CPSED stated that the University's aim is not to offer an 'equivalence of learning resources' for students in CP and on-campus provision but what is important is that a partner institution 'is able to offer a comparable level of provision, albeit of a different nature'.

113 As part of the approval process for a prospective partner a review of resources is conducted by a senior manager who prepares a report in which specific comment is required on the availability and character of learning resources for students. Satisfactory institutional resource provision is an essential precondition of academic approval. The agreed responsibility for provision of learning resources by the University and the new partner and entitlements of students are then defined in the Memorandum of Agreement. The programme approval process specifically considers the availability of appropriate resources for that particular programme and programme

approval will be conditional on provision of appropriate resources by the partner institution. Threshold requirements for staffing and library access have been developed for Off Campus Delivery at Level 3 and M level. Threshold criteria for programmes below Level 3 have not been articulated in this way and decisions regarding the adequacy of resources are the responsibility of validating panels on the basis of information provided.

114 AMRs, ARPDs and AIRs all provide commentary on learning resource issues for consideration and discussion in schools. Ongoing monitoring of learning resources provided by partner institutions includes assessment of library, computing facilities and any specialist resources. In terms of the library the stock of books and journals, opening hours, access for disabled students, availability and access to electronic materials and the acquisition process for updating book stock are assessed. The quantity and quality of hardware and software information technology (IT) resources and access to these are also evaluated. Link tutors maintain a watching brief over resource provision through their regular visits to partner institutions and are asked to comment on any resource issues in their reports. Monitoring of resources also takes place at periodic review when review panels are required to consider the whole range of resources available to students. Reporting at institutional level is through the annual summary of AIRs prepared by LEAP which reports back on capital funding expenditure by Partner Colleges.

115 To help off-campus students and staff in accessing support in the use of University library and computing resources and the University's VLE the University has recently established OSCARS). Developed from a resource to support PCET students, the aim of OSCARS is to provide, 'as far as is possible, an equivalence of service with on-campus users'. It seeks to provide off campus students with a point of contact for support in the use of, and information about, the library and computing resources and services available to

them. Dedicated web-pages have been created to provide information about resources and services with a particular emphasis on the promotion of electronic resources. OSCARS uses on-line help services to support users with the 'knowledge base' on the web pages providing out of hours assistance. OSCARS staff have worked to promote the service and much progress has been made, for example procedures are now in place with administrative staff for the creation and dissemination of Athens accounts. The very well developed links between Partner College librarians and the OSCARS team have been a critical factor in the extended role of OSCARS. As well as regular termly meetings, an Annual Training Day and visits to Partner College libraries, OSCARS staff attend Partner College library induction sessions to promote and explain the service and update on new ILS developments. OSCARS and the Partner College Librarians are currently working on the joint development of an on-line information skills module which will be available to all CP students and staff. Students (and staff) spoke enthusiastically about access to the University's electronic library resources and the excellent level of support provided by OSCARS across the full range of CP.

116 The audit team heard and read evidence of genuine partnership working between the University and its partner institutions in relation to learning resource provision. For example the University has made available a proportion of capital funding to its partners to determine the most appropriate learning resource investment to support the delivery of HE in FE particularly in respect of its growing portfolio of Foundation Degrees. Partners are required to report back on the impact of this funding through the AIR which will be reviewed by the University in the context of the summary AIR Report presented to ACC. The team also heard and read of examples of partners preparing funding bids jointly with the University. The team heard that partners greatly value working as equal partners with the University in this way.

117 The audit team gained insight into CP students' experience of learning resources through a number of meetings and reading the minutes of programme committee meetings. The main issues arising for students varied but the most commonly expressed concern was ready access to appropriate quiet study space. Students in Partner Colleges were aware of their entitlement to utilise the University's library and IT facilities but this opportunity was taken up mainly by those in closest proximity to one of the University campuses. The opportunity to use these resources alongside campus based students added significantly to Partner College students' perception of their HE experience.

118 The audit team heard and saw evidence that schools can be robust in requiring compliance with programme conditions relating to resources. A protracted debate between the school, the University and the partner over responsibility for additional specialist resources required to deliver a new Level 3 programme illustrates the lack of clarity that currently exists, in spite of recent amendments to the Memorandum of Agreement template. The team also saw examples which led it to conclude that at programme/school level reporting processes are appropriate to enable the school to monitor the quality of learning resources available to students. ACC receives the annual summary of AIRs and ARPDs (Collaborative Sections) but the reports have little analysis relating to student learning resources.

119 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to assuring the quality of learning resources provision through institutional, and programme approval processes and ongoing monitoring was being implemented at school level, but was unclear about the locus of responsibility for oversight of learning resources within the University. The team considered that the support provided to all off-campus students by OSCARS was a feature of good practice and saw evidence of effective partnership working in managing learning resources. However, the University's may want to ensure that it has robust systems

in place to determine and monitor resource thresholds for CP at all levels to assure the provision of appropriate learning resources.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

120 Scrutiny of the appropriateness of academic and personal support available to students is a requirement of the approval process for new partner institutions and new programmes in new or existing partnerships. The organisation of academic guidance and personal support to students in CP varies according to the type of provision, and the level of responsibility is detailed in the Memorandum of Agreement. In Teaching Centres partner institutions are expected to provide the primary means of academic and pastoral support. Students can obtain information about additional support available to them from the University by accessing the University's Student Centre On-line Web pages where there is a dedicated Partner College site directing students to Campus and electronic based resources. The details are also reproduced in a hard copy leaflet, Partner College Students Services for Students. In Learner Support Centres support is provided by both University staff and by staff at the partner institution. At Administrative Support Centres students get support predominantly from University staff with the partner tending only to provide advice on accessing the University's support services. Link tutors provide another means of academic and pastoral support for CP students. This may be available directly, for example by holding information workshops on progression routes and entry criteria, organising visits to University campuses, or indirectly whereby Link tutors signpost students to appropriate University services for academic or pastoral support.

121 Feedback on academic and pastoral support in CP is achieved through link tutor reports, AMRs and ARPDs which report on issues and proposed actions to SLQCs. LEAP includes these areas in its Annual Summary of Partner College AIRs which is presented to ACC.

ACC also receive a summary of ARPD reports relating to CP and together these provide institutional oversight.

122 Suspected academic offences and appeals all come under the jurisdiction of the University while more local matters are left, initially at least, for the partner to deal with. Resolving student complaints may involve partners and ultimately the student has recourse to the University's formal complaint procedures. Clearer communication with respect to processes and locus of responsibility for complaints and appeals was recommended to the University in the QAA Bahrain overseas audit report(2005). The CPSED outlined the University's response which has included improved accessibility to the Student Affairs web pages.

123 The audit team learnt that students are made aware of the support available and the means of accessing it through a number of processes including student handbooks, induction, from programme leaders, and from link tutors. The team heard from CP students that they were clear about, and satisfied with the range and effectiveness of support services available to them through their College, and how to access them should they need to. Not all were aware of the dedicated University Student Services website signposting the additional support available to them.

124 The audit team found academic and pastoral support for students in CP effective. The team saw and heard evidence of genuine partnership working in this area with mutual support and sharing of knowledge and expertise between specialists in the University and colleagues in CP aimed at enhancing student services and information. The team also saw and heard evidence of the valuable contribution made by University link tutors to the academic support of students in CP, and evidence of monitoring of academic and student support by schools as part of the reporting cycle. The University is made aware of issues through ACCs receipt of the annual Summary of AIRs prepared by LEAP and the consolidation of extracts from collaborative sections of ARPDs.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

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

125 The CPSED outlined the main forms of information provision for CP students as programme handbooks, the University website, and the prospectus. Memorandums of agreement require partner institutions to obtain permission for the use of the University's name or logo and there is a policy for monitoring of partner publicity at several levels. It also identified the need for timely and accurate flow of information relating to CP into the Marketing section of the Development and Communications Office to ensure currency of information in terms of new and discontinued partnerships and programmes.

126 In its meetings with students from partner institutions the audit team heard that the information provided to them was appropriate and reliable. The team also read the minutes of a number of programme committees and saw nothing in these to disagree with the comments it heard from students.

127 The CPSED acknowledged that although some sample checking of websites and documentation occurs, this was not foolproof. However, APSC had recently determined that misrepresentation by existing partners should be one reason for proposing discontinuation of a collaborative partnership and the audit team saw evidence that such misrepresentation had recently been one of the reasons for discontinuing a partnership. Meetings with staff during the audit visit confirmed that many different avenues were followed to try to ensure that published information was accurate, and that checks were still undertaken after the discontinuation of a partnership to check that the University's name was not still being used in publicity.

128 The appendix of the QAH concerned with monitoring partner institutions publicity and promotional material was being revised at the time of the audit visit. The revisions included amending memorandums of agreement and emphasising the overall responsibility of the host school and its collaboration committee for monitoring publicity and promotional material, broadening the scope of sample checks by the Marketing Office, and clarifying the role of the link tutor as one of several sources of monitoring. In future, link tutors and the Marketing Office would have access to LEAP's CP database. The audit team heard that the University would be consulting with the Head of Marketing before revisions to the appendix to the QAH and the memorandum of agreements were finalised.

129 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to the monitoring of partner institutions' publicity and promotional material and of its own material related to CP was adequate, and that CP students' experience of the information was positive. The team welcomed the University's plans to simplify the locus of responsibility for monitoring CP information.

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

130 The CPSED stated that at the outset of the University's preparations to meet the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) requirements, it was considered that publication of University strategies and review reports presented no real difficulties apart from the need, in the latter, for some adjustments to pro formas and the provision of guidance for their completion.

131 The CPSED noted that the quantitative information on the HERO website is generated either from the University's Student Return or from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey submitted annually to the HESA. Prior to submission, the data contained in these mandatory submissions

must pass a series of quality checks by PAS where missing and unexpected values are flagged for the University to review and where necessary, modify. The CPSED stated that the University 'is fully compliant with TQI requirements, and has used these requirements to enhance its own monitoring systems'.

132 After some internal deliberation it became University policy that, in the interests of transparency and the sector concerns about the potential for diluting external examiners' reports, each external examiner would be requested to complete a summary of his/her report which would be uploaded to the TQI site without any 'intervention' by the University. It has subsequently been acknowledged by the University that, where a programme is offered by more than one partner institution, external examiners' reports do not always explicitly differentiate between the various partners at present. The audit team learnt that following a recommendation from LQC, the external examiners' reporting pro forma has been amended so that external examiners will now be required to distinguish between individual partner institutions and the University.

133 The University has reflected on its practice with regard to the content of award certificates in light of the overseas quality audit report University and the Microcenter Institute of Technology, Bahrain (2005), and mindful of its partners' views, to determine that all University certificates will carry information about the existence of the transcript in an identical fashion but using larger print than before. Memoranda of agreement now state that the University is responsible for issuing award certificates and these make reference to transcripts which are supplied as supporting documentation for the award.

134 The audit team reviewed a number of aspects of the University's TQI submission, and considered that, when summaries were used, they reflected internal documentation seen by the team. The team considered that the University had been careful and scrupulous in its approach to meeting the TQI requirements, and had used the requirement to review and

enhance some of its internal processes. The team welcomed the University's decision to ask external examiners to differentiate their comments across partners wherever possible.

Findings

Findings

135 A collaborative provision audit of the University of Greenwich (the University) was undertaken from 20 to 24 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.

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

136 The University has three main types of collaborative provsion (CP): the Partner College network, Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) and full-cost collaborations both in the UK and overseas. Each partner institution is designated as a Teaching Centre, a Learner Support Centre or an Administrative Support Centre which also identifies the perceived level of risk associated with that partner. The highest level of risk is associated with Teaching Centres whereby all learning facilities are delegated to the partner. Some full-cost (see paragraph 28 above) and most Partner College collaborations are in this category. Less risky are links operating as Learner Support Centres where the University prepared or approved the course materials and its staff are usually involved in the assessment and often in the teaching. The PCET Network and some full-cost collaborations fall into this category. Least risk is attached to links operating as Administrative Support Centres where teaching is undertaken by University staff and the partner provides only local facilities and administrative support. This category is now of limited significance as its sole member is being phased out.

137 The quality assurance framework for programme approval, monitoring and external examining is the same for collaborative as for internal provision. The resulting reports receive separate consideration. Thus the school ARPDs contain a separate section on CP, there is a separate analysis of external examiner reports relating to CP and oversight from school and University committees.

138 Schools responsibility has formally been devolved for most quality assurance matters including the approval and review of the majority of internal, and some low-risk CP programmes; the formal monitoring of all programmes; management of the assessment cycle; appointing and responding to external examiners; responding to student feedback; maintaining links with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), where applicable; ensuring adherence to the Academic Infrastructure, and producing an Annual Reporting and Planning Document (ARPD) which includes a subsection on CP. For each of the main types of CP there is a Guide which clearly outlines the responsibilities of schools and partner institutions in the management of CP. The team noted as a feature of good practice in relation to genuine partnership working, for example, the Principals' Strategic Planning Meetings, joint bidding for grants, representation by Partner Colleges Network on Academic Council (AC) and by Partner Colleges on some Sector Skills Council (SCCs).

139 The recently created Division of Learning Enhancement, Access and Partnership (LEAP) is responsible for providing support for all CP partnerships. LEAP is divided into a number of units: continuing the role of its predecessor in Division of External and Combined Studies (DECS), the Partnership Unit, the Educational Partnerships Unit (EPU) has, in conjunction with the host school, responsibility for liaison with regional Partner Colleges. The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) stated that Learning and Quality Unit (LQU), has the responsibility to 'ensure the development, dissemination and implementation of policies, procedures and good practice in relation to learning and quality and to monitor the

effectiveness of University-wide quality assurance procedures and systems across ALL of the University's provision'. The audit team heard much positive comment from staff in partner institutions about the creation of LEAP, but was not clear as to whether its role in the management of standards and quality of CP was primarily supportive or whether it had a more proactive function.

140 The audit team saw evidence of much good work in the management of standards and quality by central units, but noted a number of instances where it was not clear as to where in the University responsibility for a particular aspect of quality assurance lay. For example, the team found it difficult to ascertain precisely at what point a newly developed programme was 'signed off' as having met all the conditions of approval, and therefore permitted to recruit students. The team considered that this has the potential to put standards and or quality at risk and thus advises the University to further clarify the locus of responsibility for decision-making within the University on issues related to CP.

141 A key role in managing the quality of the student experience is played by the link tutors. Their role is challenging in that it involves both development and monitoring, supporting and checking. With external examiners, they have developed appropriate assessment practices and have also contributed greatly to developments in partner institutions. They monitor resources, assessment outcomes and student evaluations. They meet directly with CP students. All the evidence suggests that the link tutor system has contributed greatly to supporting and developing partnership activity. There was evidence that they were well motivated and given an allowance of time for the work by their schools. The audit team considered that the role of link tutors in supporting and developing partnership activity is a feature of good practice.

142 The CPSED summarised the recommendations of the 2004 institutional audit report as a suggestion that 'devolution

had resulted in some lack of coherence, in duplication of effort or in relatively labour intensive processes'. In 2004 the University received a paper which essentially summarised the state of the University's CP at the time, and gave little consideration of how the University would grow its CP. In 2005, in articulating its Collaborative Provision Strategy, it began explicitly to consider the issue of how it intended to develop its CP portfolio in the future. The audit team considered that the Collaborative Provision Strategy was something of a wasted opportunity for the University to tackle the recommendations contained in the institutional audit report and would advise the University to further develop its CP strategy to address the management challenges of a growing portfolio.

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

143 The University's approach to programme approval, monitoring and review in CP is characterised by delegation of responsibility to schools, and by variations in process depending on the nature of the partnership, with developments involving new partners attracting more intensive scrutiny than those with established partners, particularly members of the Partner College Network.

144 A separate and defined process (known as 'authorisation') covers the decision to allow a proposal to proceed to development. This must be carried out before any provision with the partner is approved. Approval processes for new provision, while normally arranged by the school in question, follow a standard University model, and are carried out by a panel with a chair drawn from outside the school. External academic and, where appropriate, practitioner input is also required.

145 Ongoing monitoring of programmes is primarily the responsibility of the partner, and is reported to the University through the annual review cycle. This involves the

submission of an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for each programme, following a University template. Where a partner has multidisciplinary links with the University, an Annual Institutional Report (AIR) is also required. These reports are received both by the school and LEAP respectively, and overviews are produced by LEAP and reported to Academic Collaboration Committee (ACC) and AC. Schools also produce ARPDs which include a specific section on CP. AMRs, AIRs and ARPDs include sections on CP staff development issues and provision of learning resources and academic and pastoral support.

146 The periodic review process is not strictly defined, though all CP should be subject to review at least once every five years, or more frequently if, for example, a programme approval panel recommends a shorter interval. The team followed the reporting up of a number of periodic reviews and, hindered somewhat by the poor quality of minuting of consideration of the reviews by some school committees, learnt that in a number of cases the interval between reviews of collaborative programmes either exceeded the stated five-year limit, or had been subject to modification without a clear reason for doing so. The school holds delegated responsibility for determining the precise form of the review, which may be similar to an initial approval, or may follow a 'lighter touch' model, and should be based on discussions with LQU. However, LQU's advice is neither mandatory nor binding.

147 Extensive documentation, including the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) and specific guides for Partner Colleges, Full-Cost Partnerships and the PCET Network, is provided to support quality processes. A range of templates covers not only programme approval and review activity, but also aspects such as reporting on link tutor visits. Clear mappings of the respective responsibilities of the partner, the relevant school and the University (through LEAP) are also available, and are well understood and adhered to by partners.

148 Link tutors play a key role in supporting the quality processes, particularly in monitoring

and review, visiting partner institutions at least twice per year, and providing advice on the preparation of review documents. The audit team was informed in discussions with staff at partner institutions that link tutors performed their role very effectively. They are regarded as instrumental in fostering the spirit of collegiality which characterises the University's partnerships.

149 The University regards student representation and feedback as essential to the enhancement of its academic provision and acknowledges the value of both informal and formal mechanisms for gaining student feedback. The University stipulates that a system of student representation is mandatory in the partner and expects partner institutions to hold regular programme meetings with student representatives in attendance. Student representatives may also be invited to attend HE Forum Meetings in Partner Colleges.

150 The University is pragmatic in implementing these requirements however and is prepared to recognise 'equivalent' processes already operating in its partner institutions rather than requiring partners to implement University systems. It acknowledges that student malaise and cultural differences may make full student representation in management processes difficult and therefore places much reliance on 'active dialogue' between students and programme teams through informal channels although link tutors are required to meet regularly with students to monitor students' views. Formally gathered student feedback is recorded in programme and institutional monitoring documentation. However, the team considered that the lack of a standardised approach to student feedback may reduce the robustness of evidence to inform institutional oversight of student issues. Moreover, the process of reporting back any response to students is not systematic.

151 Processes for collecting feedback from graduates and employers are not formalised and in general is available through a diversity of methods both formal and informal. Employers are routinely members of approval and review panels for vocational awards including the

increasing portfolio of Foundation Degrees which may be designed as a result of employer feedback from Employer Forums. Employers support curriculum delivery and assessment, collaborate with programme teams to provide work based learning, and engage with partner institutions at a variety of levels.

152 The University has established Off-Campus Service'S Contact and Remote Support (OSCARS) to support off-campus students and staffing in accessing support in the use of University library and computing resources and the virtual learning environment (VLE). The audit team learnt of initiatives to promote OSCARS in partner institutions, and heard widespread support from both CP students and staff. The team concluded that OSCARS was a feature of good practice.

154 The appropriateness of academic and personal support available to students is scrutinised during institutional approval, and is monitored through AMRs, AIRs and ARPDs and by link tutors. Through its analysis of the AIRs, EPU in LEAP produces for ACC a summary of academic support and guidance issues affecting Partner College CP and provides a staff development programme for the Network. The audit team considered that the University has effective processes in place to monitor the effectiveness of academic and pastoral support for CP students, and that in this area it worked in partnership with partner institutions.

155 Overall, the audit team concluded that broad confidence can be placed in the University's ongoing processes for assuring the quality of provision in its collaborative partnerships. The team considered that the role played by link tutors in these processes constitutes a feature of good practice. However, the team found a number of instances where the operation of periodic review has been somewhat imprecise and advises the University to clarify its policy in all types of CP with a view to ensuring robust central oversight.

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

156 The University has a number of mechanisms for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through CP including programme approval and review processes, including external involvement, accreditation by PSRBs and appointment of external examiners. From the documentation seen the audit team considered that the two tier examination board system worked well and the Academic Regulations were both comprehensive and effective.

157 The audit team learnt that the programme approval process can sometimes operate to a compressed time scale, and in one instance seen by the team that not all conditions of approval had been signed off prior to registration of the first students. The team also was unclear as to when programme approval was officially completed, or on what authority a chair of an approval panel might sign off a new programme. Given the importance of programme approval to the maintenance of standards the team advises the University to clarify the locus of responsibility for decision-making within the University on this issue.

158 Subject specialists external to the University are routinely used in both programme approval and programme review of collaborative programmes. However, the audit team did notice some lingering confusion regarding the definition of externality, and whether this need necessarily be from outside the University. The team also noted that partner approval does not necessarily require an external participant.

159 The University also uses admission, progression, completion and assessment information to assure standards of CP awards, and the audit team concluded that this meets basic information requirements. However, the team consider it desirable for the University to continue with planned developments in this

area, in order to ensure that the improved provision of statistical information is rolled out across all types of CP and that the data is used effectively to inform the management of quality and standards.

160 The CPSED stated that the University has a robust external examiner system and that while management of the system remained with schools, the analysis of external examiners' reports allowed the University a high degree of confidence that challenges to quality and standards go neither unnoticed nor unremedied. The audit team found ample evidence to support this confidence. The analysis of reports is thorough both at school and University level. The role played by external examiners in developing assessment practice at partner institutions guards against threats emerging and when they do, the team saw evidence that action was taken at both school and University level. The development of an overview process for analysing reports and a discontinuation protocol which can be triggered by adverse reports, is evidence that the University is continuing to develop its procedures.

161 The introduction of a web-based system for examiners to submit reports should further enhance both the communication and analysis of reports. Oversight of statistical data on progression rates is less effective but the process of cross-moderation does enable external examiners to make comparisons between internal and CP. The audit team considered the use of external examiners and their reports and the introduction of an innovative web-based reporting system to be a feature of good practice. Further safeguards are provided by the PSRB accreditation process. In the case of the home partner programme accreditation considered by the team, the process was as thorough as internal periodic review. The example of overseas partner programme accreditation justified the University's decision to develop procedures for obtaining full reports and ensuring that any University-wide issues arising are considered at that level. In the light of the overall evidence, the audit team considered that the University

has effective mechanisms for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through CP.

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

162 Programme approval for all awards including CP is dependent in part on the production of a programme specification containing learning outcomes that demonstrate engagement with The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements. As part of the approval process external assessors are required to assess the extent to which the proposed programme reflects subject benchmarks and ensure that it is appropriate to the designated level of the FHEQ. External examiners are required to make comparison with the appropriate benchmarks and the FHEQ as part of their annual report. The audit team saw evidence of the extensive use of the FHEQ and benchmarks in the approval process for programmes delivered by both UK and overseas partners, and noted that schools had undertaken extensive staff development at partner institutions to reinforce understanding of the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements.

163 The institutional audit report noted that while initial alignment with the Code of practice for the assurance of quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), published by QAA, had been achieved, the process for monitoring consistency over time was not likely to be sufficient to inhibit drift from the aligned position given the highly devolved structures in place in the University. In response LQU was auditing the distribution of responsibilities for engagement with the Code of practice and has allocated overall responsibility for the CP aspects of the Code to ACC and identified which unit was responsible for each of the Code's precepts. For many precepts, it also identified the process by which responsibility was exercised but in the case of some areas, for which schools were given responsibility, the

process was not identified. The CP audit team considered that more work was required to identify the process by which the responsibility is exercised. The University has mapped its procedures against the Code of practice and issued guidance as to responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Code. Schools and LEAP provide guidance to partners on the infrastructure. The team was satisfied that the process of programme approval and monitoring does embed the use of the framework and benchmarks. It is satisfied that although University guidance on the Code does not always identify a process by which ongoing compliance is checked, it does happen in practice.

164 The audit team was initially told that work on ensuring recognition of the revised Code of practice section on flexible and distributed learning had been 'parked', but an audit of the PCET blended learning provision during the audit visit showed that much work had been done both to assist QAA in its revision work and to implement the precepts. Overall, the team considered that the University was justified in stating that its arrangements for CP were consistent with the precepts of Section 2 of the Code.

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

165 In line with the strong partnership ethos which the audit team found to characterise the University's CP the CPSED was prepared in consultation with its partner institutions. Much of the descriptive sections of the CPSED had evidently been drawn from the QAH, and was appropriately themed. It was also adequately referenced to supporting documentation. The CPSED had embedded references to outcomes of the 2004 institutional audit and recent QAA overseas audit reports within the text and the University used the opportunity to evidence its responses in terms of enhancement of quality

systems and processes. The audit team found the use of practical examples in the CPSED helpful to their understanding of the University's and practice and would have welcomed more of these.

166 The audit team appreciated the endeavours of the CPSED to introduce and explain the taxonomy for CP, and the formal structures, values and operational processes for institutional management of the standards and quality of learning opportunities of its CP. In general the team found the University's account of its work contained in the CPSED to be frank, open and honest but descriptive rather than self-critical of its experience. Furthermore, the team received the impression, reinforced by discussion with staff during the audit visit, that some of the structures described represented a central perspective on how processes ought to operate, rather than a true reflection of the situation on the ground.

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

167 ACC has recently recommended a number of enhancements to the management of CP. It was agreed that future programme monitoring reports should be based on preliminary data and comments from external examiners as the full set of statistics was not available until later, and that the University calendar would be published earlier to enable improved scheduling of school-level discussion. Guidance notes embedded in the AMR pro forma will request critical reflection; more staff development will be provided for partner colleges; and a template will be provided for the link tutors' annual report/overview of collaborations.

168 ACC emphasised the importance of sharing good practice across schools, including an increase in the staff development activity provided for partners by both the University and schools; the commitment and active engagement of link tutors; the

establishment of SCCs; well-established cross-moderation activities; and efforts to create a sense of 'belonging' among partner students. It was noted that there had been an improvement in feedback loops as link tutors and partners gained greater access to the external examiner database and the revision of the external examiner template to require specific commentary on individual centres and/or partners.

169 Further suggestions for enhancement included: improvements in the responses to external examiners; the University to require all partners to provide details of teaching teams in June that would be in place for the forthcoming session; and student representatives to receive training, and possibly credit, for their role, acknowledging that a culturally appropriate model of student feedback may need to be negotiated for some full-cost collaborations. It is also planned to improve the institutional-level scrutiny process regarding senior manager overview of all reports relating to CP monitoring. The audit team welcomed these plans and considered that they should enhance the management of the University's CP.

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

170 The audit team noted the procedure by which information was published on the Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO) website, in particular the seamless uploading of actual external examiners' reports rather than summaries. The University is aware of the differences in visibility of collaborative partners in the different sections of the HERO website and is actively seeking to ensure their reports differentiate between partners who provide a common award.

166 From the evidence seen by the audit team and following meetings with a range of students involved in CP the audit team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the University publishes (or

authorises to be published) about the quality of the programmes offered through CP that lead to its awards and the standards of those awards.

Features of good practice

171 The team identified the following features of good practice in the University's management of quality and academic standards of its CP:

i   the role of link tutors in supporting and developing partnership activity (paragraphs 33, 55, 72, 88, 107, 114, 121, 123 and 124)

ii   the effective use made by the University of external examiner inputs, and its development of an innovative web-based reporting system (paragraph 70)

iii the genuine sense of partnership that characterises the relationship between the University and its collaborative partners (paragraphs 107 and 116), and

iv   the support provided to all off-campus students by OSCARS (paragraph 115).

Recommendations for action

172 The audit team considers it advisable that the University:

- further develop its collaborative provision strategy to address the management challenges of a growing portfolio (paragraph 23)

- clarify the locus of responsibility for decision-making within the University on issues related to collaborative provision (paragraph 38), and

- clarify the policy on periodic review in all types of collaborative provision with a view to ensuring robust central oversight (paragraph 62).

173 The audit team also considers it desirable that the University ensures:

- timely implementation across the University of the recently identified quality enhancement initiatives (paragraph 44), and

- that the improved provision of statistical information is rolled out across all types of collaborative provision and that the data is used effectively to inform the management of quality and standards (paragraph 104).

The University of Greenwich's response to the collaborative provision audit

The University welcomes the outcome of the collaborative provision audit, which confirms that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's management of academic standards and awards made through its collaborative arrangements. The report welcomes in particular the commendation in respect the genuine sense of partnership fostered by the University and its partners, the advisable and desirable recommendations and the commentary provided in the general text relating to areas where opportunities exist for the University to enhance its quality procedures. The University notes the positive comments made in respect of its innovative external examiner system, its off-campus support systems and the role of its Link Tutors in supporting partnership activity.

The timing of the audit and delivery of the draft report, combined with the desire for the University to conduct widespread discussion of the report's conclusions, entails that the main recommendations will be considered in detail commencing in the 2006-07 academic session when the University and its Partners will take appropriate action to address the formal recommendations made within the body of the report.