



## University of Bradford

### Audit of collaborative provision

April 2010

### Annex to the report

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## Introduction

An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Bradford (the University) from 26 April to 30 April 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the institution's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students through collaborative arrangements.

## Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

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

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

## Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's approach to quality enhancement of collaborative provision forms part of a wider institutional strategy. Its implementation was still at an early stage at the time of the audit visit.

## Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The University's postgraduate research framework and its implementation meet the expectations of the precepts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

## Published information

The audit team concluded that only limited reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes and permits to be published about the quality of its collaborative provision and the quality of the collaborative awards.

## Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the active and effective contribution of course coordinators to sustaining collaborative partnerships (paragraph 24)
- the creation of DevelopMe as an innovative online resource to support collaborative provision students' engagement with the University and with one another (paragraph 111)
- the introduction of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice by distance learning for staff in partner organisations (paragraph 134)
- the introduction of an annual monitoring review process for postgraduate research programmes (paragraph 159).

## Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers essential:

- implement a systematic process for ensuring that all contractual agreements for collaborative provision are kept current, up to date and accurate (paragraph 41)
- review its approach to the management of dual awards, including the process for approval, to ensure that they meet the requirements of the FHEQ and that certificates issued by the University for dual awards state explicitly and unambiguously the programme of study which the student has completed (paragraph 56).

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- develop a systematic process for periodic review of partner institutions' capacity to support delivery of University of Bradford awards (paragraph 37)
- strengthen structures and processes for institutional oversight of quality management within the University's system of shared responsibility between schools and institutional bodies for collaborative provision (paragraph 42)
- ensure that the academic standards of joint degrees meet the University's own expectations and those of the FHEQ (paragraph 69)
- ensure that its review of external examining takes full account of collaborative provision, with specific reference to consistent follow-up of external examiners' recommendations and to their attendance at Assessment and Examination Boards (paragraph 86)
- establish robust arrangements for institutional oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes to ensure that appropriate decisions are made on entry (paragraph 121)
- put in place an effective system for approving and monitoring partner publicity for collaborative courses leading to a University of Bradford award (paragraph 162)
- ensure that students studying collaborative courses receive appropriate and accurate information about complaints and appeals procedures (paragraph 164).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- expedite the introduction, for the use of all parties, of the University's proposed guide to the respective responsibilities of the University and of partner organisations in the management of policies and processes relevant to collaborative provision (paragraph 32)
- ensure that appropriate staff and students from partner organisations are more actively involved in the periodic review of courses (paragraph 65)
- develop a robust and timely reporting mechanism for course coordinators to assure the University about the quality of the student experience (paragraph 97).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 The University was established by Royal Charter in 1966, having developed from the Bradford Institute of Technology, founded in 1957. The Institute succeeded Bradford Technical College (est 1882), which had its roots in the mid-nineteenth century Bradford Schools of Weaving, Design and Building. The Briefing Paper stated that the University has a background of vocational education which has influenced its objectives and mission since its incorporation. The ethos of applied, interdisciplinary education and research underpins the culture of the University. The University's mission is to provide 'high quality teaching informed by internationally recognised research and knowledge transfer, which enables students to achieve their educational aspirations and staff to enhance their careers within an inclusive, supportive and sustainable environment'.

2 Institutional development is guided by the Corporate Strategy, Making Knowledge Work 2009-2014. It outlines the University's vision, mission, values, strategic aims and corporate objectives. It also contains measurable targets and sets out the enabling strategies that are intended to support their achievement. The Corporate Strategy makes little specific reference to collaborative provision, but part of the vision is to establish wider collaboration with cities, the region and nationally. The Briefing Paper stated that the University's approach to collaborative provision is informed by the Corporate Strategy and the Academic Policy Framework (approved by Senate in 2009), and, for overseas provision, by the draft Internationalisation Strategy. The Briefing Paper also stated that, following ratification by Senate, a consolidated Collaborative Provision Strategy would be prepared. The audit team was told that the current Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2005-2009 has been extended until the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2009-2014 is approved by Senate.

3 The University offers a diverse portfolio of named awards including continuing professional development courses, Foundation Degrees, undergraduate degrees, postgraduate master's and doctoral awards. The University has a wide range of collaborative partners, including UK further education colleges, and overseas higher education (HE) institutions, both public and private. Most of the University's collaborative provision consists of franchised programmes, which share the aims and learning outcomes of the equivalent programmes delivered at Bradford and offer the same curriculum; the syllabus is modified only to accommodate appropriate local legal and cultural differences. Other categories include validation; supported distance learning; joint awards and dual certification (awards). The Briefing Paper stated that the key aims of the collaborative partnerships are to 'support and enhance the development of HE provision through capacity-building and providing new study opportunities, widen participation in higher education and facilitate the development of high level skills [and] enhance the University's reputation for high quality teaching and research'. It also stated that collaborative partnerships have a key role in achieving the University's commitment to inclusion, diversity and widening participation, 'aiming to meet the needs of students who may not have the opportunity to pursue a degree course'.

4 At the time of the audit, the University currently had 18,542 students enrolled on its programmes. Thirty per cent of students were studying for University awards delivered in collaboration with a partner institution; 99 per cent (5,826) of these students were studying at overseas partner institutions. The University has 21 partner organisations, 12 of which are located overseas. Four of the overseas partners are Associate Institutes.

5 The University has seven schools. The School of Management and the School of Engineering, Design and Technology have over two decades of collaborative experience. All other schools are now also involved in collaborations. Schools are being encouraged to collaborate with the same, established, partners. Associate Institutes, all of which are

overseas partners, are described in the Briefing Paper as 'primary partners', with whom 'a range of collaborative activities' may be undertaken, possibly including joint research bids and the enrolment of partner staff onto University postgraduate research programmes. In general, Associate Institutes are subject to the same quality assurance processes as other partner institutions.

6 As stated in the Briefing Paper, the University has a highly devolved system for the quality management of collaborative provision, operating a model of shared responsibility between the schools and centre.

## **The information base for the Audit of collaborative provision**

7 The University provided a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the quality and standards of its collaborative provision. All documents referenced in the Briefing Paper were made available electronically via the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Other documentation requested by the audit team was provided in hard copy and also made available electronically. The team received hard copies of extensive materials regarding the four partner institutions visited. The team is grateful for the willing cooperation of the partners concerned.

8 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit in December 2007
- the report of the previous Audit of collaborative provision in July 2006
- relevant integrated quality and enhancement review reports published by QAA since the previous Institutional audit
- the overseas audit report for the University of Bradford and the Institute for Integrated Learning in Management (India), June 2009
- the 2006 Special review of research degree programmes (unpublished)
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs))
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students at the University and visits to partner institutions.

## **Developments since the last audit**

9 The 2006 collaborative provision audit commended a number of features of good practice including the operation of the revised committee system, which ensured that senior committees could be satisfied that delegated responsibilities were being discharged effectively by departments, centres and programme teams. The present audit team concluded that with respect to the management of collaborative provision this strength had diminished and that institutional oversight of delegated responsibilities needed to be strengthened (see paragraph 42). The audit commended other features which remain positive aspects including the associate lecturer scheme, availability of learning resources on the VLE, and strong identification of students studying in collaborative provision with the University. Other features that were previously commended still remain features of the University's approach including the Course Approval and Review Team (CART) and the allocation of time to course coordinators. The School of Management's Advisory Board remains in place.

10 The 2007 Institutional audit team commended the University for its partnership with the Students' Union, its approach to student engagement and support and its work in widening participation. The present audit team found that less progress had been made in terms of student engagement with respect to collaborative provision, but noted the Students'

Union's commitment to increase engagement with students in partner institutions, and the work being done in Pakistan to enhance opportunities for students there to participate in higher education. The present team has commended the University on examples of its innovative approaches to student engagement (see paragraph 110) which build on the strengths noted in the Institutional audit. The 2007 audit also commended the University on the use of the balanced scorecard method: the present audit team did not observe the use of this tool in relation to collaborative provision.

11 The 2009 India audit commended two features, the role of the course coordinator (sometimes referred to as the director of studies) and the close working relationship with the partner institution. The present audit team also recognised the key role played by course coordinators in sustaining collaborative partnerships (see paragraph 24).

12 The Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC) agreed an action plan with the Academic Policy Committee (APC) in 2007 to address the three advisable and three desirable recommendations as well as issues identified in the text of the collaborative provision audit report. The University provided the audit team with an update on progress that had been made. With respect to the recommendations for advisable action, changes have been made to allow partner institutions to make independent comments on annual monitoring reports to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) (Learning and Teaching), and programme specifications for Foundation Degrees have been amended to clarify progression opportunities. While efforts have been made to improve guidance to schools and information available through the web, the effective and equitable representation of students studying in partner institutions remains an issue. Initiatives have been taken at a number of partners to create local opportunities for students to provide feedback. School policies on student involvement have been introduced to address the issue more generally, but the team noted these make limited reference to students in collaborative provision. Limited progress has been made with respect to the recommendations for desirable action. Students in collaborative provision are still not afforded the same level of participation in periodic reviews of provision as campus-based students (see paragraph 65). However, the Steering Group Reviewing Engagement with Students continues to address aspects of support and other arrangements for engagement with students and has fostered initiatives such as DevelopMe (see paragraph 111). The recommendation to adopt a more stringent and comprehensive approach to approving and monitoring learning support resources still remains an issue in the absence of a process for partner review (see paragraph 37).

13 The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) agreed an action plan to address the outcomes of the 2007 Institutional audit report and has reviewed annually the progress made. The 2007 report made four recommendations for advisable action. The first was to review the use of external participants in programme approval and review to ensure a balance between academic and practitioner input. This team found that external input was lacking in relation to the approval of a recent dual award (see paragraph 56). The second recommendation for advisable action related to the involvement of external examiners in assessment committees and boards of examiners. The audit team found that this remained an issue given variable attendance of external examiners at committees and boards (see paragraph 82). The third advisable recommendation related to the need to develop assessment criteria at an institutional level to ensure comparability of standards. Work has been done on this at university level, but it remains an issue in terms of collaborative provision, particularly in relation to joint degrees where the partner has a different grading system (see paragraph 69). The fourth recommendation referred to the need to specify minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards and to reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements. The present audit team concluded that this issue needed to be addressed further in relation to collaborative provision and that central oversight of local decisions and actions needed to be strengthened.

14 The recommendations for desirable action in the 2007 Institutional audit related to dissemination of good practice and institutional-level representation of research students. Both have been addressed.

15 The Briefing Paper stated that, because preparations for this audit 'began before the QAA published its June 2009 report on the University's partnership with IILM [Institute for Integrated Learning in Management]', the University 'plans to incorporate the "points for consideration" noted in the 2009 report into the action plan that follows the present audit. The 2009 overseas audit report suggested the need for a number of issues to be given further thought, including the accuracy of the online summary of the collaborative provision register; clarifying arrangements for review of Associate Institute business plans; consistent implementation of annual monitoring processes; involving partner staff and students in periodic review of provision; providing structured written feedback to collaborative provision students on their work; giving partner staff and students access to external examiners' reports; and addressing through a review various aspects of external examining. The present audit team identified similar issues and this report makes a number of recommendations for action.

16 The audit team concluded that the University in general had built on the strengths identified in the three previous audit reports in specific areas. However, it had not built successfully on the good practice identified in the 2006 collaborative provision audit report regarding the oversight of delegated powers and functions. With respect to the actions taken in response to the various recommendations made in the reports, the team concluded that, while efforts had been made to address all of the items raised at least in the 2006 and 2007 reports, a number of issues which related to the effectiveness of the University's management of academic quality and standards in collaborative provision remained at the time of the 2009 overseas audit and still remain to be resolved, and are the subject of recommendations for action in this report.

17 Since the 2006 and 2007 audits there has been no major structural change in the University. The new Corporate Strategy was adopted in 2009 and work is in progress on developing supporting strategies and plans. The University has also commenced work on the development of an Academic Policy Framework, which is intended to provide an integrated approach to quality management and to contribute to quality enhancement. In order to support this development the University has made three new appointments; namely, a Director of Learning and Teaching, a Dean of Graduate Studies and a Dean of Students. At the time of the audit visit the University regarded this initiative as work in progress. The Framework and all three posts relate to both on-campus and collaborative provision.

18 Two of the initiatives noted at the time of the 2007 audit have become operational. One is the sustainability project named Ecoversity, which impacts collaborative provision through curriculum developments. The other is Escalate, a development designed to embed employer engagement with the potential to foster new types of collaborative provision with employers as partners (see paragraph 43).

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

19 The University's approach to quality management of collaborative provision is to embed it in quality assurance systems as a whole. The Briefing Paper stated that the maintenance of standards and enhancement of quality involves 'shared responsibilities between schools and institutional bodies...monitored and evaluated by the Learning and Teaching Committee' and that 'the University's approach to collaborative provision is no different', albeit with 'due regard for...additional risks'. However, the Briefing Paper also explained that while the Corporate Strategy 2004-09 'retained a school-based and course-based focus for collaborative provision', the revised Strategy for 2009-14 seeks to

strengthen 'the strategic, institutional focus of the University's development of partnerships' with an emphasis on capacity building and on partnerships with other degree awarding bodies with whom research and knowledge transfer links, as well as collaborative teaching, can be taken forward. The Briefing Paper further acknowledged that 'having enabled schemes to grow and flourish based on the aspirations of academic schools, the University is now considering the need to move to a more institutionally strategic approach'. A discussion paper prepared by the DVC (Academic), to be presented to LTC in May 2010, proposes that, in relation to one partner with whom several schools are in partnership, there should be a designated University coordinator and a cross-school approach to programme regulations.

20 The Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) has a section dedicated to 'quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision'. The audit team found two versions of this on the University intranet but was directed to the definitive (shorter) version. This sets out the University's definitions of collaborative provision, embracing the franchise of a Bradford programme for partner delivery - the most common arrangement in practice; a 'validated award', where the partner's own programme has been deemed appropriate for a Bradford award; 'dual certification', where the programme leads to separate awards being granted by the University and the partner (dual award); and 'joint award', described as 'an arrangement whereby two or more awarding institutions provide a programme of study which leads to a single award signed by all participating institutions'. The University does not regard articulation agreements or distance learning and off-site provision, whereby delivery is solely in the hands of University staff, as collaborative provision.

21 The QAH also sets out the arrangements for annual monitoring and periodic review. As with all the University's academic provision, collaborative programmes are subject to an annual monitoring process, but whereas annual monitoring reports (AMRs) on home-based provision go only to the school concerned, those for collaborative provision are forwarded by the schools to the university-wide Annual Monitoring Team. The audit team was informed that this measure of central oversight is in recognition of the higher risks involved in collaborative provision. An annual overview of collaborative provision, AMRs is prepared by the Academic Standards and Support Unit (ASSU). Senate receives these at its June meeting for the previous academic year. Collaborative programmes also figure in periodic (five-yearly) review of academic provision (formerly known as Course Continuation Review), but normally alongside similar home-based programmes.

22 The partner approval process includes such matters as local resourcing, quality management and student support. The University does not have a distinct process for the periodic review of a partner. However, the QAH states that 'Contractual agreement review' should 'where possible...take place in conjunction with the periodic review' to ensure that contracts with collaborative partners are still fit for purpose and arrangements still financially viable.

23 The principal support department with oversight of quality management of collaborative provision is ASSU, which - in line with the 'embedded' approach - embraces partnerships within its overall work. An Academic Standards Adviser (ASA) from within ASSU is attached to each school; a further ASA has a cross-university remit to give advice specifically on collaborative provision and, for example, works with the relevant school in carrying out due diligence on prospective partners prior to submission of a new partnership proposal to CPC. However, ASSU and ASAs have limited contact with partners direct, other than participation by the ASA (Collaborative Provision) in some site visits and occasional exceptional interventions, such as a visit by the DVC (Academic) and a senior ASSU officer to resolve issues with one partner in June 2009.

24 The University's view is that the 'crucial link' with each partner is the school-based course coordinator (in some faculties the title is Director of Studies), a role specific to, and essential to, institutional arrangements for the management of collaborative provision. In discussions with the audit team, the University stressed that course coordinators were the

'bedrock' and the 'hub' of its liaison with collaborative partners. The role descriptor for a course coordinator requires at least one visit to a partner per annum, in order to meet staff and students, to give advice, guidance and feedback, to monitor recruitment, admissions and publicity handled by the partner, and to report formally to the University on any issues identified (see Section 3). The team noted the commitment of those course coordinators whom it met. Partner staff met by the team emphasised their appreciation of the active and effective contribution of course coordinators to sustaining the collaborative arrangement, through frequent email contact as well as face-to-face. The audit team considered the active and effective contribution of course coordinators to sustaining collaborative partnerships to be a feature of good practice.

25 Within the University's deliberative systems, supreme authority over collaborative provision is vested in Senate, the terms of reference of which include a responsibility 'to accept courses of study in any other institution which in the opinion of the Senate possesses the means of affording the proper instruction for such courses as equivalent to such courses of study in the University as the Senate may determine'. Staff who met with the audit team confirmed that Senate had overall authority for strategy and, ultimately, for quality assurance in this area, while operational management is vested in schools.

26 School Boards of Study receive annual monitoring reports for collaborative programmes before they are forwarded to the Annual Monitoring Team (AMT). The Boards, or other school-level committees, are also expected to receive reports from school-based course coordinators following their visits to partners. Reports of Phase II programme approval, and of periodic programme review, are also received within each school.

27 LTC reports to the Academic Strategy and Performance Committee (ASPC). In its turn, LTC has delegated authority from Senate to approve new programmes (although requests for waivers of regulations are referred to Senate), to ensure that annual monitoring and periodic review are carried out and to formulate procedures in response to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. Among matters which it recommends to Senate, rather than approves in its own right, are the formulation of regulations, the coordination of the approval of new provision, and the development of institutional strategies relating to quality assurance, quality enhancement, and all aspects of the student experience. For its part, LTC's involvement with collaborative provision is primarily through receipt of the minutes of CPC (permitting it to endorse new partnership proposals), receipt of the annual report arising from the monitoring of collaborative provision and consideration of relevant external audits.

28 CPC, chaired by the DVC (Planning and Resources), reports to LTC. It is the principal committee responsible for collaborative provision. The terms of reference of CPC include the development of policies and procedures for collaborative provision, oversight of the initial stages of partner approval (prior to consideration of the academic provision by a CART), annual review of the collaborative provision register and of partner agreements and financial schedules, and the approval of University bids for external collaborative provision funding. The minutes of CPC over the two years prior to the audit visit lack the detail necessary for certain issues to be readily understandable by someone not present. However, they showed an emphasis on the development of new provision and some consideration of financial schedules, but lacked reference to an annual review of individual partner agreements (other than Associate Institute business plans) or the collaborative provision register.

29 The audit team considered that, notwithstanding the presence as chair of a DVC both on CPC and LTC, these arrangements provide insufficient institutional oversight of both the strategic development and the operational management of collaborative provision. CPC is placed three rungs and LTC two rungs below Senate. Some schools sent no representatives to CPC throughout 2008-09. Although (since March 2010) all recommendations of LTC now go direct to Senate, as well as to ASPC, this means that Senate is not informed of collaborative developments until initial (Phase I) approval of a

partnership initiative has been granted by CPC. For example, Phase I approval of two new routes in the BSc Biomedical Sciences for delivery by an overseas partner, granted by CPC in October 2009, did not reach Senate, via the minutes of LTC, until March 2010. Approval of a new partnership with a local further education (FE) college, involving Foundation Degrees to be delivered for Bradford awards from September 2009, went through CPC in September and LTC in October 2009, but the team saw no evidence of it in the minutes of Senate up to and including March 2010 or in papers which went to Senate.

30 A review of the minutes of Senate for the two years prior to the audit suggested that, apart from receipt of the overview of annual monitoring of collaborative provision at the June meeting each year - 10 months after the end of the academic year to which the AMRs relate - there had been little discussion of specific partnership issues, other than the granting of a waiver for regulations pertinent to one collaborative programme and certain procedural matters.

31 The University's position on the formal consideration of collaborative provision is complicated by the presence alongside CPC of a parallel subcommittee of LTC, the Internationalisation Committee. Although it is clear from the minutes of this body, which is chaired by the Director of Academic Administration, that it is primarily concerned with international student recruitment and the development of a new Internationalisation Strategy, its terms of reference have twice been amended during 2009-10, first to include a duty 'to have an oversight of all University collaborative partners and to develop a strategy for future proposals' and then 'to have a strategic oversight of all international collaborative partners'. Until May 2008 this Committee reported to CPC, but after acknowledgement at that time that its reporting lines were unclear it was determined that it should henceforth report to LTC direct. Even so, the Internationalisation Committee is, like CPC, three rungs below Senate, and only since December 2009 has it had a representative of each school within its membership. The team was concerned that Senate, as the supreme deliberative body with oversight of strategic developments, was entrusting matters of critical importance to the institution to a body with which it did not have a direct reporting line.

32 While respecting the importance placed by the University on 'shared responsibility' between schools and the 'centre' for quality management of collaborative provision, the audit team noted that the University was considering the need for greater central oversight. In September 2009, LTC recommended that in terms of the quality management of collaborative provision 'it would be helpful to do more at institutional level to support schools and partner institutions and to facilitate more consistent practice' through production of a guide to the management of collaborative partnerships. In March 2010, LTC recommended to Senate that 'the University produce and publish a guide to the management of collaborative arrangements...for use at Bradford and by partner institutions'. The lack of specification as to the respective responsibilities of the University, schools and individual partner institutions, which is compounded by the generalised nature of contractual agreements between the partner and the University (see paragraph 41) and the reliance on course coordinators' reports to highlight any deficiencies (see paragraph 95), has implications for the management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The team therefore considers it desirable that the University expedite the introduction, for the use of all parties, of the University's proposed guide to the respective responsibilities of the University and of partner organisations in the management of policies and processes relevant to collaborative provision.

33 The audit team found evidence of several operational issues which arose, at least in part, from a lack of a central, coordinated approach. These included inaccurate partner websites. Responsibility for checking these is among the duties formally assigned to school-based course coordinators, and members of the University Marketing Team and specific post-holders conduct spot-checks. The team also found inconsistent follow-up to external examiners' reports, which the team was informed are the responsibility of schools rather than ASSU to address. Yet another was variability between one school and another in the

handling of course coordinators' reports following their visits to partners, which meant a lack of consistency in the information being returned to the University.

## Selecting and approving a partner organisation or agent

34 The QAH sets out the processes for the initial approval in principle ('Phase I') by CPC both of a new partner and of a new initiative with an existing partner. This is based on recommendations from a school and preliminary enquiries about the partner by ASSU; the subsequent ('II') consideration of the academic provision itself (requiring a site visit where a new partner is involved) by a school Board and a CART chaired independently of the relevant school, and a recommendation via the CART report, which if favourable, is the signal for ASSU to ensure entry onto the collaborative provision register of the new partner and the forwarding of information about the new academic programmes to Student Support and Administration (the Hub) and to the student record system (SAINT). A signed contractual agreement between the University and the partner must be in place before delivery begins. This staged process mirrors that for home-based provision, where initial consideration within a school of the 'appropriateness and resourcing' of a new academic proposal leads to scrutiny of 'academic quality and learning opportunities' by a CART. In a collaborative context, however, the referral of the initial partnership proposal to CPC allows for additional discussion of the prospective partner outside the school concerned, before there is detailed scrutiny by a CART of the academic provision involved.

35 The partner approval process includes such matters as local resourcing, quality management and student support. The University does not have a distinct process for the periodic review of a partner. The University's approach to ensuring that it is able to continue to satisfy itself that the conditions that were originally approved at the time of partner approval is to rely on ongoing monitoring, including 'course co-ordinator monitoring visits and the annual monitoring process'. The QAH emphasises the role of contractual agreement in reviewing partnerships. It states that 'Contractual agreement review' should 'where possible...take place in conjunction with the periodic review' to ensure that contracts with collaborative partners are still fit for purpose and arrangements still financially viable. The QAH explicitly refers to 'periodic review' and 'contractual agreement review' as distinct processes. The former covers partners' academic provision in line with standard University procedures. The latter is undertaken because 'the contractual agreement should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure it is still fit for purpose and that the arrangement is still financially viable'. The QAH continues that 'where possible contractual review should take place in conjunction with the periodic review [although] it is possible for either the University or the partner to initiate a review when required'. The QAH explains that the ASA (Collaborative Provision), drawing on guidance from the University Legal Adviser, initiates and organises contractual reviews, inviting the relevant Associate Dean (Learning & Teaching), course coordinators, the school Management Accountant and representatives from the partner organisation to be in attendance. The audit team was not provided with any evidence, orally or in writing, suggesting that the 'contractual agreement review' process took place in the manner described in the QAH. Nor did sample contractual agreements provided make provision for a formal review. One for an overseas partner, for example, effective from 1 May 2010 to 30 April 2013, stated that 'it shall thereafter continue on the same terms and conditions' subject to notice being given of an intention to terminate. Another for five years from September 2002 was 'to continue to operate automatically on an annual basis' after 2007, again subject to notice of termination. Senior University staff explained that partners were monitored through the AMR process and their financial accounts were either sent in regularly or requested specially. The team was also informed that, in the case of Associate Institutes, five-year business plans are now subject to an annual review.

36 It was made clear to the audit team that it was never the intention of the University to periodically review its partnerships, other than through periodic review of the academic provision with a focus on 'the outcomes of the partnership in terms of the student experience', and through the updating of financial schedules (which might be annually or

every three years). Partner staff who met the team had no knowledge of a periodic partner review process other than that involving academic provision, nor did the range of administrative staff, at school and institutional level, who met with the team. The University was unable to provide a schedule for any form of 'partner review'.

37 The audit team concluded that, in the absence of periodic institutional review of a partner, the University is unable to fully assure itself that the terms and conditions originally approved, such as local quality management arrangements, student support, facilities and learning resources, continue to be met. Once approval had been granted, these issues are monitored through AMR (a process to which partner input is variable), reported upon by course coordinators (in a manner which lacks consistency: see Section 3) or may be included in academic periodic review (where partner provision could be given only limited attention), always in a context specific either to the academic programme or to the school, not to the partner institution overall. The team considered that the lack of a holistic approach to the review of a partner has the potential to put the management of quality at risk and requires corrective action. The team therefore considers it advisable for the University to develop a systematic process for the periodic review of its collaborative partners, to enable it to take a holistic view of partners' continued capacity to support students towards the attainment of University awards.

### **Written agreements with a partner organisation or agent**

38 The University sometimes uses a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as a preliminary statement pending negotiation of a full Contractual Agreement. The University requires a Contractual Agreement to be signed by the Vice Chancellor and the Chief Executive of a partner organisation prior to delivery of any new academic provision involving a partner. In some cases, a Memorandum of Understanding is signed at a preliminary stage in discussions, but it is the Contractual Agreement which binds the two parties, after detailed negotiation involving the course coordinator during the approval process.

39 The audit team discussed with the University how it ensured that contractual agreements were kept up to date. It was explained to the team that contracts with partners were normally for five years, but they would usually be renewed if no significant issues had come to light, so were in effect 'rolling contracts'. Asked how the University kept contracts up to date, for example in the light of changes to the name or legal status of a partner, senior staff stated that they were reliant on partners or course coordinators to inform them.

40 The audit team had access to a number of current contractual agreements. In one agreement relating to a master's-level programme at an overseas partner to take effect from September 2002 the agreement was only signed by the heads of the two institutions in March 2003, while another with a local partner effective from August 2003 was signed in 2006. The lack of currency of some agreements was also a concern. In the case of one overseas partner, an 'agreement for a programme of academic co-operation' for delivery of master's-level programmes is now inaccurate in terms of both the names of the partner (which changed in 2008) and of the programmes. One agreement also states that the programme will be managed by an executive committee comprising two nominees from each institution, which will act as an exam board. Senior partner staff were unsure of the membership of this executive committee, which in any event did not act as an exam board, a fact confirmed by University staff. It was clear from the comments of University staff that it was a 'local', that is partner, committee only.

41 The audit team considered that the lack of a current legally binding agreement or contract setting out the rights and obligations of the parties and signed by the authorised representatives of the awarding institution and the partner organisation was putting academic standards and quality at risk, for example by commencing programmes before agreements were signed, through errors in programme titles, and through documented reference to an exam board which did not meet. The team identified several inaccuracies and inadequate definitions of partners' responsibilities, which, if not clear and accurate, may result in the contract not being enforceable. The team considers it essential that the University implement

a systematic process for ensuring that all contractual agreements for collaborative provision are kept current, up to date and accurate.

42 Overall, the audit team considered that the University's framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of collaborative provision is not applied consistently. The team recognised that responsibility is intended to be shared between the centre and the schools and that the University is considering introducing a greater role for the centre. However, the absence of a collaborative provision strategy, poorly defined responsibilities for checking the accuracy of partner websites, and the entrusting by Senate of the operation and strategic development of collaborative provision to two subcommittees, which did not report directly to it, collectively constituted a potential risk to the management of quality and academic standards. Accordingly, the team advises the University to strengthen its structures and processes for institutional oversight of quality management within the University's system of shared responsibility between schools and institutional bodies for collaborative provision.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

43 The University's system for the approval of new collaborative partnerships is set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) as a phased process, coordinated by the Academic Standards and Support Unit (ASSU). Initial discussions take place at Dean and Associate Dean level within a school, leading to the submission of a Phase I Collaborative Provision Approval form to the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC). This covers such matters as rationale, prospective risks and benefits, and the partner's legal and financial standing and with other organisational details of the proposed partner. Only if CPC recommends Phase I approval of the new partnership to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) is a Course Approval and Review Team (CART) convened to scrutinise the academic provision proposed for delivery by the prospective partner. This draws upon the outcomes of a site visit normally by two members of staff, one of whom should have no direct relationship to the anticipated collaboration. The remit of a CART is 'to consider detailed new course and module proposals and proposals for revisions to existing courses and modules, and to make recommendations in relation to the approval of these, ultimately to the Senate'. Its membership should include at least one external subject expert. Consideration of the academic provision by a CART on the basis of a site visit constitutes Phase II of the approval process. The next stage is the drafting of a Contractual Agreement setting out respective responsibilities, following negotiation between the course coordinator and the partner, and only when this has been signed may delivery commence. An essentially similar process is followed with new provision by an existing partner, although a site visit may not be necessary if the proposed provision is related to that already delivered by the partner; in the case of Associate Institutes, Phase I approval for new provision is omitted. New partnerships with employers under the University's employer engagement initiative 'Escalate' are also subject to Phase I consideration by CPC and the University has now appointed an Academic Standards Adviser (ASA) with a particular remit for this area of work. A 'shell framework' has also been developed for the approval of employer-responsive provision (see paragraph 57).

44 The audit team read several case studies showing these procedures in action. Some illustrated the effective operation of due process, for example a CART which considered new Postgraduate Diploma proposals with a local partner in July 2008. It recommended closer working with University staff in future because of a number of presentational flaws in documentation. Others gave cause for concern. A CART which recommended approval of the franchising of programmes to an overseas partner in March 2009 had no 'external expert' present, despite the insistence on this in the University's QAH. The same CART included a condition of approval that the contract 'include a statement to say that labs need to be in place before teaching can start', but the subsequent contract omits to mention this specifically.

45 A further example was received by CPC in June 2009, when it considered an approach to the University from a local further education college for the transfer of seven Foundation Degrees and one honours 'top-up' from its existing partners. Following mapping of the programmes against the University's own provision, ASSU recommended that they be approved on chair's action rather than be presented to a CART, so as to allow delivery to commence in September 2009. This was despite the fact that the modular credit framework and the format for programme specifications and module descriptors remained for the time being different from the University's requirements.

46 The audit team had further reservations regarding the approval of dual awards. In its meeting with staff of one overseas partner, the team was told that a dual award was being introduced because the partner was soon to become a university, a status which would mean that it would only be able to offer a maximum of 20 per cent franchised provision. In 2007 the University and the partner had therefore signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to further develop their existing relationship with programmes which would be certificated by both, using an approval process outlined as Appendix 1 of the MoU.

47 The audit team read CPC minutes and found that the proposed dual award had been discussed several times. At the meeting in September 2008 a draft policy on approval and quality assurance of dual awards was presented, and suitable wording for the certificate was discussed, with the conclusion that ASSU would seek external advice regarding the quality assurance of dual awards. At the following month's meeting, it was nevertheless reported that chair's action had been taken to approve proposals to undertake development of the dual awards. This occurred although external advice was still being sought. Subsequent CPC meetings report progress in developing the proposed awards, and final contractual approval of the awards, although there was no further reference to the sought external advice. CPC minutes of December 2009 and February 2010 show that it is proposed to replace joint awards at two other overseas partners with dual awards, and that student records for dual awards are to be maintained on the student record system (SAINT) under named dual certificate schemes.

48 Despite the University's requirement that an external expert is present, the CART which considered the initial dual awards proposal did not include anyone in this category. In response to the team's enquiry as to why external representation had not been included, the University stated that 'the event had concerned itself with the appropriate mapping of the [partner's] course on to a Bradford course and that it was not a new award. No externality was required.' The CART minutes lack clarity in that they suggested that either 'an undergraduate degree from the University of Bradford' or 'an award equivalent to a University of Bradford award' would be awarded following successful completion of the course. In any case, all planning and costings had been prepared on the assumption that a University degree would be awarded, 'as this would demand more robust quality assurance and management'. The 'Detailed New Course Proposal - Supporting Information' submitted to the CART for dual certification of the partner's BEng programmes with the University's equivalent MEng programmes outlined further details of the mapping process that had been undertaken, and reported that this process had been jointly undertaken over an extended period by a team composed of staff from the relevant school and the partner.

49 An unusual feature of the process was that the partner's BEng programmes had been mapped against the University's corresponding MEng. The partner's BEng degrees are of four years' duration and have similar admissions criteria to the University's MEng. MEng degrees are not available in the partner's home country. Following a number of iterations and revisions to the partner's BEng programme specifications and module descriptors it was deemed that the two programmes had equivalent learning outcomes.

50 The CART also reviewed other aspects of the partner's BEng including assessment strategy and oversight, progression requirements, staff development and local quality

assurance arrangements, most of which were considered to be comparable to those of the University. A notable difference between the arrangements for this dual award and the University's current franchised degrees is that in the 'dual' arrangement the partner is responsible for setting all assessments (coursework and exams), though initially the University will double-mark all assessments. The intention, the audit team was told, is to reduce this to moderation alone, once confidence exists that academic standards are comparable and secure. Some differences in delivery and assessment between the partner's BEng and the University's MEng were accepted by the University, for example the robust attendance requirements and (most significantly) prohibition of reassessment or repeat assessment unless there are mitigating circumstances. The proposal suggests that these differences should be accepted 'as the students are technically not University of Bradford students', an assertion which the team found to be contrary to practice elsewhere in the sector.

51 The proposal included tables outlining equivalence between the partner's modules and corresponding University MEng modules. The relevant programme specifications state that all fourth-year and a few third-year University MEng modules are at master's level. This is in line with the expectations of the FHEQ with respect to integrated master's degrees. However, the audit team noted that only 20 credits of the partner's BEng in one programme and 40 credits of the BEng in another programme's final-year modules map directly to University master's-level equivalents. The team was concerned that this table did not provide prima facie evidence that the university-validated award which will be offered to students completing the BEng degrees were correctly aligned to the FHEQ in terms of offering at least a full year of study at master's level. The CART minutes stated that 'the [partner] module descriptors had very little information about learning outcomes, and they were not stated in a way that University of Bradford would expect to see them; from reading the descriptors it was difficult to distinguish between levels'. The minutes also indicated that it was proposed to hold 'a workshop in Bradford for [partner] staff on module descriptor writing and module development during a forthcoming visit by academic staff from [the partner]', but there was no suggestion in the CART minutes that this substantive issue relating to both the academic standards and quality of awards offered by the University should be addressed as one of the approval conditions for the degrees, only that a file copy of the mapping process should be supplied to ASSU.

52 The audit team discussed this matter with senior representatives of the University during the audit visit. The University responded by stating that the partner's degree has fewer master's-level credits in their programme than the University's MEng, 'but as they do not follow the UK's FHEQ we would not expect this'. The team was concerned that this statement failed to recognise the distinction between the partner's own degree award offered in its home country and any degree offered by the University, which despite being wholly delivered by a partner institution overseas is a UK qualification, which should meet the expectations of the FHEQ.

53 The CART commended the work that the course team had undertaken in mapping the partner's BEng degrees against the Bradford MEng awards but specified several conditions and recommendations. A subsequent memorandum from the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) of the relevant school, who is also chair of the school's Academic Programmes Committee, approved the partner's BEng programmes to be dual certified on behalf of the School Board. This indicated that approval had already been gained from CPC and from the CART. The audit team was not provided with any evidence demonstrating formal sign off by the chair of the CART that the conditions attached to its approval had been met.

54 The CART proposal confirmed that University processes for dual awards were still under development. However, the audit team saw no evidence that CPC at this time was developing any approval processes specifically for dual awards. Lacking formal mechanisms the CART adopted the University's mechanisms for approving validated programmes, which involved mapping the partner's degree as 'equivalent' to an existing Bradford degree without recognising the students as University of Bradford students, a misunderstanding that was not corrected by the CART review process or by senior staff in meetings with the team. A consequence of this repeated institutional misunderstanding is that the team was provided with no evidence that a set of tailored management processes for validated dual awards, recognising the differences in oversight required, and distinct from those applied to existing franchised provision, has yet been developed or formally approved.

55 The audit team was provided by the University with an approved sample certificate for the dual award which the team was assured had been authorised on behalf of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) (Academic). The certificate included the wording 'It is hereby certified that <name>, having completed an equivalent programme, is presented with a Master of Engineering in <mechanical/civil> engineering.' The team was concerned that such wording did not convey the title of the programme studied or the location of study. Moreover, the use of MEng posed further difficulties because it was a title identical to that of the Bradford-delivered MEng, despite there being a different programme specification covering delivery at a different institution.

56 In the audit team's view, the mapping, scrutiny and approval processes applied to the University's first dual award exhibited a number of weaknesses which put academic standards at risk. Processes for the approval of a new type of collaborative provision were not sufficiently developed, and there was no clear evidence to confirm that external advice in the form of independent external assessors, as required by the University's own documented procedures for approving new provision and as necessary to confirm the appropriateness of academic standards through the mapping exercise, had been obtained or acted upon. Moreover, the proposed wording of the certificate for the award was ambiguous. Given that the first cohort of students enrolled on the programmes will graduate in the near future, the team considers this to be a matter currently putting academic standards at risk requiring urgent corrective action. The team therefore considers it essential for the University to review its approach to the management of dual awards, including the process for approval, to ensure that awards meet the requirements of the FHEQ and that certificates issued by the University for dual awards state explicitly and unambiguously the programme of study which the student has completed.

57 In its arrangements for the development of a 'shell framework' for employer-responsive provision, the University stresses the importance of all programmes approved being aligned with the FHEQ. This university-wide shell framework, which had yet to be validated at the time of the audit, enables programmes developed in collaboration with the University's employer partners under the 'Escalate' initiative to be approved more rapidly than would otherwise be the case, the arrangement being that schools can submit customised provision that fits within the framework for streamlined consideration. The audit team was satisfied that the University's scheme, although reliant on scaled-down CARTs for each new proposal, was well thought through and appropriately robust, especially since the consistent involvement of an 'external expert' was retained.

58 The University has an established system for annual programme monitoring and the audit team saw several examples of Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) which were comprehensive and sought to engage with issues pertinent to the provision in question. For instance, the AMR for the collaborative MBA programmes covering the academic year 2007-08 included a contextual statement, critical review including evaluation of aims and learning outcomes, comparative data on the performance of home and partner students, a completed action plan from the previous year, lists of partner teaching staff, detailed analysis of the student-completed Stage Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) and key points from external

examiners' reports. Similarly, the 2007-08 AMR for the BSc Computing, delivered by an overseas partner, also offered a contextual statement, qualitative evaluation of aims and learning outcomes, completed action plans, some comparison of home and partner student performance from statistical data, and a summary of 'effective practice', although in this case external examiners' reports had apparently been appended rather than summarised and no student evaluation had been included since 'no useable stage evaluation questionnaires had been received from [the partner]'. Despite this omission, and despite some lapses identified by the University itself in its overview report to Senate, the audit team considered the AMR system to be in many respects sound, especially since collaborative programmes are monitored separately from home-based provision. University staff who met with the team spoke of their commitment to the process, seeing it as key to the ways in which the institution identifies good practice and develops quality enhancement targets, captures student opinion, checks that appropriate admissions decisions have been made and is alerted to any other issues which need to be addressed.

59 The audit team had some concerns about the timeliness of the information which the University received through the annual monitoring process, given that the BSc Computing AMR for 2007-08, referred to above, was not signed off by the chair of the team responsible for reviewing it until September 2009, and given that the team was informed that the AMRs for 2008-09 were still 'subject to revision' at the time of the audit in April 2010. LTC in May 2009 was informed that six collaborative provision AMRs from the previous year had still not been received.

60 The audit team shared the concerns expressed in previous QAA audits over variability in partner input to AMRs. The team was told that the usual practice in franchised provision was for the course coordinator to write the AMR and then send it to the partner for comment. Some partner staff who met with the team expressed disquiet over the process. In one overseas partner, it was claimed that despite authoring the AMR for submission to Bradford they never saw the final version. In another overseas partner, staff involved with the MBA were satisfied with their opportunity for input but those in one undergraduate programme were not, considering the course coordinator's comments, based solely on a site visit, to be an inadequate reflection of their views. University staff explained to the team a reluctance by some partners to contribute to annual monitoring but, overall, the auditors drew the conclusion from their own meetings with partner staff that there was often a willingness to engage with the process, sometimes to a greater extent than was currently allowed.

61 After consideration at school level, all collaborative AMRs are submitted to a university-wide Annual Monitoring Team (AMT), a process which allows issues of cross-University interest to be identified. The audit team read the overview report arising from scrutiny of AMRs for 2007-08. The overview report raised a number of 'process' issues, such as limited student involvement in AMRs, problems in identifying whether external examiners were commenting on home or collaborative provision and difficulties in ensuring full attendance at AMT meetings. It also identified areas of 'effective practice' noted in the AMRs, among them exchange visits for staff and (in one overseas partner) the use of Skype for tutorials. Appended to the overview were more detailed records of AMT scrutiny, which included an insistence on resubmission of certain AMRs where AMT was not satisfied with the completion of certain sections. The team welcomed the systematic manner in which the University handled this process, while noting that when Senate eventually received the overview report, in June 2009, it formally confirmed 'confidence' in academic quality and standards across the provision and restricted its agreed resolutions to tackling the 'process' issues identified in the overview. This was in spite of the fact that, as recorded in an appendix to the overview report, AMT meetings had identified several matters relating to programme administration at one overseas partner, including concerns over marking schemes, submission of incorrect student results and delays in response to student evaluation.

62 The audit team noted that the CART considering the franchising of Computing programmes to the same overseas partner, aware of the ongoing problems mentioned in the AMR, made approval conditional on the outcome of a visit to be made to the partner by the DVC. The issues were identified on that occasion as timely submission of accurate information, the need for an audit trail and clear response to quality assurance processes, matters relating to student admissions and registration, staff-student liaison committees and other forms of student evaluation, the personal tutor system, peer reviews, exam setting and exam boards, the application of mitigating circumstances, module reviews and use of Bradford's online systems. However, according to the report on this visit, which was read by the team - a visit intended to address matters arising from both the AMR and the CART process - much of the discussion related to future curriculum development and problems of communication; among the topics identified above only assessment and 'student voice' issues were specifically addressed. Senior staff of the partner institution who met with the audit team were of the opinion that no administrative changes had been made as a result of the visit.

63 The audit team concluded that, while the University had a reasonably effective system for identifying problems through the AMR system, and had a satisfactory process for formal consideration of AMRs, follow-up action could be more rigorous. The team encourages the University to reflect upon how a more robust approach can be taken to addressing issues identified through the annual monitoring process.

64 The audit team scrutinised the process for five-yearly review of academic provision using examples of documentation presented on these occasions and the minutes of CART meetings which handled them. In most cases, due process was followed in accordance with the QAH, although the team had some concern with aspects of the review of a local partner's Postgraduate Diploma provision in May 2009, involving two programmes. It found that only one student - actually a 'former student...now a tutor' - was present to meet the review panel. Partner teaching staff who met the audit team had not been involved in any discussion with colleagues who attended the event so were unaware of outcomes from the review.

65 The audit team noted that, because partner provision is normally reviewed alongside similar home-based programmes, there is limited opportunity to focus on partner-specific issues. The Course Continuation Review of postgraduate provision in one school, for example, which took place on one day in October 2005, handled 12 programmes, seven of which were delivered by overseas partners as well as at Bradford; five different partners were involved, with two of the programmes being delivered by more than one partner. The report from this review showed that the review panel satisfied itself as to the overall quality management of collaborative provision, but the only issues considered in relation to a specific partner concerned requests for waivers from regulations. Similarly, the Course Continuation Review for undergraduate and postgraduate provision in another school, which ran over three days in May 2007, considered 47 programmes, plus three new ones for approval, among which were four delivered by one overseas partner and one delivered by another. In this case, a separate critical appraisal document had been submitted on behalf of the more substantial of these partners. It was clear, however, that such representation as partners had at these events was through relevant course coordinators. Partner staff who met the team consistently reported a lack of any input into the reviews, other than via AMRs. The team also noted that reflection on the benefits of greater involvement by partner staff in periodic review had been recommended in the QAA audit of IILM, India, in 2009. This is an area of quality assurance which, in the opinion of the audit team, could be strengthened, since the limited focus on partner-specific issues at periodic reviews of academic provision compounds the problems associated with the absence of periodic review of the partnerships themselves (see paragraph 66). Given that partner students are also under-represented in periodic reviews, as they were at the time of the 2006 QAA Audit of collaborative provision, the audit team considers it desirable for the University to ensure that there is more active and appropriate involvement by staff and students from partner organisations in the periodic review of programmes.

66 The audit team also reviewed the oversight arrangements for a joint European master's-level programme awarded by the University and another overseas partner. This was first approved in 2003, and was reapproved in 2006. However, since 2003 the title of the degree has changed to avoid a name clash with a consortium distance-learning programme delivered by six institutions including the University. The team was not provided with any evidence to suggest that the contractual agreement was updated to reflect this change. However, the agreement states that 50 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits (100 UK credits) are achieved by studying modules derived from the partner's award, which were adapted to reflect the structure of the University's award, but remain subject to the normal academic policy arrangements at the partner. Remaining taught modules of the programme (20 ECTS credits, 40 UK credits) are provided as a subset of the University's elective modules but delivered in the partner's home country, while the management project (20 ECTS credits, 40 UK credits) is delivered according to the University's model but with joint supervision by the two institutions.

67 In meetings with the auditors, senior staff from the partner were unaware of any processes by which the University formally verified the quality and academic standards of the partner's modules. Teaching staff, however, indicated that each year the course coordinator informally discussed and agreed the programme for the following year. Within the sample AMR for all University MBAs that the team reviewed there is specific mention of the programme as having a different structure (where the core elements of the programme are taught, administered and assessed by the partner institution), compared with the remaining franchised provision. There is also evidence of specific monitoring of this programme, through a number of action points relating specifically to weaknesses being addressed by this partner. Overall, the combination of informal interaction and monitoring delivered through course coordinators and more formal records provided in the AMR suggested to the team that there is suitable oversight of year-to-year delivery.

68 The Course Continuation Review for postgraduate collaborative MBA provision, last conducted in 2005 and next due to take place in 2010-11, did not, however, include any reference to the joint award with the partner, although it did include the partner's degree in a related subject, which is a franchised version of a course also delivered in Bradford. While the regular annual monitoring provided through AMR is carried out conscientiously, with effective liaison and scrutiny from course coordinators, the omission of the joint programme from the periodic review of the validated joint provision means that there has been no opportunity to review, update and reapprove the core part of the joint degree that is designed and delivered directly by the partner. The audit team was told that the school did not consider it necessary to include the modules delivered and quality assured by the partner because they were included in the reviews undertaken by the relevant regulatory body of the partner.

69 The University is therefore advised to put formal oversight arrangements in place to ensure that the academic standards of joint degrees that it offers with its partners meet the University's own expectations and those of the FHEQ.

## **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

70 In order to set and maintain the academic standards of its awards University programme approval and periodic review processes require engagement with the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements along with external representation on approval and review panels. The audit team noted from the documentation associated with programme approval and reviews it saw that generally the FHEQ was systematically used to ensure that the academic standards of University awards were appropriate. However, as noted in paragraphs 56 and 69, there have

been examples where the University has not paid sufficient attention to the FHEQ in setting and verifying academic standards.

71 Documentation seen by the audit team indicated that programme approval and review panels of collaborative provision make appropriate use of subject benchmark statements. Programme specifications are produced for each programme delivered by a partner and are published on the University's external website. These are written to a standard format and give detailed information about such matters as curriculum content, assessment regulations and support arrangements. The use made by the University of external subject experts in setting the academic standards of collaborative provision awards has generally been appropriate (but see paragraph 54 for discussion of an exception). Staff at one overseas partner in particular demonstrated good knowledge of the academic infrastructure and told the team that they regularly received sessions from University staff on latest developments in UK higher education.

72 In meetings with staff, the audit team identified a tendency to rely on external PSRBs to verify quality assurance in partner programmes and institutions. Two professional body reports provided to the team were cited as being utilised to verify quality assurance of the joint programme. The team was concerned in this instance with an overreliance on PSRB verification for management of academic standards over the use of internal quality assurance processes (see paragraph 68).

## **Assessment policies and regulations**

73 The Briefing Paper stressed that there is a 'unified approach' to assessment regulations, which apply to all taught provision wherever it is delivered, although waivers of standard regulations can be granted by Senate. The audit team was also informed that local variations to assignments by partners may be approved by the relevant University module leader, except where these impacted upon learning outcomes, in which case the programme leader and external examiner were consulted. For its part, the QAH has a clear and comprehensive section covering assessment regulations, including such matters as the respective responsibilities of first and second markers, arrangements for the consideration of mitigating circumstances, and the conduct of assessment and examination boards. In the context of collaborative provision, the Briefing Paper explained that partner staff participate in exam boards either in person or by telephone or teleconferencing and that all coursework and exam papers, if written by partner staff, must be approved by University staff and (at level 5 and above) by the relevant external examiner. It was repeatedly made clear to the team, both by partner staff and by University representatives, that if there was any difference of opinion between first markers at the partner institution and second markers at the University the latter mark would prevail, subject to the agreement of the external examiner.

74 Scrutiny of the documentation provided by the University confirmed that the arrangements set out above did not fully apply in practice. The audit team was provided with evidence of minuted input via teleconferencing from an overseas partner to an exam board within one school. However, tutors from a local partner working with another school said that, although invited, they did not have the time to always attend boards and instead passed any comments to the exam board via their administrative staff. An external examiner reporting on postgraduate provision in a school commented that 'it is essential to have people [at the exam board] who can speak about the overseas provision, and such people were sometimes absent'. On the issue of prior approval of assignments and exam papers, several comments by external examiners suggested that those set by partners were not being systematically approved in advance, either by University staff or by the externals. One external complained that he had been unaware until the June exam boards of a new project assessment being piloted that year. A postgraduate external examiner suggested for two years running that University staff should comment on whether assignments set by partners were of comparable quality to those for home-based provision; another considered some partner-set questions to

be ambiguous; yet another specifically reported that she did not always receive drafts of proposed assessments. The same external, evidently having been sent an exam paper in advance in accordance with due process, noted a question in a resit exam paper identical to one set first time, and reported that when she commented on this no change was made.

75 On the other hand, external examiners' reports suggested that marking standards generally were being upheld. One external specifically affirmed the overseas partner's standards. Another covering postgraduate provision reported that over-generous marking by the partner was corrected through second marking at Bradford, and feedback was sent in the hope of eradicating such discrepancies in future. In this instance, the course coordinator confirmed that guidance on marking had been given to partner staff concerned. Yet another external examiner noted that there were some differences in the results from partners 'but these were all looked at very carefully to ensure that there were no anomalies in the marking'.

76 Conversely, in one school the handling of the marking process was criticised in relation to an overseas partner: some second marking consisted of identical marks and identical comments, other second marking involved different criteria. External examiners had in 2007-08 criticised the lack of grading criteria in the context of projects - echoing a comment in the Institutional audit of 2007 about lack of such criteria at institutional level - but the audit team was informed that only now were these criteria being 'looked at' in this subject. When asked whose responsibility it was to ensure that issues of this nature were addressed, senior staff of the University said that the relevant schools were responsible, although the team noted that LTC had at its last meeting of 2008-09 resolved to introduce guidance on generic marking criteria by the following September, but the matter was not progressed.

77 The Briefing Paper drew attention to recent changes to the handling of academic appeals and complaints, on the one hand, and of breaches of assessment regulations on the other. The audit team noted that, while complaints remained partners' responsibility, academic appeals had since 2008 been consistently dealt with by the University. The University had posted a 'plain English guide' to the appeals process on its intranet, specifically targeted at collaborative provision students. The team also noted a new devolved approach to the handling of breaches of assessment regulations, whereby partners were responsible for investigation and punishment however serious the offence, according to standard University regulations, albeit with a right of appeal by students to the University. It was too early for the success of this scheme to be evaluated, but the team considered the process to have been extensively communicated to partners, and also noted that the University was alive to the risk of partners in due course seeking waivers of standard procedures. The team also noted that the University is taking steps to refine its use of plagiarism detection software, which is used in some schools especially for dissertations and as a check where plagiarism is suspected. Electronic submission is used by overseas partners, so facilitating the use of anti-plagiarism software, although staff of one local partner reported that it was not yet available to them.

78 Students who met the audit team reported a mixed picture on assessment feedback. Overseas partner students associated with two schools were pleased with rapid and helpful feedback, while those taking other programmes had longer to wait because of the moderation process at Bradford. A turn-round time of six weeks was quoted by students of more than one partner, but the University has recently imposed a four-week maximum which, despite reservations in one school, is applicable to collaborative as well as home-based provision. The team considered that the University's stance on timely feedback was generally being adhered to by its collaborative partners.

79 The audit team spent some time seeking clarification from the University on the treatment of 'capped' resit marks for purposes of degree classification, given a discrepancy between a sample transcript for a partner student with which the team had been provided and the information in the relevant section of the QAH, and given that both staff and students

gave an answer at variance with that in the QAH. It was eventually established that the QAH was correct. The University will wish to ensure that the information on transcripts is accurate and that staff and students are given a clearer understanding of the treatment of these marks.

## External examiners

80 Previous audits have drawn attention to problems of non-attendance by external examiners at examination boards, inadequate distinction of home and collaborative provision in external examiners' reports, inconsistency in external examiners receiving responses to their reports, and lack of access by partner staff and students to these reports. On the basis of a review of external examiners' reports relating to collaborative provision, and the follow-up thereto, and also from discussions with staff and students, the audit team considered that the University's efforts to address these difficulties had been only partially successful.

81 The QAH explains that external examiners are nominated by schools but approved by Senate for terms normally of three or four years. In the interests of ensuring comparability of standards, the University assigns assessed work in particular units or programmes to the same external examiner, whether it is produced by home or partner students (or in one school alternates the allocation between two externals from one year to the next). The work of collaborative students is considered alongside that of 'home' students at assessment committees (which determine students' marks within units assigned to them) and examination boards (which decide the consequences of those marks for student progression and achievement) and the work is reported upon together.

82 The Briefing Paper stated that external examiners are invited but are not obliged to attend assessment committees, but are required to attend examination boards. Senior staff acknowledged difficulties in securing attendance, while stressing the powers of Senate to remove an unsatisfactory external examiner. The audit team found variability in the attendance of external examiners at exam boards. There was consistently good attendance in some schools, while in another school those external examiners who had attended exam boards reported them to be well conducted, one adding that the overseas partner had been able to participate through teleconferencing, a fact confirmed by the partner staff. However, one of the externals working with this school (who had been involved with collaborative provision through reviewing exam papers) complained that he had not been invited to the June exam board. Within another school, one external examiner covering partner provision reported that he had never managed to attend an exam board and two others also admitted that they had been unable to attend on occasion. When senior staff at the partner were asked about this, they said that, whereas the University had previously set dates of exam boards six months in advance, this was no longer the case, making it difficult for externals to attend. The audit team was assured by University staff that this matter had been raised with the relevant Dean of School.

83 The audit team read that a number of external examiners were doubtful about their ability to comment adequately on collaborative provision within their remit. These arrangements are intended to ensure comparability of standards, and the external examiner report template has been redesigned to capture some commentary on this matter. However, one external covering home and partner provision in one school reported that he was unclear whether it covered collaborative provision; the following year, he complained that the late addition of partner assessments to the business of the board made it difficult to do full justice to them. Another reported that there had not been enough time to examine projects from partner students. Within another school, an external covering postgraduate provision at Bradford and at several overseas partners requested in his 2007-08 report a breakdown of comparative performance by students at different institutions, since he had been asked to compare this, but (in the absence of such data) had not checked it himself. He repeated these comments in identical terms the following year. University staff acknowledged that,

where several partners are involved, it is difficult to identify comments pertaining to a specific institution's students.

84 In terms of responses to external examiners' comments, the audit team again saw a mixed picture. Externals' reports, or a summary thereof, are appended to AMRs alongside actions to be taken in response, but among all those submitted by the University as evidence of their work with collaborative partners only about half said that they had seen the previous year's AMR. In any event, external examiners are supposed to receive a standard response from the DVC (Academic), plus a further response from the Dean or Associate Dean of the relevant school where there are issues of concern. The team found that the DVC (Academic) consistently sent a response, and also forwarded to the school an instruction to respond where appropriate, but that the follow-up from the school was not always adequate. Although there was some evidence of a response from the Dean or Associate Dean of School, several external examiners covering collaborative provision commented that previous recommendations had been inadequately addressed, or in some cases apparently ignored.

85 The audit team asked staff and students of partner institutions whether they had seen external examiners' reports. No students said that they had done so, but staff of one overseas partner and one local partner replied in the affirmative. There was a clear negative response from staff of a further overseas partner. From all this, the audit team concluded that in this, as in other respects regarding external examiners and their reports, there was variability of practice across the University.

86 The Briefing Paper stated that a summary of all external examiner reports is produced annually, and the audit team observed that the 'overview report' for 2007-08 was considered by Senate in June 2009, alongside the overview of collaborative provision AMRs. The team noted the decision of LTC in the previous month that a review of external examining be conducted, and that a paper prepared for consideration at its first meeting of 2009-10, with supporting revised regulations. However, neither the minutes of LTC for September 2009 nor those of subsequent meetings make any mention of the paper or the review, and teaching staff whom the team met had no knowledge of it. Taking all this into account, and in view of the threat to academic standards posed by some of the matters raised by external examiners - sometimes in successive years - the audit team considers it advisable for the University to ensure that its review of external examining takes full account of collaborative provision, with specific reference to consistent follow-up of external examiners' recommendations and to their attendance at Assessment and Examination Boards.

## **Certificates and transcripts**

87 It is University policy to provide details of the name and location of the institution where collaborative degrees have been studied on the transcript and not on the certificate awarded. The audit team was shown examples of both certificates and transcripts including for a dual award (see paragraph 55). However, in the case of one area of validated provision the team was provided with evidence by the University indicating that students do not receive a transcript, but are given a results letter which does not indicate the name and location of the partner institution. The team was also shown an example of a transcript issued by a school rather than the University which made no reference to the name or location of the partner institution. The team considered that these practices were potentially misleading and did not reflect guidance contained in Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. The team also observed that the information regarding re-sit marks on the reverse of the University transcript that were seen by the team had not been updated to reflect changes in assessment regulations. The University will wish to review its practice regarding transcripts and ensure that all students in collaborative provision are provided with accurate transcripts that state the name and location of the partner where their studies have taken place.

## Management information - statistics

88 The Briefing Paper acknowledged some weaknesses in the University's data systems in the context of collaborative provision. Schools are required to produce their own statistics on partner students for annual monitoring purposes, while the student record system (SAINT) is unable to handle provision, including that of partners, where there are multiple entry points in a year. Staff who met the audit team said that SAINT could now cope with two entry points but otherwise confirmed these statements, even though when the multiple entry issue had been noted in the QAA collaborative provision audit of 2006 the University was reported to be giving it urgent attention. The team also noted with concern comments by two external examiners working with one school that centrally supplied data about students had to be corrected at the exam board. The team was assured that entry of marks onto SAINT was exclusively in the hands of Bradford staff, not its collaborative partners.

89 Among documentation supplied by the University, the audit team saw evidence of copious presentation of statistical data in AMRs relating to both home and partner provision, with some analysis thereof. However, evidence of engagement in statistical analysis by partner staff was variable. Teaching staff at one overseas partner, who clearly had input to the AMR process, felt able to say from the data therein that their own students were outperforming those at Bradford. Local partner staff who also had to account to a PSRB were also aware of the statistics in the AMR. However, another overseas partner used its own data and claimed to have received none from the University for comparative purposes for several years. Another overseas partner reported that no such data was received so no comparisons with student performance elsewhere could be made.

90 The University is aware that there is room for improvement in this area. CPC in November 2009 passed resolutions to ensure that details on partner students and partner modules should be more clearly distinguished on the SAINT system in future. In March 2010 Senate resolved to ensure that the good practice in several schools in comparing home and partner performance be disseminated across the institution. The audit team encourages the University in these endeavours, particularly the systematic sharing of data with partners.

## Overall conclusions on the management of academic standards

91 The audit team concluded that limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers.

## Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

### Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

92 The University's arrangements for approval, monitoring and review of programmes include both the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities and are considered in Section 2 above. Course coordinators have a key role in monitoring the quality of learning opportunities and their active and effective contribution to sustaining collaborative partnerships, much appreciated by the partners themselves, was recognised by the team as a feature of good practice in Section 1 above. This section focuses in more detail on their role.

93 The role descriptor of a course coordinator embraces wide-ranging liaison responsibilities and includes a visit to the partner, 'normally...at least once a year', to meet with partner staff and students and to check the continued adequacy of facilities and

resources. A written report on each visit is to be submitted to the relevant school Board or delegated committee thereof. The audit team learnt that, in addition to the duties set out in the role descriptor, course coordinators might chair exam boards considering the performance of partner students. This is generally considered by the University to be a conflict of interest, and a practice on which the University will wish to reflect.

94 Course coordinators may be programme-specific or partner-specific. The audit team was informed that course coordinators are carefully selected, often to fit a career trajectory, and that the role was taken seriously. Duties were factored into a workload model based on guiding principles set by Senate but applied in various ways according to schools' own tariffs, a justification for variation being the very different burdens which different partnerships entail. In one School, however, a course coordinator said that there was a lot of credit attached to the role, rather than a tariff. The team noted that it was the responsibility of each school to train its course coordinators and that they might be prepared for the role by serving as an assistant first. The Briefing Paper stated that institutional staff development, usually in the form of seminars provided by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group, was optional. Given the critical role ascribed to course coordinators in the quality management of the University's collaborative partnerships, the team considered this to be a further case where greater consistency between schools and greater institutional oversight of their activity would be advisable.

95 Conscious of the significance attached to course coordinators' reports on their visits to partners, the University sought to introduce greater standardisation for 2009-10. The Briefing Paper explained that as from 2009-10 'course coordinators' reports are considered by the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC) as well as within their own schools and at partner institutions'. In September 2009, CPC resolved that the monitoring visit reports of course coordinators would henceforth be considered by CPC as a standing item, having first gone to the relevant schools; a standard template for monitoring visits would be introduced. The audit team was told that, in practice, only key issues identified by each school would be forwarded to CPC. A review of CPC minutes for the current academic year showed that by March 2010 only four reports had been considered. The University was asked to furnish evidence of the consideration of course coordinators' reports at school level. The team saw that some lengthy, detailed reports were submitted for consideration by one school in relation to visits to one overseas partner in 2008 and 2009 and some less detailed ones from other schools. There is as yet no consistency in the template used, and the new template is designed for use by any member of staff visiting a partner. Hence, it does not prompt course coordinators to address all the quality assurance matters assigned to course coordinators and so does not result in a holistic report of their course coordinator findings. The forums which considered reports at school level ranged from the Graduate Programmes Committee in one school to the programme management board (rather than any school committee) in another school.

96 The audit team concluded that as yet limited progress had been made in standardising the process for submission and consideration by schools and the University of course coordinators' reports, despite the good intentions of CPC. The failure to consistently use the standard template means that variable attention is being given to the student experience; reports continue to be received by an array of school-level committees and CPC has considered matters arising from a small number of reports. Accordingly, in order to improve the management of the quality of learning opportunities and to further secure the academic standards of University awards, the team considered it desirable that the University develop a more robust and timely reporting mechanism for course coordinators to assure the University about the quality of the student experience.

## Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

97 The Academic Standards and Support Unit (ASSU), on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), has a key role in updating schools on changes to institutional policies and regulations, as well as to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. For each new or revised section of the code ASSU produces for LTC a document that sets out how the University meets the precepts of the *Code of practice*. The paper summarises the policy and procedures approved by Senate and recorded in the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH). Particular reference is made in this document to policy and procedures, as approved by Senate, which are reflected in the QAH. In terms of its response to Section 2 of the *Code of practice* (Part A) the document provides a comprehensive response to the precepts as set out in Part A Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. The team found a number of cases where University practices were in variance to those contained in sections 2, 5, 7 and 10 of the *Code of practice*. In general, the team concluded that the University's approach to the *Code of practice* and its application to collaborative provision students had been somewhat lacking in rigour.

## Management information - feedback from students

98 The Briefing Paper stated that student feedback is 'an important facet of the management of learning opportunities'. It was made clear to the audit team that the University prioritises the 'student voice', while acknowledging the difficulties of soliciting this in some partner contexts because of cultural differences. There are a number of ways in which student feedback from collaborative provision students is collected and analysed by the University: stage evaluation questionnaires (SEQs), staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs), course coordinator reports and Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs). The University is adamant that all students, including those in partner institutions, should complete SEQs at specific intervals during their programme of study. In March 2010 Senate agreed that a more flexible approach could be adopted to staff-student liaison committees, since these might not always be appropriate. According to the Briefing Paper, four schools are currently piloting online evaluation questionnaires, which also have the potential to allow partner students to feed their views direct to the home institution.

99 Partner students who met with the audit team reported different experiences in practice. In one local partner, evaluation was sought via questionnaires and informal contact with tutors, rather than via a formal liaison committee; students cited an example of responsiveness to an issue which had been raised. Students from overseas partners were also familiar with SEQs but less so with staff-student liaison committees. In general, the team concluded, overseas students prefer to deal with issues outside of these structures. In terms of responses to issues raised, the University stated in the Briefing Paper that course coordinators are a primary means of conveying to students the University's feedback on their comments. However, the team was told that there was sometimes a lack of response to issues which had been raised.

100 The reports of course coordinators' visits to partner institutions seen by the audit team sometimes refer to meetings with students. However, these tended to consist of information being communicated on behalf of the University rather than of evaluation being gathered to feed back to the University.

101 It is a requirement that student evaluation is incorporated into AMRs and the team saw sufficient evidence of this being taken into account in annual monitoring action plans to conclude that the University was indeed taking student opinion seriously. Where student evaluation was not apparent from the documentation submitted for collaborative provision annual monitoring, schools are instructed to work with their partners to make this more explicit. The team concluded that the University was making appropriate efforts to capture partner students' opinions via the AMR process, but that it may wish to consider how

collaborative provision students can be better informed of actions taken in response to their comments.

## **Role of students in quality assurance**

102 The University of Bradford Students' Union currently has no links with student representative bodies at any of the University's partners. On-campus student representatives are included in the membership of a number of the University central committees that have a role in the management of collaborative provision, including Senate and LTC. There are no student representatives on CPC or the Internationalisation Committee. Students are represented on various school-level committees including those that receive course coordinator reports on visits to partner institutions and AMRs. The team heard from representatives of the Students' Union that their relationships with the deputy vice chancellors (DVCs) and the Dean of Students were of significant importance in relation to discussion of collaborative provision policy.

## **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

103 Part of the University's mission is to provide 'high quality teaching, informed by internationally recognised research'. The Briefing Paper noted that much of the University's collaborative provision has a strong professional or vocational focus. Staff involved may be academics at partner institutions, or practitioners, as for example in the case of teaching staff from a local NHS Trust, which included GPs with special interests, nurses, and consultants who act as mentors to the part-time students. The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2005-09 makes no explicit mention of collaborative provision, and refers to research primarily in terms of pedagogic research used to provide an evidence-based approach for learning and teaching innovation and improved student retention and progression. The University's draft Internationalisation Strategy specifies as one of the University's key internationalisation objectives: 'Development of in-country delivery/ collaborative partners including research and knowledge transfer', and distinguishes three different classes of international collaborative partners: capacity-building partnerships in developing countries, strategic partnerships of equals (where there are immediate opportunities for joint research), and franchise partnerships.

104 The University has recently developed the concept of Associate Institutes, a status which has been offered (with Senate approval) to the four overseas partners with which the University maintains its deepest and broadest relationships. Associate Institutes work more closely with the University than other partners, including sharing their business plans with the University on an annual basis. The audit team explored this development, and reviewed a sample Associate Institute approval document and annual business plan review. The latter included objectives to collaborate on research, evaluation and consultancy work. However, at this early point the review did not indicate that any progress had been made in realising these aims.

105 The University encourages the scholarly activity of its collaborative partners, and in its meetings with partners the team heard that a common informal opportunity for liaison between peer academics from the University and its partners was at academic conferences, for example in business-related and engineering disciplines. Scholarly activity also includes pedagogic developments (supported by Learner Support Services and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group at Bradford), and pedagogic conferences run by partners.

106 With franchised collaborative provision, courses are designed by University staff for delivery at Bradford and its partners. Staff at the University expressed the view that in these cases research at Bradford influenced the development of their courses and modules, and hence was transmitted to partner staff who were responsible for delivering the franchised

provision. Plans to expand research among partner staff sometimes include registration of these staff for higher degrees at Bradford. A few examples where this had happened were cited during the team's meetings with Bradford staff, but there are no systematic arrangements of this sort in place at present. Overall, the audit team concluded that Bradford was currently working opportunistically to develop research links with its collaborative partners, and that this activity is most advanced where the partnership is with a mature research-active academic institution, leading to opportunities for joint research programmes. The Internationalisation Strategy currently under development aims to develop a more strategic approach across all partners, and to diversify opportunities for linked research and scholarship.

## **Other modes of study**

107 The Briefing Paper stated that some of the University's collaborative provision is delivered through distance or blended learning, including recorded lectures available online, web access to the University library and programme materials, and one-to-one supervision of project and dissertation work through Skype or other interaction. Students from partners that the audit team met confirmed that they had suitable access to the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) and online library facilities, and also noted that some partners provided local web facilities and/or their own local VLE to augment facilities hosted by the University.

108 The Briefing Paper stated that 'Assessment Committees and Boards of Examiners normally review student performance across modes of study to ensure standards of attainment are comparable. This is supported by the use of the same external examiners to monitor consistency across the modes of study and provide an external view of the equivalence of learning opportunities'. The audit team noted that two questions on the external examiner report form refer to collaborative provision, and there is no explicit reference on this form to other modes of study. It was not clear to the team how external examiners distinguished between modes of study in order to make the comparisons suggested by the University.

## **Resources for learning**

109 In addition to learning resources at partner organisations, students have access to the University's learner support publications and online material, such as e-journals, through University library services. However, it was confirmed through discussions with staff and students that the audit team talked to during partner visits that the use made of resources, and the mode of access (physical or online) varies according to local partnership arrangements.

110 Local part-time students on a collaborative programme met by the audit team confirmed that they found the Bradford library and IT support excellent; however, some students and partner staff make little use of the VLE except as a course materials repository, preferring for convenience to use existing email facilities and conventional printed lecture materials distributed during face-to-face lectures and seminars.

111 In its discussions with academic and support staff, it was explained that Learner Support Services works with partners on a needs basis to audit their local provision and identify gaps which can be supported through the University's online services. As part of the audit, the team reviewed the online 'Hub' resources which the University provides and found them useful and accessible as a portal to access University support services. The Hub is equally available to all Bradford students including collaborative partner students, but the location-specific resources are obviously more relevant to local and regionally-based partner students than to international partner students. The University also provides other online resources, including the University VLE and DevelopMe, a social networking site which the University has set up for both Bradford and collaborative partner students. The team was

able to access both these resources, and observed that the latter included a number of student groups based at international partner institutions. It was acknowledged that DevelopMe is a transitional network, typically used by new students to orientate themselves and locate resources when they first register for their degree. Use of the network to integrate Bradford and collaborative partner students therefore peaks at particular times of year, but is then replaced by alternative communication media such as email and Facebook. However, it has proved popular with students in India and Pakistan, as the team was able to confirm from reviewing the active student groups on the site. The team considered the creation of DevelopMe as an innovative online resource to support collaborative provision students' engagement with the University and with one another to be a feature of good practice. Online resources also include facilities for electronic coursework submission, and submission to electronic plagiarism checking devices for checking. Varying use was made of this resource in different schools, but staff whom the team met confirmed that a few examples of plagiarism among partner students had been identified, and offences, though rare, were referred to a panel chaired by the DVC.

112 In summary, the team concluded from its review of online and other study resources that the University has well-developed and effective online resources which are used by both Bradford and partner students. Partner students' use (particularly in the case of international partners, who may also provide alternative local resources) is more selective and variable than use by Bradford's students, but still provides useful blended learning and student support to augment local provision. The University is now considering how to develop more systematic analysis of patterns of use of online resources, and the audit team would encourage this development as a useful step towards effective targeting of support for partner students.

113 Partner resources are initially evaluated and approved as part of the partner approval process. This involves Course Approval and Review Team (CART) consideration of a report focused in part on learning resource provision from a site visit. Following partner and programme approval, as noted in Section 2, monitoring of the ongoing appropriateness of resources occurs through course coordinators' reports, annual monitoring reports and course continuation reviews. The audit team noted a number of examples of how these processes operated reactively in response to issues arising.

114 AMRs include student-completed SEQs results to provide feedback on the quality of partners' learning resources. SEQs ask students to rate their satisfaction with library, computing, careers service and information resources, though no distinction is made between local partner and University provision. Although SEQs should be routinely submitted by partners as part of the AMR process, the audit team was provided with one AMR with no useable SEQ data. The team reviewed a number of SEQs and concluded that any serious weaknesses in existing learning resource provision would likely be identified. However, because they are completed by students, it was unlikely that they were sufficient to provide the driver for instigating new or upgraded services. Moreover, SEQs would not be capable of providing data for objective comparisons of resource quality between different delivery sites (including Bradford). The team concluded that, although SEQs submitted as part of AMR provide useful information from the student perspective of partner learning resources, SEQs in themselves are not a sufficient mechanism to ensure these facilities are up to date and consistent with the support expected by the University.

115 The audit team concluded that neither the University's annual monitoring nor its periodic review processes provide sufficient direct focus on partner learning resources. Annual monitoring generally includes indirect surveys of students' opinions (although these were not available in every case that the team reviewed), and informal reports from course coordinators (who at present are not specifically asked to review and report on these facilities), both of which may nevertheless detect serious weaknesses in provision. Periodic reviews at present are focused directly on academic content of degrees and do not generally include any separate review of partner resources. There is a need to periodically review

collaborative partners' resources over a longer cycle which aligns better with substantive developments in facilities such as internet and computing provision, laboratory equipment updates, pedagogic developments in learning and teaching, and other aspects of the higher education agenda such as improvements to skills and employability support. The lack of such a process contributes to the recommendation that the University should develop a systematic process for periodic review of partner institutions' capacity to support delivery of Bradford awards.

## Admissions policy

116 University ordinances state that admissions requirements for all collaborative programmes are determined by the University as part of its course approval process. Undergraduate applications meeting standard entry requirements are processed and accepted locally by the collaborative partner with oversight by the University, but non-standard and marginal applications, including those requesting Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) or direct entry at levels 5 or 6 or to most postgraduate programmes, should be referred directly to the school for approval.

117 The audit team noted that a University response to the *Code of Practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education* had been due in September 2007 but, due to a combination of circumstances, including the appointment of a new Head of Admissions, had not been available until January 2009. The University's Code of Practice on Admissions was considered at LTC in January 2009 and approved on behalf of the Academic Strategy and Performance Committee (ASPC) and Senate by chair's action. The University Code of Practice contained several references to ongoing reviews and future plans and, in particular, made no reference at all to admissions arrangements for collaborative partners.

118 In its meetings with staff from partner institutions the audit team asked how applications were handled in practice. In general they confirmed that the process outlined in the Briefing Paper was followed, but were unclear how the University monitors the admissions information that they provide. Senior administrative staff at one local health collaborative partner told the team that the University did not require any sign-off for their applicants, since all applicants are practising NHS staff with first degrees and suitable background and experience. The team subsequently learnt that, in practice, the homogeneity of the student body had changed from the original group of GPs to include other 'non-standard' applicants from health-related professions including nurses and support staff. Therefore, not all applicants to these validated courses will necessarily have suitable prior educational experience, especially if their initial professional training preceded the formal upgrading of the profession to degree-level intake standard. It also became clear that the University oversight arrangements are not currently sufficient to pick up this development. A similar weakness in tracking partners' admissions decisions was also apparent at an overseas partner, where a condition of the most recent Course Continuation Review in Engineering was 'to monitor all the decisions taken by the partner on behalf of the University on student admissions to the programmes in order to ensure the comparability of the entry qualifications of the students accepted onto the partner's programmes with those at Bradford'.

119 Within meetings with teaching and administrative staff at the University the audit team heard some inconsistency between schools as to the degree to which admissions in practice are devolved to partners, and the extent to which the University maintained oversight of admissions arrangements. It was later confirmed that in some schools partners issue offer letters, and mature partners may be given delegated permission to make postgraduate offers, despite the standard arrangement being for all postgraduate offers to be made by Bradford. When asked for clarification of how the University knew where there is delegated admissions authority and where it is centralised, no clear answer was forthcoming. When asked how delegated admissions are monitored, the response was that this was either

monitored through checks conducted by the course coordinator during visits or through monitoring of student progression, either at the end of the semester or through the AMR. The team noted that in either case this is an indirect check that is conducted after the event.

120 The audit team sought further clarification on admissions arrangements from senior staff, who confirmed that a diverse approach is taken whereby the University works with schools, who have their own admissions procedures and policies, and that this mirrored the diverse arrangements that also applied to the University's own admissions. Partner decisions were made against set criteria (in some cases reflecting local admissions requirements), and non-standard applications would be referred to the school at Bradford. The team was also told that the main mechanism for checking admissions was through course coordinators' visits to the partner, and the constant engagement of the course coordinator meant that 'live' interaction was maintained. The team recognised the value of this responsive approach, but also noted that there was currently no formal mechanism by which records of this interaction were recorded and available to provide University oversight, except where aggregate admissions data was included in AMRs at a much later date.

121 The audit team considered that the omission of arrangements for the admission of collaborative provision students from the University's Code of Practice on Admissions, along with the diversity of devolved admissions arrangements operated by schools, makes it difficult for the University to achieve consistent oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes and so poses a potential risk to academic standards and quality needing corrective action. The team concluded that it would be advisable for the University to establish robust arrangements for institutional oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes to ensure that appropriate decisions are made on entry.

## **Student support**

122 In general, responsibility for providing support for collaborative provision students resides largely with the partner institution. The division of responsibilities for the provision of student support between the University and the partner institution, if included, are only briefly set out in contractual agreements.

123 The University has recently established a Student Charter, a project led by the recently appointed Dean of Students. The Student Charter sets out a number of commitments the University will make 'every attempt' to do and the commitments the institution expects of the students. The commitments to be made by the University range from giving clear information about when and how students will receive feedback on their individual progress to providing students with appropriate and relevant information regarding University services and support available. The audit team learnt that the Charter applies to all students studying for a Bradford award including collaborative provision students.

124 In May 2009, a revised induction framework was introduced, for implementation no matter how students are taught or where they are based. Students met during partner visits referred to the induction process positively; plagiarism was referred to repeatedly by students as a key part of the induction process.

125 Students receive both module and course handbooks. Students met by the audit team during partner visits considered the handbooks to be a helpful resource for students. The audit team found varying information on appeals and complaints procedures and regulations in student handbooks for different partner institutions (see Section 6). Although the Students' Union stated that it had little involvement with collaborative provision students, it drew attention to the support it offered for such students with appeals and complaints. However, the Students' Union pointed out there had been very little take up on this offer to date.

126 The Learner Development Unit provides courses and workshops to support students in developing key study skills such as essay writing and developing and analysing arguments. The audit team heard from students it met that they had utilised and appreciated the facilities and services provided by the Unit. The Briefing Paper stated that the University's Counselling Service is available to all students; while by the nature of the service face-to-face support is preferable, staff are making efforts to provide other forms of support, and provide an email address and information for those not able to meet counsellors in Bradford.

127 When visiting partner institutions course coordinators routinely meet with students. Students met by the audit team confirmed the helpfulness of course coordinators in addressing matters related to student support.

128 Evaluation of support for collaborative provision students at the University level is one of the responsibilities and priorities for the new Dean of Students. Recurrent issues raised by students at partner institutions to the course coordinators are reported at CPC and school Boards for discussion and action. However, the team found examples of issues mentioned to course coordinators by partner students that were reported to Bradford but with no evidence of the follow-up.

129 Overall, the team considered that the University's management of student support makes an effective contribution to the quality of collaborative provision student learning opportunities.

### **Staff support (including staff development)**

130 There are a number of mechanisms by which the University supports staff in developing their capabilities as teachers, including Academic Development to Enhance Professional Teaching (ADEPT) and feedback, support and advice provided by course coordinators and other Bradford staff during their visits to partners. The most recent Institutional audit found that the University generally offers good support to its academic staff, has suitable arrangements in place to support academics new to teaching, and offers a range of good-quality staff development opportunities. All of these were endorsed by this audit team's review of online staff development resources available to staff, including partner staff.

131 Contractual agreements with Bradford's collaborative partners generally state that partners' academic staff should be 'suitably qualified', with qualifications and experience approved by the University of Bradford. The audit team heard during its meetings with one partner institution that staff delivering University courses are expected to be qualified to at least master's level, have a teaching certificate and be approved by the local Ministry of Education. Staff at another overseas partner undergo a rigorous appointment process approved by the 'chair' of a discipline area, and only the best are deployed to teach on University courses, reflecting the high status of the course. Tutors on the courses at a local partner NHS Trust are practising GPs with special interests and supporting professional practitioners, some of whom are themselves past graduates from the same courses. Tutors on these courses are supported by mentors for each student (normally hospital consultants), who provide access to case studies in their own hospitals, as well as providing advice and support to students.

132 The University's standard requirement is that all partner staff CVs should be supplied to the school for approval, and this policy was consistently implemented in the partner audit trails submitted to the audit team. However, although mentor CVs from the NHS Trust partner are also supplied to the University, Trust senior staff were not aware of any formal University approval process for mentors. Students themselves are responsible for selecting a suitable mentor, and the Trust then checks that the proposed mentor is a registered hospital consultant. This may represent a risk, as although the mentor may be a professional colleague of the student they are responsible for signing off the student's work

as meeting course learning outcomes. There is however, an extensive mentor handbook providing guidance in all aspects of the mentor and assessor roles. The team would therefore encourage the University to ensure that it formally reviews and approves all mentor appointments, as well as those of other partner teaching staff.

133 Staff induction, development and appraisal are primarily the responsibility of partners (often to conform to local and national employment policy and legislation), but with some supplementary support from the University. The audit team heard that course coordinators are the key mechanism for supporting partner staff, and sometimes facilitate training in response to specific needs. One overseas partner's teaching staff felt they received good support on how to teach franchised modules from their peers at Bradford, and the University had also organised a workshop in 2009 on dissertation supervision for partner staff, as well as a seminar on marking standards to deal with discrepancies between marks awarded by partner staff and second markers at Bradford.

134 While most of the examples given above might be characterised as reactive rather than proactive staff development support delivered by the University, the audit team was also made aware of an innovative example of proactive staff development support being piloted with a new overseas partner institution, where the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice (PGCHEP) course for new academic staff is being delivered entirely using distance learning methods. At the time of the audit visit, the pilot delivery of the first module of this course had been running for several weeks, using a range of delivery methods, with material delivered by five university staff to eight partner academic staff. The audit team was able to browse both the online resources for the course and a recording of one of the interactive delivery sessions, and noted the active engagement and successful team working that had been achieved in the online delivery of the module. In consequence, the team considered the introduction of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice by distance learning for staff in partner organisations as a feature of good practice.

## **Overall conclusion on the management of the quality of learning opportunities**

135 The audit team considered that, although there are some positive elements, the University's overall approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students is not sufficiently comprehensive or joined up. The team has concerns and has made recommendations above about the currency of contractual agreements (see paragraph 56), the University's mechanisms for ensuring that learning opportunities remain appropriate (see paragraphs 37 and 97), the current absence of a detailed guide to the quality management of collaborative provision (see paragraph 32), the insufficient institutional oversight of the management of quality (see paragraph 42) and the lack of robust institutional arrangements to oversee admission decisions for collaborative provision students (see paragraph 121). Accordingly, the team concluded that limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision**

136 The Briefing Paper stated that the University's pre-existing plans for an institutional quality enhancement strategy were subsumed by its Academic Policy Framework (APF), which highlights the need to 'plan a holistic approach to enhancing the student experience'. Three new posts - Director of Learning and Teaching, Dean of Graduate Studies and Dean of Students - have been established to facilitate the implementation of the APF. A new Academic Development Delivery Board would oversee delivery of the APF with reports on performance against the strategy being received annually by the Academic Strategy and

Performance Committee (ASPC). The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) has overall responsibility for quality enhancement initiatives. The Briefing Paper highlighted the role of quality assurance processes in identifying enhancement opportunities, such as external examiner reports, the approval, monitoring and review of programmes and management information in the form of student feedback and the National Student Survey (NSS).

137 The APF, which was approved by Senate in June 2009, is a strategic document that is both ambitious in scope and self-critical. It has four components: Student Experience; Learning and Teaching; Research; and Knowledge Transfer. It contains no specific focus on collaborative provision.

138 The Academic Framework Delivery Board met for the first time in October 2009, when three action points relating to student induction, human resources strategy and international issues were agreed and future meetings were set for February and May 2010. When the audit team asked why the February meeting had not taken place it was told that insufficient progress had been made at that point but that the Board would definitely be meeting in May. The audit team was told that the Board's priority would be to monitor the tasks (as many as 60 had been identified) arising from the APF, but that it had not yet submitted the first of its annual reports to ASPC.

139 The APF also states that a new Academic Development Unit (ADU) would be formed, to be located within the Centre for Active Learning and with a board to review progress. However, the diagram in the Briefing Paper giving an 'impressionistic overview' of the organisation of the University, depicts ADU as part of Learner Support Services, and the University website puts it in a different place again, as one of the directorates that are part of the institution's Corporate Services. The audit team was subsequently told that ADU is indeed a directorate, and not part of Learner Support Services and that the Centre for Active Learning, which would be a physical entity, remains an aspiration but has been delayed by financial considerations.

140 The audit team also sought clarification regarding the University's quality enhancement strategy because, although the Briefing Paper presents this as having been subsumed into the APF, the job description for the new post of Director of Learning and Teaching requires the holder to 'develop and keep under review a Quality Enhancement Strategy with both Schools and support directorates' and the APF itself states that a quality enhancement strategy will be developed 'in which Schools prepare enhancement targets' and performance against which, as reported annually to ASPC, would affect future budget profiles. The team was told that this was still the intention, that progress had been affected by the temporary absence of the Director of Learning and Teaching, but that schools were indeed developing enhancement targets, in connection with their annual monitoring reports, and that these involved collaborative as well as home-based provision. Evidence of progress could be found in the minutes of the Quality Enhancement Sub-Committee (QESC).

141 The QESC is a subcommittee of LTC, whose functions include articulating the University's approach to quality enhancement, promoting its communication to staff and students via the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group (TQEG) and establishing a rolling programme of thematic audits relating to learning and teaching. The 2009-10 minutes of the QESC show that it has initiated four thematic audits. One of these, on Assessment and Feedback, was well advanced, but some of the working groups did not have sufficient members and one had yet to meet.

142 The TQEG aims to enhance the quality of the University's taught provision by supporting delivery of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the dissemination of good practice and through curriculum and staff development. Its staff includes e-learning advisers and learning technologists. It organises an annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment Conference, the next of which will run over two days in June 2010, as well as a Learning Support Seminar series to help academic staff keep up to date

with developments in teaching and learning. It also manages the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice (PGCHEP) including the distance-learning version that is being piloted and which the audit team identified as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 134). Information about all of these matters is posted on the TQEG pages of the University website.

143 The Learning Support Seminars held in April 2009 and entitled 'Sharing Good Practice in Collaborative Provision' took the form of an open discussion about the experience of managing collaborative provision across different schools. There was input from the University's Finance department and most of the recommendations were concerned with financial matters, although annual contract review and a handbook for staff involved in managing collaborative provision were also recommended. In November 2009 ASPC resolved that the University would produce a web-based guide to the management of collaborative arrangements; remind schools of the means by which they were expected to compare student performance on home and partner programmes; adopt a standard approach to course coordinators' visit reports, which should be submitted to CPC to provide an overview of collaborative activity and to partner institutions; and that the University's guidance on effective dialogue with students in partner institutions should be revised.

144 The audit team welcomed the University's formulation of an Academic Policy Framework but concluded that some of the elements that are key to its implementation, including the Academic Framework Delivery Board and the Quality Enhancement Strategy, were still at a very early stage of development, with no report having yet been made to ASPC. The rolling programme of thematic audits, the establishment of which is one of the main functions of the QESC, is also at an early stage, and the 2009-14 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is not yet complete. What is already well established is the TQEG and, although most of its work to date has been with Bradford staff rather than those in partner institutions, the 2009 seminar on Sharing Good Practice in Collaborative Provision did lead to some significant recommendations. The audit team welcomes the University's decision to act upon these recommendations and would encourage it to do so as soon as possible.

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

145 QAA's 2006 Special Review of research degree programmes at the University concluded that the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision was appropriate and satisfactory. It mentioned the University's Codes of Practice for Directors of Postgraduate Research, Research Students and Research Student Examiners as one of three instances of good practice. The 2007 Institutional audit concluded that the University's arrangements for the management of the quality and standards of its postgraduate research provision were effective and that the University codes of practice met the expectations of the precepts of the QAA *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The 2007 audit did, however, recommend that it would be desirable for the University to ensure consistent representation of postgraduate research students at institutional level. It also concurred with the University's view that its processes for monitoring postgraduate research students should be made more consistent and robust.

146 The audit team learnt that the University has strengthened postgraduate representation at the institutional level by enabling up to two members of its Research Students' Forum to attend meetings of the Research Degrees Committee. The University has also initiated an annual monitoring process for research degree programmes, one outcome

of which has been information about how research student representation varies between schools.

147 As part of the University's approach to quality enhancement a new post, Dean of Graduate Studies (sometimes referred to, for example on the Hub website, as Dean of Graduate Research), was created in 2009. The Dean now chairs the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), which makes recommendations to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) on matters of academic policy relating to higher degrees by research, coordinates quality assurance and learning support for these degrees, and, in relation to individual candidates, makes recommendations to Senate on such matters as admission, progression and the appointment of examiners.

148 The only research degree delivered collaboratively by the University is a doctoral-level programme. The programme is also delivered at Bradford and cohort numbers across both partners are capped at 30 per annum. This is a professional practice doctorate, which aims to produce reflective managers capable of independent judgement. As it is designed for practising managers and the like, it is only available through part-time study. All entrants are expected to have significant experience at middle or senior management level and most already have an MBA or equivalent master's degree. The first part of the programme, worth 70 credits, prepares candidates without the master's qualification through attendance at elective units of an MBA programme. The second part, worth 190 credits and taken over two years, consists of taught modules, some of which provide training in research methods while others are designed to develop discipline-specific skills and knowledge. It includes a 20-credit Reflective Learning Journal, which is seen as innovative because it is at doctoral level. The final 280 credits are normally obtained through a 60,000-word thesis, but may also be gained through a combination of a shorter thesis and one or two management reports of publishable quality, the rationale for this element of choice being the applied nature of the programme and the varying needs of students.

149 The Programme Specification for the doctoral award states that it is accredited by the Economic and Social Research Council and a professional body. However, this is misleading because the 2009 professional body Peer Review granted the European Quality Label to the school as a whole. The programme as such has not been accredited by the professional body. Several sections of the brochure for the programme include the logo of another professional body, despite the fact that, although the body does accredit doctoral programmes, it has not accredited this one.

150 The programme is taught and assessed in English and all students, whether based at Bradford or at the partner, take the same modules and are taught by the same lecturers. Three of the four residential sessions during year one, including the initial induction, are held in Bradford, as are two of the three in the second year and the 'mini viva' at which the candidate presents and defends his or her thesis proposal. Students already engaged on the thesis are expected to participate in at least two Peer Review Workshops each academic year, chosen from the six that are offered. Publicity regarding the location of the workshops is inconsistent. In line with University procedures and regulations, the taught elements of the programme are moderated, for all students, by the same external examiner, and for the research element all students have two supervisors. Students and supervisors complete an annual individual progress report. The programme is overseen by a Director of Studies at Bradford and a Programme Director at the partner. One of the Peer Review Workshops is utilised as an opportunity for a formal meeting between students and the directors and this constitutes the Staff/Student Liaison Committee.

151 Information about the programme is set out on the partner's website and in the Programme Handbook issued to students. The latter is generally comprehensive, though it does not make mention of procedures for complaints or appeals by students.

152 The programme recruited its first students in 2001 and the University undertook a review in 2004. The review noted that, through an oversight, no contract had been drawn up for the programme. It resolved that a new contract would be produced to include the various master's programmes delivered by the partner plus the programme. It also noted that the programme would be included in a Course Continuation Review scheduled for the 2005-06 session. The audit team saw the report of the review but were not shown the new contract.

153 The audit team read the first annual monitoring review of postgraduate research programmes. Reports on most of these programmes were considered by the RDC at its meeting in March 2009 but the doctoral programme was one of four areas that were not covered and for which reports were required to be submitted in time for the May meeting. RDC considered the programme in April 2010. The minutes of that RDC meeting had not been produced by the time of the audit visit. However, the team was told that the provision in 2008-09 had been considered by RDC the previous week and judged to be satisfactory.

154 The annual monitoring report concluded that the programme is a 'flagship programme' for the school that had gone from strength to strength but was in need of review as it reached the end of its first decade. The report incorporates statistics for student enrolment and performance for all but the first cohort of students; a critical overview based on an internal review conducted during 2008-09; and an evaluation of aims and learning outcomes showing how these were embedded in the programme and highlighting points of innovation. It takes account of a survey issued in November 2008 to the 66 students from the first seven cohorts who were still registered on the programme. Although only 16 responded to the survey it provided some valuable insights, which were analysed by the Director of Studies. The report also takes account of 2008-09 correspondence with the external examiner for the taught elements of the programme. He considered the programme to be of the appropriate standard but suggested that some failures of one module might indicate cross-cultural differences in preparedness for that kind of learning. The response to this observation acknowledged that cross-cultural differences might be a factor and proposed a change to the title of the module, although the audit team noted that this has not yet been implemented.

155 The action plan arising from the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) states that the internal review had shown that the programme was in need of a 'thorough overhaul'. It proposed: bringing the teaching of research methods in-house; redesigning the second year of the programme so that it was better adapted to the specific needs of the students; and providing the same level of support for students recruited directly by Bradford as is offered to those recruited by the partner. These changes were to be implemented in time for the 2009 entry.

156 The audit team was told that because the requirements of the students were significantly different from those of students enrolled for PhDs the teaching of research methods, previously delivered by the Graduate School, had been brought in-house by the school. It also heard that the internal review of the programme had disclosed the need for other changes, including measures to make it easier for students to complete the programme within the intended four to six years, better preparation for undertaking the thesis, and more reliable tracking of students through their studies. It was also told that students would be surveyed regularly in future, although they were well-able to voice their opinions by more informal means.

157 The audit team learnt that the expansion of postgraduate research, particularly transnationally, is one of the key issues to be addressed in the next two years. The team discussed with the University the implications such expansion might have for the maintenance of standards and quality in the context of collaborative provision. The team was told that there would be a need to assist certain partner institutions that want more of their staff to obtain doctoral qualifications. This would entail clearer, more visible training

programmes for those partners, a crucial element of which would be a thorough skills audit for each participating individual.

158 The audit team learnt that in March 2010 Senate had approved changes to the ordinances and regulations governing research degrees. This meant that the University's own codes of practice for directors of postgraduate research and research supervisors, for research students and for research student examiners had been temporarily replaced with a Briefing Note for Research Students. Though the changes were few in number, the opportunity had been taken to reform the documents to make them more accessible. One outcome of the process had been to withdraw the code of practice for supervisors and that for students and to amend and rename that for examiners, while simultaneously providing a new website for research students and staff where all of the information needed by them could be found in one place. This forms part of the electronic 'Hub' and incorporates material on admission and registration, support for students, supervision, progression, and completion. It includes the new Annual Progress Report forms to be used by students and by their supervisors. The site is clear, well organised and comprehensive, although it does not include information on complaints or appeals procedures. The audit team was advised that a formal document, demonstrating that the expectations of the precepts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice* were being met, will be drawn up shortly and published on the Academic Standards and Support Unit (ASSU) website.

159 The audit team agreed with the University's own judgement that the collaborative doctoral programme had been in need of a thorough review. This has now happened through the new Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) process for postgraduate research programmes, which will ensure continuous monitoring. It should be supplemented soon, however, by a periodic review involving external scrutiny. Meanwhile, the creation of the post of Dean of Graduate Studies is already helping the University to improve its management of postgraduate research programmes in general. Regular and systematic monitoring will be an important element of that management and the audit team wishes to commend, as a feature of good practice, the introduction of an annual monitoring process for postgraduate research programmes. The audit team concluded that the University's postgraduate research framework and its implementation meet the expectations of the precepts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice*.

## Section 6: Published information

160 The Briefing Paper stated that standard University processes are used to ensure that the information published regarding collaborative provision is accurate and complete. These processes apply to both electronic and paper-based publications. However, the standard procedures applicable to campus provision are augmented for collaborative provision by a number of additional checks which course coordinators and specific post-holders carry out on paper and web publications.

161 Contractual agreements seen by the audit team contained clauses regarding the approval of publicity created by partner institutions which refers to University awards. The clauses require partner institutions to obtain written approval from the University for publicity relating to University degrees or the use of the University of Bradford's name. The clauses are not standard. The contracts signed on behalf of one school also contain a clause providing for approval to be given by default if the University does not respond within either seven or fourteen days. The University does not formally monitor the frequency with which the default clause is invoked, but staff from partner institutions who met the audit team indicated that it had been invoked on occasion. The audit team noted that, while the inclusion of such clauses was pragmatic, the result was that the University could not be sure that it had actively approved all publicity relating to its awards produced by partner institutions.

162 Approval for publicity relating to collaborative provision is normally given at school level. The person giving the approval varies between schools. It is part of the course coordinator's job description to monitor, and, where appropriate, amend and offer advice on, partner publicity relating to the University's collaborative provision in order to avoid 'exaggerated or misleading claims'. Monitoring involves checking materials during visits. Staff who met the audit team stated that, where problems had been identified with materials, the matter had been raised with the partner and corrective action taken. However, the team saw examples of webpages that did not represent the University in an appropriate or accurate way and concluded that the University's monitoring processes were not fully effective. The University is therefore advised to put in place an effective system for approving and monitoring partner publicity for collaborative programmes leading to a University of Bradford award.

163 The University has recently clarified the minimum content to be provided to students in handbooks. The list of mandatory information is quite short and does not explicitly include procedures concerning appeals and complaints. The University, however, provides considerable information for students on its web pages and through the Blackboard virtual learning environment. This includes information on complaints and appeals. Course handbooks are developed by partner institutions using materials supplied by the University and signed off by the relevant school. Students may also receive local handbooks and copies of these are supplied to the University. The students whom the audit team met stated that they had found the handbooks they had been given accurate and helpful.

164 The audit team viewed a sample of handbooks from partner institutions. The extent and accuracy of information given in the handbooks was variable. With respect to complaints and appeals, some handbooks gave helpful information and referred students to the relevant University websites. Other handbooks contained no information or gave varying information about the person to whom the appeal should be submitted, and in some cases the information given about appeals was inaccurate. The team considered that there was unjustified variability in the information provided to students regarding complaints and appeals, and that students could be disadvantaged, in some cases by a lack of information and in other cases by inaccurate information. The University is therefore advised to ensure that all students studying on collaborative programmes receive appropriate and accurate information about complaints and appeals.

165 External examiners' reports are sent to the partner institution as attachments to the annual monitoring review which is not shared with students. None of the students who met the audit team recalled having seen an external examiner's report for the programme upon which they were studying, nor were they particularly aware of the existence of such reports. The desirability of giving students in partner institutions access to external examiner reports was noted in the University's Audit of overseas provision in India in 2009. The team encourages the University to find ways of giving students in collaborative provision access to these reports.

166 The University publishes its collaborative provision register on its website. The information given includes the name and country location of the institution and the University degrees available at the partner institution. However, while broadly accurate, the webpage omits some provision which is publicised on partners' websites. There are also differences in degree titles between one school's webpage and the University's webpages as well as the addition, in the former, of a further programme. The QAA Audit of overseas provision in 2009 noted that the University should consider ensuring that 'the online summary of the collaborative provision register represents accurately the approved programmes' at the partner institution. While updated on the University's webpage, the information about the partner concerned in the overseas audit has yet to be updated on the school pages. In the interests of accuracy of publicly available information, the University will wish to ensure that these discrepancies are removed and that the collaborative provision register published on the web is fully up to date and accurate.

167 On the basis of the evidence seen, the audit team concluded that only limited reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes and permits to be published about the quality of its collaborative provision and the quality of the collaborative awards.

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