University of Greenwich

Audit of collaborative provision

April 2011

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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 Greenwich (the University) from 28 March to 1 April 2011. 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 Greenwich is that in the context of its collaborative provision:

- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers
- **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 audit team found little evidence of systematic enhancement, but concluded that recent changes to the management of collaborative provision had the potential to strengthen the enhancement of learning opportunities in the University's collaborative provision.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative provision

The University does not offer postgraduate research programmes through collaborative provision.

Published information

The audit team concluded that, for the most part, 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 standards of the collaborative awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the Table of Responsibilities contained within the revised Memorandum of Agreement template, which makes it clear to both the University and its partners where their respective responsibilities lie (paragraph 26)
- the risk assessment approach to tracking cumulative curriculum changes, in order to prevent curriculum drift (paragraph 44)
- the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences' collaborations website, which is a source of useful information for staff and students involved in collaborative programmes (paragraph 127).

Recommendations for action

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

The team considers it advisable for the University to:

- ensure that, as the University continues to develop its collaborative strategy, its processes and structures are appropriate to the scale and complexity of its collaborative provision (paragraphs 19, 21, 23 and 24)
- create and maintain a publicly available and up-to-date list of collaborative partners and programmes (paragraph 28)
- put in place a consistent and robust approach to the credit rating of external courses (paragraph 43)
- ensure an appropriately consistent approach to the provision of timely feedback on all student work (paragraph 59)
- at programme approval, agree with the relevant partner a maximum cohort size that is commensurate with the resources available (paragraph 91)
- where admissions decisions are being made by partner institutions on applicants without relevant formal qualifications, agree with those partners clear criteria to ensure consistency and equity of treatment of applicants (paragraph 94)
- consistently make programme specifications available to prospective and current students (paragraph 124).

The team considers it desirable for the University to:

- seek to achieve greater consistency in the expectations placed upon its partners in relation to student involvement in quality assurance processes and give greater prominence to feedback from students in the partner's and University's reporting processes (paragraph 75 and 80)
- improve the effectiveness of its procedures for ongoing monitoring of its partner colleges to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate higher education learning environment (paragraph 90).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The University of Greenwich describes itself as a 'large and diverse institution' which traces its antecedents to 1890. One of its precursors was Woolwich Polytechnic, the second polytechnic to be established in the UK. The University has three principal campuses: the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich; the Avery Hill Campus at Eltham in south-east London, and Medway, a campus it shares with the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University.

2   The University has nine schools (one being a joint school with the University of Kent), each of which is managed by a Dean (formerly designated a Head of School). The University offers a wide range of programmes across the entire academic spectrum.

3   The Briefing Paper stated that the University's rationale for collaborative provision is that, among other benefits, it helps to: respond to regional and local demand for higher education; increase, facilitate and widen access to higher education; generate income for all partners; and raise the University's international profile.

4   One of the objectives of the five-year Corporate Plan that was put in place in 2006 was to develop partnerships both in the UK and overseas, with a specific target of increasing its non-campus-based overseas students by 30% by 2011. By the time of the audit, this target had already been achieved. The University's strategy for collaborative provision was reviewed and revised in 2010.

5   The University plans to consolidate its overseas activity in targeted regions, possibly developing an offshore campus. The team was also told of plans in the School of Business to expand its overseas numbers by 30-40%, although it later appeared that this referred to past growth rather than future aspirations.

6   The University has three types of partnership. The first is with local and regional partners that comprise the Partner College Network of nine Further Education Colleges and two Higher Education Funding Council for England-fundable specialist colleges (the partner colleges), together with three other publicly funded colleges outside the Network. The second type is the National Lifelong Learning Sector Network of 24 publicly funded linked Colleges across the UK, while the third type comprises 65 full-cost partnerships, 56 of which are overseas.

7   The Briefing Paper stated that in the 2009-10 academic year there was a total of over 35,000 students on programmes leading to awards of the University, 22,000 of whom were on campus and around 1,000 on distance-learning programmes. Of those on collaborative programmes, 3,000 were in partner colleges, 1,000 in Lifelong Learning Sector Network Colleges, and nearly 9,000 in full-cost partnerships.

The information base for the Audit of collaborative provision

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

9   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (March 2009)
- the report of the previous Audit of collaborative provision (March 2006)
- Integrated quality and enhancement review reports published by QAA since the previous Institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies)
- the report on the mid-cycle follow-up to Institutional audit
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students at the University and at partner link visits.

Developments since the last audit

10   The most recent Audit of collaborative provision took place in 2006 and the most recent Institutional audit in 2009. Since the 2006 audit there has been continued expansion of collaborative activity, particularly of full-cost partnerships. There has been some additional resource to support this expansion, but during the audit team's meetings different views

emerged among staff as to whether investment should precede or succeed the creation of a new partnership.

11   The report of the 2006 Audit of collaborative provision recommended that the University should further develop its collaborative provision strategy and should clarify the locus of responsibility for decision making with respect to such provision within the University. The new Collaborative Provision Strategy seeks to consolidate the international collaborative provision portfolio and similarly to strengthen the University's management of it. During the audit, the audit team learned of the various and, in the team's view, complicated processes that govern collaborative partnerships and also learned of plans to simplify and to harmonise practices. A number of changes were introduced from autumn 2010. Two separate committees have been established, the Partner Scrutiny Panel (PSP) which considers approval at an institutional level, and the Academic Planning Committee (APC) which considers programme-level management and monitoring. (See paragraphs 17 and 18.) It is also part of PSP's brief to keep institutional partnerships under review. An administrative Partnership Division undertakes strategic management of collaborative provision within the Partner College Network; the School of Education manages the Lifelong Learning Sector Network; a new International Partnership Office oversees international collaborative activity; and a separate Learning and Quality Unit (LQU) is responsible for central quality assurance. The team agreed with the University's claim that there is now a clearer distinction between the strategic management responsibilities for the three types of partnership.

12   The 2006 report also recommended that the University clarify its policy on periodic review in all types of collaborative provision. The University has now done this and is part-way through a JISC-funded project called UG-Flex to enhance systems and processes related to curriculum management and quality assurance. Oversight of periodic review is now the responsibility of the LQU of the Vice-Chancellor's office. (See paragraph 50.)

13   In 2009-10, the University introduced a new Annual Reporting procedure. The School Monitoring and Review Document uses key performance indicators to report on both collaborative provision and mainstream provision within schools. (See paragraphs 46 and 47.)

14   The 2006 report recommended that statistical information be rolled out across all types of collaborative provision. The University recognises that the provision of data has improved since the last audit but acknowledges that work needs to be done to encourage the fuller and more comprehensive use of these data. (See paragraphs 66 and 67.)

15   The University acknowledges that activities in respect of the full-cost partners are less well developed than in other partners. The recent appointment of an International Partnerships Manager is recognition by the University of the need to provide more central oversight of its International activity. Already there is evidence of useful developments, such as the new collaborative partner report template for all partners and the production of a handbook of international partnerships for University staff and partners involved in international partnership activity. The role of the International Programme Manager has yet to be fully developed.

16   The report of the 2009 Institutional audit made a number of recommendations that apply to both mainstream and collaborative provision. One recommendation related to the then three-model degree classification system, which has now been replaced. There were also 'advisable' recommendations that applied to central oversight of school-based periodic review, the appointment and operation of external examiners, the institutional oversight of programme changes, and ensuring the consistent student representation in quality management at all levels. The 'light touch' reviews that were the subject of a

recommendation in the audit report of 2009 no longer exist, and a mechanism has been introduced to manage cumulative curriculum change (see paragraphs 50 and 44 respectively). The audit team concluded that the University had responded well to the recommendations of the 2006 audit.

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

17   Academic Council is responsible for the academic oversight of the University's entire provision and is supported by its Learning and Quality Committee (LQC). The Academic Collaboration Committee is the committee of Council that monitors all collaborative provision on its behalf (taking over the work previously done by the Academic Planning Sub-Committee). As noted in paragraph 11, the work of that committee is now shared between two new but smaller committees, the PSP and the APC.

18   PSP is responsible for making recommendations to Academic Council about the approval of potential new partners. According to its terms of reference it will also undertake regular oversight of existing partners. This panel is relatively new, and it was difficult for the team to judge, at this stage, whether it is working effectively. APC is responsible for the authorisation of programmes (both internal and collaborative) to proceed to development and approval, and also for their suspension or discontinuation. The Briefing Paper stated that this change in orientation has been introduced in recognition of the view that the approval of partners should be separate from the authorisation and approval of programmes and that Academic Council, as the senior academic committee, should be the most appropriate overseer of the development of new partnerships. This is a very recent change of process, so there is little firm evidence on which to base a judgement, although the audit team did support the rationale for the change.

19   The University defines two key principles for the management of its academic quality and standards. The first is that authority for the management of quality and standards is delegated to the academic schools through their delivery of programmes of study, operating within agreed frameworks, principles and protocols. Second, that engagement with external evaluation of University standards and quality management processes is fundamental, and provides an independent and critically supportive view of those standards and processes. With a high number of partners in the UK and overseas, it is apparent that these principles are under considerable stress. For example, the audit team found that what was happening in schools and partner colleges was not always known to senior management. The University seems to have acknowledged this deficiency by a strengthening of the central LQU and a 'more robust procedural core for QA, developed with a view to ensuring tighter cross-school consistency and stronger central oversight in the management of quality and standards'. The audit team initially found it hard to reconcile these apparently contradictory views and took the view that the University was moving to a similar conclusion. It became apparent during the audit that tensions remained between the views of senior managers in the University as to the degree of central control required to ensure uniformity and regularity. (See paragraph 24.)

20   The Briefing Paper stated that the 'practical work of assuring standards is the responsibility of schools at programme level reporting through Departmental and school committees, but overseen by the Learning and Quality Unit and the LQC'. From examining documents provided, the audit team found that considerable expertise and efficiency existed in the key schools involved in collaborative activity. What was less clear to the team was whether this same strength and expertise existed in the central oversight exercised by the University through its major committees and units, as noted in the next paragraph.

21   Schools also report through their School Boards to Academic Council. School Learning and Quality Committees, some of which have collaboration subcommittees, oversee each school's collaborative provision. Academic Council receives many different reports from different bodies. The audit team was not fully convinced that Academic Council could exercise full oversight of its work, given the multiplicity of committees and boards working at various levels. The team found examples of issues at school level that did not feed up to Academic Council. (See paragraph 24.)

22   The role of link tutors varies across schools, and the University has acknowledged this variation in practice. The Briefing Paper stated that link tutors are pivotal agents in the University's support for collaborative provision. From the audit team's discussions with link tutors, it was clear that they are the vital communication link between the University and the partner. Link tutors are involved in checking the accuracy of a partner's published information and in checking the adequacy of learning resources, and of staff development activity in the partner. They provide an annual report to their home school. The partner visits also clearly confirmed that the link tutor was indeed the critical link with the University. There is no specific training for link tutors, although the team did hear that a mentoring process took place when new link tutors were appointed and that there is an annual meeting of link tutors. An example of a new template for link tutors reporting on a partner visit is given in the University's comprehensive Quality Assurance Handbook. The team viewed this as a positive development.

23   The University has recognised the dangers of inconsistency and is now striving to bring an element of standardisation into its processes. It also recognises that the process of standardisation is not yet complete. The audit team heard throughout the audit of a 'journey' that was being undertaken. The team also heard how the present devolved management system is being transformed, with the aim of bringing harmony to an institution which, previously, allowed considerable variation of practice with regard to its collaborative provision. The audit team was unable to form a firm conclusion about this process, given that it is far from being completed; but the team did feel that the direction of travel was appropriate. (See paragraph 24.)

24   The magnitude of collaborative provision at the University has led to considerable stress of the present management structures. The audit team was not convinced that the present structures were sufficiently robust to manage the entirety of the varied provision. (See paragraphs 19, 21 and 23 above.) The team therefore advises the University to ensure that, as it continues to develop its collaborative strategy, its processes and structures are appropriate to the scale and complexity of its collaborative provision. The team heard that there was some expectation of a review of structures and processes once the new Vice-Chancellor was in place; however, the team would encourage the University not to delay this process with respect to collaborative provision.

Selecting and approving a partner organisation or agent

25   As noted above (paragraph 11), a review of current practice was carried out in 2010.The University now has a dual process: for selecting and monitoring partners through PSP; and for monitoring the academic provision through APC. The new system is a two-stage process: PSP makes a recommendation to Academic Council; following that, APC is responsible for programme-level proposals. See paragraphs 29-31 for further details.

Written agreements with a partner organisation or agent

26   All agreements with partners are signed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development). An improved template for both the Memorandum of Agreement and the

Financial Memorandum were put in place very recently. The audit team saw examples of these for the partners that it visited and took the view that they were comprehensive and fit for purpose and that they clearly defined the respective responsibilities of the University and its partner. In particular, the team considered the Table of Responsibilities within the revised Memorandum of Agreement template - which makes it clear to both the University and its partners where their respective responsibilities lie - to be a feature of good practice.

27   The audit team was given a 2009-10 Register of Collaborations, which was presented as an up-to-date and authoritative list of the collaborations approved by the University. During the audit visit it became apparent to the team that the register was incomplete. A supplementary list was provided by the University on request from the team. This second list still did not include all programmes offered by at least one partner college. The minutes of Academic Council of 24 March 2010 read: 'A register of all current collaborations is being prepared together with an audit of documentation held by schools. All schools now have had their paperwork examined by a member of the Collaborations Working Group. Substantial gaps remain. Schools were reminded of the importance of being able to locate all relevant paperwork for the audit.'

28   The audit team concluded that a fully up-to-date register of collaborative provision is not routinely maintained at the University and it could find no evidence of such a register being available as part of the institution's information available to the public. Consequently, the team advises the University to create and maintain a publicly available and up-to-date list of collaborative partners and programmes.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards and programmes

Partner approval and re-approval

29   As stated above, from the start of the academic year 2010-11, partner approval has been subject to separate appraisal by the Partner Scrutiny Panel (PSP). Academic Council must endorse the approval of the partner before any programmes can proceed to approval. Recommendations for approval of a partner by PSP are based on key information, including the partner's background, structure and staffing, quality assurance arrangements, a due diligence report and an institutional visit report compiled as a result of a visit by senior university managers. All documentation is written to a university template. On approval, the appointed institutional link manager arranges for the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement, which is effected on behalf of the University by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development).

30   Renewal of partner approval is also undertaken by PSP on the basis of evidence presented by the Learning and Quality Unit (LQU), which includes information drawn from (among other sources) statistical data, external examiners' reports, annual monitoring documents, approval events and student feedback. If PSP feels that the evidence is equivocal it can ask for further information in the form of a critical appraisal of the partnership by both the partner and the relevant schools, and a new due diligence report. In addition, PSP may require an on-site or virtual review event before recommending (or otherwise) re-approval. Should re-approval be refused, the University has discontinuation processes in place. Discontinuation must be approved by Academic Council and conducted in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement. Schools must present to the Academic Planning

Committee (APC) a list of programmes to be discontinued along with arrangements for supporting existing students. Should a partnership be reinstated, the full process of partner approval is again initiated.

31   While the audit team noted from the minutes of PSP that one partner had been re-approved for a further five years, the minutes seen by the team did not indicate whether any real discussion had taken place nor did they note the documentation that had been considered. Nevertheless the team had sight of the documentation considered by PSP, and it was clear to them that there would have been no issues of concern in relation to that particular partner institution and that re-approval was an appropriate action. However, the team found that minuting of discussion and noting of documentation was minimal at school level. (See paragraphs 37, 73, 75 and 113.)

Programme approval

32   The University approves several different models of collaborative programme:

- franchised programmes: these are existing University programmes that have been approved for delivery on campus and that may also be approved for delivery by an external partner
- validated programmes: these are programmes designed and developed by a partner using the University's protocols, approved for delivery by that partner, and approved for a University of Greenwich award
- externally validated programmes: these are programmes devised and developed by a partner to its own specifications and validated by the University as equivalent to a University of Greenwich award.

The audit team also identified further models of partnership, namely articulation agreements and school-based credit rating.

33   The University uses similar frameworks for programme approval in its collaborative partners and its mainstream provision, with amendments made to the process depending upon whether it involves a new or existing partner, a new programme developed by an existing partner, or franchised provision. Initial discussion occurs within schools. The school puts forward a proposal to APC confirming school support, with the documentation listed in the Quality Assurance Handbook. APC will then authorise the programme for development, or request further information, or refuse authorisation.

34   Once authorisation to proceed has been granted, the school identifies a link tutor who then works with the partner to prepare for the approval event. The *Quality Assurance Handbook* lists the minimum documentation required for an approval event, including extra information required if the proposal is for a franchised programme. The information must include reference to: the FHEQ; the relevant QAA subject benchmark statement(s); and programme specifications. (See paragraph 124.)

35   The approval event is normally organised by the school although the LQU may take the lead in complex proposals. Schools liaise with LQU regarding the composition of panels. The criteria are clearly set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook, which states that panels should include external members. The audit team confirmed that there was external membership in the examples it saw. For a newly approved partner the event will involve a face-to-face meeting at the partner which includes a senior member of University staff and the link tutor. Where the partner is established virtual approval events may be used. Staff met by the team stated that they felt virtual events were successful, however the virtual partner visits undertaken by the team were not felt by the team to be successful, with video

links constantly breaking down throughout the meetings, leading to questions and answers being interrupted. The University may wish to consider how to ensure that programme approvals are only conducted through a virtual event if a high-quality link and technical support can be guaranteed.

36   Approval decisions and the meeting of any conditions are signed off by the panel chair on a pro forma and reported to School Learning and Quality Committees (SLQCs). In addition, approval events are noted in School Boards. The reports of approval events are passed to LQU. Approval and review events are also reported to Academic Collaboration Committee (ACC). A Scrutiny Group reports to ACC and monitors the composition, conduct and findings of panels. The report seen by the team included detailed recommendations for the University. The Briefing Paper stated that the Scrutiny Group had generally found panels to be properly constituted and conducted carefully and thoroughly and, where there were concerns, ACC can refer them to the school to be addressed. The minutes of ACC showed that that committee had referred matters back to schools for clarification.

37   While the team saw clear document trails showing the process of programme approval and the signing off of conditions, it also noted that the minutes of the SLQCs and School Board minutes merely noted the approval events and that conditions had been satisfied, and again there was no discussion of such or any indication that the committees or boards had seen the event reports.

Articulation

38   As noted in paragraph 32, the University has a number of articulation agreements. The Quality Assurance Handbook gives a brief description of articulation and states that all new articulation agreements since 2008 have been subject to approval by APC through the completion of a pro forma. The audit team noted that a number of articulation agreements had been approved by APC and on occasion such agreements had been referred back to the schools for amendment. The team was told that the University expected such articulation to include a mapping of the partner provision against relevant University of Greenwich provision and would expect the partner provision to go through a local quality regulatory regime.

39   Further, in 2008 APSC required that any articulation from postgraduate diplomas to University of Greenwich Master's provision should only be allowed in respect of such diplomas being awarded by other UK awarding bodies, or through diplomas accredited by regulators of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Specifically, there should be no articulation in respect of postgraduate diplomas from private providers unless there were equivalent quality assurance procedures for the grading, moderation and ratification of awards by external examiners and the entry qualifications for the diploma were a relevant UK degree or equivalent. The audit team saw evidence that schools had rejected articulations that did not comply with these requirements. However, the relevant form, completed by programme teams, does not make explicit either these requirements or the requirement to map partner provision against that of the University. Consequently the team would encourage the University to clarify its expectations to programme teams.

Credit rating

40   The University has an external process for assigning credit value by which a judgement is made about the amount of academic credit that can be awarded for courses or training programmes offered by other institutions or agencies and subject primarily to that organisation's regulations and quality regime. Providers can apply to the University for credit

rating of their provision through a process undertaken within schools. Students can then use those credits for advanced standing on University awards.

41   Guidance in this area provided in the Quality Assurance Handbook is limited and the audit team found significant difference in practice between the two main schools which carry out this activity. The School of Health and Social Care has produced a very thorough and informative handbook, has established a Credit Rating Group chaired by the University Director of Learning and Quality, and has a code of practice in place. All relevant activity is internally moderated and overseen by an external examiner.

42   In contrast, there was no documented procedure available for the School of Education, other than the brief guidance in the Quality Assurance Handbook, and there was no external examiner involvement in the process. The audit team was told that proposals were approved by a subcommittee of the SLQC which included an external member. However, in the example provided, which involved 60 credits at postgraduate level, no external member was present and there was no record of any external comment on the proposal, nor did the proposal document contain much information about the quality assurance arrangements of the provider. Decisions of the subcommittee were not then subject to any further consideration or formal ratification by the SLQC other than through a note showing receipt of the minutes. The audit team concluded that, although there were examples of sound practice, the University's external credit-rating processes were inconsistent and insufficiently robust.

43   The University did recognise in June 2009 that guidance on credit rating needed to be improved but the process was delayed by changes to senior staffing. However, an amendment to the Quality Assurance Handbook on external credit rating was considered by the Learning and Quality Committee (LQC) in March 2011 and the draft minute referred to the importance of involvement of external examiners and to improved annual monitoring. The audit team felt this action needed to be completed promptly and therefore advises the University to put in place a consistent and robust approach to the credit rating of external courses.

Programme changes

44   In response to a recommendation of the 2009 audit (see paragraph 16) the University has introduced a risk-based process for changes made to existing programmes. Any changes must be submitted to SLQC on a pro forma that notes the impact and significance of the proposed changes and assigns a risk score. An appendix records the running total of all changes and their risk scores by the relevant School Director of Learning and Quality, and, where the total risk score is 10 or more, either the periodic review of the programme will be brought forward or a replacement programme will be proposed for authorisation by APC. Once approved by SLQC the changes are monitored by LQU to ensure oversight of cumulative changes to programmes. Staff in partner colleges told the team that they would submit any proposed changes to the University and, in the case of UK partners, were aware that the University had recently moved to a risk-based system. While the process was only introduced for the academic year 2010-11, the team felt that it would allow the University appropriate oversight and would prove to be an effective method by which the University could assure itself that programme outcomes for its collaborative and on-campus provision continued to be met. The team regarded the risk assessment approach to tracking cumulative curriculum changes, in order to prevent curriculum drift, to be a feature of good practice.

Annual monitoring

45   All collaborative programmes require a programme monitoring report (PMR) to be completed by the collaborative partner. The audit team was told that such reports would also be considered by programme committees in the partners; however, it was also told that the University does not have a policy on the convening of such committees, and there are no set agendas for such. This was confirmed by the University staff the team met. In some partners, programme committees had been meeting for a considerable time, while in others programme committees were relatively new. However, in the documentation seen by the team, it was clear that PMR reports are considered by SLQCs, which refer reports back for further clarification if required.

46   PMRs feed into the School Monitoring and Reporting Document (SMRD). The SMRD was introduced in 2009-10 to replace the previous Annual Reporting and Planning Document. The Briefing Paper stated that this, along with the Strategic Planning Document, introduced at the same time, focuses the annual reporting on quality and standards; this was confirmed by the University staff the team met. The SMRD focuses on risk-based action using key performance indicators, an approach being rolled out for collaborative provision in 2010-11.There is a template for SMRDs and detailed guidance in the Quality Assurance Handbook. Among other matters, the reports deal with progression rates, external examiner reports, National Student Survey (NSS) data, and action plans; and they allow a focused approach on issues and actions arising from these. In addition, where there is collaborative provision, the relevant link tutor completes a visit report for each visit, a Collaborative Partner Report for each partner with whom they liaise, and an annual report for consideration by the SLQC. These reports feed into school monitoring processes. SMRDs are considered by School Boards before a scrutiny group considers the quality and standards sections of all SMRDs. The scrutiny group reports on quality and standards to LQC and to ACC in relation to collaborative provision aspects, in an overview report for ACC.

47   SMRDs must also take account of course monitoring reports and programme monitoring reports, each written to a template from the Quality Assurance Handbook. The University works with its partners, particularly those in the Partner College Network, to dovetail the University's requirements with the quality assurance processes already in place in the partners. While the School Board decides on the frequency with which programmes should be monitored for internal provision, the Quality Assurance Handbook lays down criteria for when a programme monitoring report must be completed and this includes a stipulation that a PMR should be completed for all collaborative provision. Details of the content of such reports are listed in the Quality Assurance Handbook.

48   The PMRs seen by the audit team were variable, both in their consideration of statistics and in the action plans to address any issues. However, the SMRDs included appendices that map programme progression, course achievement and NSS results against University key performance indicators along with actions to be taken and an appendix listing action to be taken in respect of issues raised by external examiners. Such appendices include programmes and courses at partner colleges and any external examiner issues arising from them. It was clear to the team that detailed monitoring took place at school level through the SMRDs and these provided the University with appropriate oversight of partner issues with respect to standards arising out of the process. The team also felt that the report of the Scrutiny Group, which identified aspects of collaborative provision contained within the SMRDs, was a further useful source of information for the University. However, while there is a specific section in the SMRD for comment on collaborative partners, the team noticed that aspects of collaboration occur in other sections of the document. The team felt that pulling together all aspects of collaboration into one section of the SMRD might make the task of the Scrutiny Group easier.

49   If a partner deals with more than one school, that partner must also produce an Annual Institutional Report (AIR), again to a template contained in the Quality Assurance Handbook. AIRs are circulated to the Regional Academic Partnerships Unit, LQU, and School Directors of Learning and Quality. The LQU produces an overview report for ACC for partner AIRs and a Scrutiny Group produces a report on international multi-disciplinary AIRs. The report received by ACC in May 2010 recommended the retention of AIRs but also recommended that ACC consider the future purpose and coverage of them. The consideration of the future of AIRs was confirmed to the audit team by staff that it met at the University. The team felt that the AIRs were a useful addition to the information received by the University as part of its oversight of partners and also noted that it was the only document where a partner could comment on the relationship it had, across all of its provision with the University. In addition, the AIR listed future aspirations of the partner in relation to proposed programmes and issues for the University to consider. As a result of recommendations made in the LQU report to ACC, the committee has recommended changes made to the template for AIRs to be implemented in 2011-12 in order to make them more strategically focused. The team affirmed this development.

Periodic review

50   The Briefing Paper stated that the University strengthened the periodic review process after concerns raised by the 2009 audit (see paragraph 16) and it now occurs every five years unless there is a concern. In other cases, programme review may be brought forward if, for example, new professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements are such that major curriculum modification is needed. The review process consists of a critical appraisal, details of content being listed in the Quality Assurance Handbook, and meetings with senior managers, teaching staff and students. In addition, the panel may meet employers where there is significant learning in the workplace. The composition of the panel is laid down in the Quality Assurance Handbook and includes external panel member(s). The panel chair confirms that conditions arising from the review have been met in the same way as confirmation that conditions have been met in programme approval. The composition, conduct and findings of panels are overseen by ACC in the same way as approval reports. The team found that programme review for collaborative provision operates as intended with appropriate external representation.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

51   The Briefing Paper stated that the design of any new programme is required to conform with the key aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, including the subject benchmark statements. It also stated that schools and offices are expected to adhere to the *Code of practice* in all their operations.

52   Advance notice of revisions to the Academic Infrastructure is sent to schools. The team found that revisions to section 2 of the *Code of practice* had been considered by PSP and LQC, and were considered by ACC in January 2011. LQU consults with relevant parts of the institution when sections of the *Code of practice* are revised.

53   The Briefing Paper stated that it was unusual for provision offered through partners to be subject to PSRB accreditation, although this has happened with the BA Accounting and Finance programme in Malaysia, and accreditation by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors had recently been obtained by a partner in Hong Kong for the master's programme in Real Estate and Facilities Management and for the MSc Project Management. In addition the University provided the team with an audit trail for the accreditation of the BSc Biomedical Sciences at a partner college by the Institute of Biomedical Sciences. This

showed that there was a clear information flow between school and University committees. An annual report on all PSRB activities is presented to LQC.

54   The University gives support for partner colleges during Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) engagements, which includes attendance at Development engagements and Summative reviews. ACC receives IQER reports and school LQCs monitor responses. A theme from several Summative reviews was the relationship between partner colleges and external examiners and the need to clarify roles, coverage, feedback and reporting lines. Staff in partner institutions told the team that they had met with external examiners and could access their reports electronically. (See also paragraphs 80, 85 and 90.)

55   In addition to the Academic Infrastructure, other external reference points are discussed in University committees. For example, Academic Council discussed the final report of the Equality Challenge Unit project on degree attainment of black and minority ethnic students, NSS outcomes and the Government statement on future funding and student finance. LQC discussed and adopted the change in the FHEQ nomenclature. At school level, while one school had discussed the Academic Infrastructure, the main external reference point discussed was the NSS. The team concluded that the University's processes, which apply to its collaborative provision, take note of and align with the Academic Infrastructure.

Assessment policies and regulations

56   The management of assessment processes relating to collaborative provision, which delegates some of the detail of implementation to schools, takes place within the framework provided by the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Awards. The regulations give clear guidance on the information to be given to students, state the responsibilities of students, and provide definitions of compensation, condonation, and reassessment in addition to defining the standards of the awards and defining grade descriptors. The regulations also specify grounds for student appeals against decisions of examination boards.

57   Schools have their own Assessment Policies, approved by LQC, which apply to their collaborative provision. The assessment policies of all the schools were seen by the team. While they covered standard issues such as extenuating circumstances, the content was variable. For example, three schools listed the roles and responsibilities of key staff while others did not. The audit team identified inconsistency over the time taken to return work to students. The Greenwich University Charter states that the return time is three weeks, which was confirmed to the team by the University. However, the team was also told that schools could deviate from this norm in exceptional circumstances. Of the assessment policies seen by the team, two gave the return time as three weeks, another stated that the time was six weeks, while others did not specify a period at all. The students met by the team felt that the feedback they received was timely and that they knew what they had to do to achieve particular grades. In addition they told the team that submission dates were made clear to them. Nonetheless, the team's view was that there was much scope for confusion, particularly for students and partner staff who work with more than one school of the University.

58   The audit team was told that there was no University-wide policy of giving students feedback on their examination performance but that individual schools may have their own policy, which could mean that no feedback is provided. The team was aware that such an approach may not align with the precepts in section 6 of the *Code of practice*, which requires institutions to provide feedback to students on all assessments.

59   At the time of the audit, the University had begun work on a University Assessment Policy to improve consistency across the institution. The team was told that, owing to staff illness, this had been delayed but that LQC had agreed that the School Directors of Learning and Quality should draw up a common assessment policy and that this would be considered at its May 2011 meeting. The team felt that the matter needed to be resolved and therefore advises the University to ensure an appropriately consistent approach to the provision of timely feedback on all student work in collaborative partners.

60   In one of the University's collaborations, students gain a dual award, one from the University and one from the partner. The University Academic Regulations allow for this. The team established that ACC, as part of its discussion on QAA guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning, had noted concerns about dual awards and referred them to LQC for further discussion. LQC established a working group that reported in its 2005-06 annual report to Academic Council. Academic Council approved the amended regulations in 2006. From the minutes available to it, the audit team could find no discussion within a University committee of the potential consequences of allowing dual awards. The University might find precept A13 of section 2 of the *Code of practice* to be a useful point of reference. The team also found that staff were not aware of these potential consequences, such as ensuring that all assessments fall under the University's own regulations.

61   For all its provision, the University operates a two-tier examination board structure, Subject Assessment Panels and Progression and Awards Board. The composition and powers of each are stated in the Academic Regulations and comply with the sector norm. The wide discretion that was allowed to Progression and Award Boards, and was the subject of a recommendation in the Institutional audit, has now been removed.

External examiners

62   External examiners are nominated by departments and approved by schools, after which the nomination is approved by LQC under delegated authority from Academic Council. The Academic Regulations specify criteria for the appointment, induction and duties of external examiners in addition to the process for responding to their reports. Where delivery of the curriculum takes place overseas, examiners with experience of the local context may be appointed, but they must have experience or familiarity with UK higher education. Where possible, external examiners visit partners, but the University does acknowledge that this applies mainly to UK partners, although an external examiner does visit a partner in Egypt. External examiners are provided with a CD that contains the Academic Regulations and details of their role. Detailed induction takes place at school level.

63   External examiners send reports electronically on a University template and are encouraged to comment on individual centres where the provision covers collaborative provision. The Briefing Paper acknowledged that securing such comment is proving challenging and stated that work is underway to ensure this coverage occurs. Reports are distributed to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), LQU and senior school representatives, and schools are responsible for the distribution to partners. Schools are expected to respond to any issues in relation to collaborative provision, and these should be addressed as part of the SMRD. An overview of issues for the University is gained through SMRDs as well as through an overview report produced by LQU for LQC and Academic Council, which identifies good practice and recommendations for the University.

64   The audit team was told that it is not University policy to make external examiners' reports available to all students but that such reports would be discussed at programme committees which would include student representatives. The team asked all the students it

met whether they had seen an external examiner's report. All of the students stated that they had not seen reports although some had met external examiners (see paragraph 70).

Certificates and transcripts

65   The Memoranda of Agreement state that the responsibility for the issuing of certificates and transcripts lies with the University. However, the memoranda do not mandate that the location and language of instruction be listed on the transcript, although the Briefing Paper stated that this is the case and such is stated in the Academic Regulations. In addition, the partnership agreement with one partner does not clearly state the responsibility for issuing certificates and transcripts. The team saw an example of a certificate and transcript from a University in the Netherlands, the transcript of which clearly stated the location of the teaching and that the language of instruction was Dutch. External examiners for such provision are required to understand higher education in the UK.

Management information - statistics

66   The Briefing Paper stated that the statistical data provided for the University's internal provision are similarly provided for the review of collaborative provision and thus the University's database can be interrogated to provide data for programmes at each partner. The Briefing Paper also stated that partner colleges have been given direct access to the database so that they may use this in annual reporting. The feasibility of extending this to full-cost partners is being considered. The PMRs submitted by partners were variable in their use of data. In some cases no data was provided within the reports while in others some statistics were provided but no real analysis. The team felt that the University might usefully work with its partners to achieve greater consistency in this regard.

67   On the evidence seen by the team it was clear that data from collaborative provision were discussed within the University. ACC receives reports on student recruitment and progression, as does Academic Council. At school level the team found such discussion to be more inconsistent.

Overall conclusions on the management of academic standards

68   As noted in paragraph 23, the audit team was told by senior staff that the University is on a journey in relation to its management of collaborative provision. The team recognised that the University had undertaken a review of its processes and procedures in relation to its collaborative provision and that it had acknowledged that there are still areas it has to address and what those areas are. The team agreed that the direction of travel was appropriate, although the speed of travel could be improved. Notwithstanding the need for more rapid progress, from the evidence provided to it, the team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards. The team found strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Management information - feedback from students

69   The University regards student representation and feedback, both formal and informal, as essential to the assurance and enhancement of its academic provision. The

Partnership Agreement for partner colleges makes no explicit reference either to student representation or to feedback but does point out that University quality assurance arrangements apply to these issues. Other partner institutions are required, under the terms of their agreements, to gather feedback from students. The University states that the exact means for this are agreed as part of the approval and review process although this was not always evident in approval and review reports. Mechanisms used include questionnaires, meetings with the link tutor, programme committees and student focus groups.

70   The link tutor plays a key role in monitoring the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and in ensuring that the information gathered is used appropriately, both within the partner and by the University. The audit team heard from most students in the partner visits that they did meet with link tutors and valued those meetings. Concern had been expressed by students at one partner college that they had a perception of being neglected by the University and did not understand the role of the link tutor, although there was some evidence that this concern was now being addressed by the link tutor. The team found wide variation in terms of the involvement of link tutors in programme committees, from chairing to not attending. The University states that 'whenever possible, link tutors are also required to have direct, private discussions with partner students', but the team heard of instances where this does not happen. Given the heavy reliance on link tutors as a source of feedback from students, the University might consider how to make private meetings of link tutors with students a more common occurrence, and how to provide clearer guidance on link tutor involvement in programme committees. Some students had also met with external examiners and had found the interaction valuable. Students who had not had this opportunity felt that it would be beneficial. (See paragraph 64.)

71   Questionnaires include the National Student Survey (NSS), which incorporates the views of collaborative provision students at partner colleges, and the University's own student survey (USS). NSS response rates for collaborative provision students have been lower than for on-campus students and often do not meet the reporting threshold. Also, the USS response rate for overseas collaborative provision students has been too low for any useful conclusions to be drawn. Students and staff seen by the audit team in a partner college were unaware of the USS but did have their own surveys in place. It has been agreed within the University that action needs to be taken to improve the USS process, but it was unclear if partners had been involved in discussions on its relevance and on operational issues.

72   The NSS results for 2009 showed a number of poor scores at one of the partner colleges. This was discussed at Academic Collaboration Committee (ACC) and followed up appropriately with the college. Actions taken were reported back to ACC. This action evinced that the NSS results in partner colleges were considered by the University and dealt with appropriately.

73   Programme committees consider feedback from students both directly from student representatives and also through survey results. Some programme committee minutes seen by the audit team failed to identify any actions arising from the student comments and concerns raised; neither was there any follow up from actions from previous meetings. There appeared to be a lack of clarity as to where programme committee minutes are considered by the University and whether any feedback on them is provided to partners. The audit team encourages the University to consider clarifying the process and working with partners to improve the quality of those minutes and thereby ensure actions are identified and followed through.

74   The University states that feedback from students is reported through annual monitoring, but the audit team found that evidence of reporting in annual monitoring was mixed. There was little evidence in some programme monitoring reports (PMRs) seen by the

team in relation to the use of student feedback, nor was there significant commentary on student feedback in some link tutors' annual reports, although it is now included in the template. Where significant concerns raised by students were referred to in some PMRs, these sometimes failed to lead to any related action being identified. There were, however, some examples of PMRs that were thorough in linking actions to issues raised and provided evidence of follow-through.

75   The audit team concluded that, although there was evidence from students that student feedback was, in the main, acted upon at a local level by the partners, it was unclear how the University assured itself that this was the case, and that therefore the University should give greater prominence to feedback from students in the partner and University reporting processes (see paragraph 80).

Role of students in quality assurance

76   As described above, student feedback is used as part of the quality assurance process. Partners are required to have a student representation system in place, to enable feedback on areas of concern to be raised with resultant actions then being communicated to students. Most partners hold programme committees to achieve this, but alternative means can be agreed in some instances to reflect local cultural norms or existing practice. The audit team was provided with a range of minutes from programme committees which, as described in paragraph 73, were not always sufficiently clear. There was also insufficient evidence available to the team to be assured that programme committees always took place as described in the student handbooks. Some partner colleges have their own 'student voice' schemes in place and have student representation on some college committees to give higher education students an additional way of raising issues at a college level.

77   Students seen by the audit team confirmed that student representation systems were in place and that actions resulted and were communicated to students, although there was some scope for improvement in this communication. Representatives are nominated by their peers or invited to participate by members of staff rather than, necessarily, being elected, but students appeared satisfied with the process. Greater guidance on the role of student representatives and other means of involving students in the quality management process has been provided recently in the revised Quality Assurance Handbook. A report from the Regional and Academic Partnerships Unit, considered by ACC in October 2010, identified the need to include partner college student representatives in training opportunities, and for a Student Representation and Democracy Officer to be appointed within the Students' Union to work with partner college student representatives. It was unclear to the team how the relevance of this recommendation to other collaborative provision students was being considered or progressed. While the University states that link tutors advise on and monitor the way partners prepare student representatives, this is not included in the documented role of the link tutor, and there was little evidence seen as to how this process takes place. The University is encouraged to continue to develop training for student representatives in partner institutions to ensure they are well prepared and supported in their role.

78   There appeared to be inconsistent practice in relation to the consideration of PMRs and external examiners' reports by programme committees, which therefore affected the ability of student representatives to contribute to this aspect of the quality assurance process. Although they were seen and approved by some programme committees, there was insufficient evidence that this was always the case.

79   While groups of students are met by programme review panels, the University does not include student representatives on review or approval panels. For non-collaborative

provision, students are represented on the School Student Experience Committee and on the School Board, but this does not extend to collaborative provision students. Nor does there appear to be an expectation that partners involve students in an equivalent way in their own committee structures. Students' Union sabbatical officers are members of Academic Council and some other University-level committees, but it was difficult for the team to judge the extent to which the views of collaborative provision students are represented at an institutional level.

80   The audit team concluded that although there is explicit student involvement in quality management processes, the degree of variability and the lack of prominence in the reporting of feedback from collaborative provision students means that it is less effective than it should be. The team therefore recommends that the University seek to achieve greater consistency in the expectations placed upon its partners in relation to student involvement in quality assurance processes and give greater prominence to feedback from students in the partner's and University's reporting processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

81   The University aims to be 'research-informed'. Its Learning and Teaching Strategy includes objectives to link teaching to research, scholarship and advanced professional practice. In 2010-11 it introduced a new Greenwich Graduate Attributes policy which reflects this, and also promotes more active forms of learning. Whilst the University recognises that extending this to its collaborative provision students will be challenging, it nevertheless has stated the intention to do so.

82   For its own provision, the University requires teaching teams delivering at level 6 and above to include active researchers and/or staff engaged in advanced professional practice and consultancy. It has stated that it expects the same level of expertise in its partners, and provided a series of examples where it has worked effectively with partners to enhance their research capacity; however, there was little evidence in programme approval and review reports that this was seen as a key issue. Evidence was heard during the partner visits of how this relationship with the University, which included scholarly exchange and joint research, had enhanced the quality and experience of partner staff. Some partner staff are pursuing PhDs with the University. The University has also placed an increasing emphasis on staff involvement in pedagogic research, with staff being encouraged to share effective practice through the annual Greenwich e-Learning and Learning and Teaching conferences, and a staff publication for research into learning and teaching. Whilst these initiatives are open to partner staff, the University recognises developments have been slow in implementation; however, some partner staff have attended the conferences but have not yet contributed to the publication. It was also clear that pressures on staff time in the partners could limit their ability to pursue research and scholarship.

83   The audit team concluded that the University recognised the need to support partners in developing research and scholarship to enhance learning opportunities but found that practice and its effectiveness was varied. The University is therefore encouraged to continue to pursue the inclusion of partner staff in such developments.

Other modes of study

84   Only a limited number of collaborative programmes are delivered through what might be judged to be other modes of study, although e-learning features in almost all provision, while work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees. Many collaborative programmes make use of online access to the host school-produced or

commercial learner materials to support and supplement partner-based delivery. The only collaborative flexible and distance learning programmes are the provision by the School of Education for the national Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS) Network of 24 Further Education colleges across the UK, and the School of Architecture and Construction, which offers a small number of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes through distance learning in partnership with five overseas centres. The partners, which have been subject to an approval process, provide local tutorial and/or administrative support. These programmes are also offered in distance learning mode direct from the University, with online tutorial support provided by University staff, so the materials developed are subject to the same level of University scrutiny. For the LLS Network, the School of Education provides support through the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), including a discussion forum, e-resource centre, real-time chat room, and e-administration centre with tutor time being allocated to each student dependent on their study pattern. Such blended learning approaches are supported by the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and e-Learning Strategy, and a series of staff development programmes is offered to collaborative provision and University staff.

85   Several IQER Summative review reports for partner colleges included recommendations related to the need to align with the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. As a consequence, the Partnership Development Group agreed to conduct self-assessments of work-based learning for Foundation Degrees, and a dissemination event was held in February 2011.

86   The audit team concluded that where other modes of study were used, they were subject to appropriate approval and that ongoing support contributed appropriately to the quality of the student learning experience.

Resources for learning

87   The University is making an increasing range of academic facilities available to collaborative provision students through the use of internet-based technology, which includes the electronic library and the use of the VLE to distribute support materials. Significant effort has been made by Information and Library Services to maximise the availability of online resources to collaborative provision students through the negotiation of relevant licences, which was valued by partners and their students. Students and partner staff are able to search the library catalogue, renew books online, and access teaching and learning materials via the University portal, which provides a common interface. There have been some delays in students being able to access the student portal linked to their registration; however, this appears to have improved markedly and students did not report it as a concern for the current academic year.

88   The Off-Campus Services Contact and Remote Support (OSCARS) team provides support for all remote users including collaborative provision staff and students. It does this through: 'self-help' materials; email, interactive and telephone help facilities; and regular liaison with schools and their collaborative partners. Access to university learning materials, such as online journals, is referred to in the partner college Annual Institutional Reports (AIRs) as a strength and was commended (including the role of OSCARS) in several partner IQER reports. The audit team found that the services provided by Information and Library Services, including OSCARS, makes a valuable contribution to the learning opportunities of collaborative provision students.

89   The appropriateness of the wider range of learning resources is initially judged as part of the partner approval process through an institutional-level resources visit involving a senior member of University staff. Programme-level resources are checked by school staff

and are considered as part of the programme approval event. The position is subsequently monitored through link tutor visits, PMRs and AIRs, the templates for which all include sections on learning resources. Issues should then be raised, where appropriate, in School Monitoring and Reporting Documents.

90   For partner colleges, the Partnership Agreement states that 'a higher education learning environment will exist and be maintained in the College' and that 'an HE common room will normally be provided by the College'. However, the audit team found several instances where repeated concerns had been raised about inadequate provision by colleges, but these had not been resolved by the University. In one college, students reported a long-standing request for an HE common room or equivalent, and for priority access to specialist software. Improvements to the HE learning environment were signalled in the college's 2007 critical review but were seemingly not undertaken; the issue also appeared in a 2008-09 PMR as a significant student concern but this was not reflected in the PMR action plan. Indeed, the 2010 IQER Summative review recommended that the College should 'continue efforts to expand the Learning Resource Centre to meet fully the needs of students'. Despite this also being a key concern for students seen by the audit team, there was no evidence of the University pursuing this with the partner concerned. The audit team also saw evidence in one other IQER report and heard from staff and students that concerns around the HE learning environment had been repeatedly raised in two other partner colleges, but no action had been taken. In a further college, a dedicated space had been created but had quickly been withdrawn on the basis of insufficient use; however there had been no discussion about this in the PMR and no evidence of any concern being raised by the University. The audit team therefore recommends that the University improve the effectiveness of its procedures for ongoing monitoring of its partner colleges to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate higher education learning environment.

91   Although learning resources are assessed at the point of partner and programme approval, these are not then tied in any way to maximum student numbers on each course. There is therefore no formal mechanism in place to ensure that the learning resources are still sufficient for increased student numbers, other than retrospectively through the link tutor reports and PMRs. The audit team found one instance in a partner college where the intake was more than twice the target, but no approval had been required by the University and no evidence was available of any check on sufficiency of resources. The University confirmed to the team that maximum numbers are not set at the point of approval and that no formal approval is needed to go beyond these numbers at a programme level. The audit team felt that the University needs to be assured that the learning resources available match the number of students on each programme. The team therefore advises that, at programme approval, the University agree with the relevant partner a maximum cohort size that is commensurate with the resources available.

92   The audit team concluded that the University's processes for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were in the main effective but that improvement could be made in relation to the monitoring of the HE learning environment in partner colleges and to ensuring the sufficiency of learning resources when student numbers increase.

Admissions policy

93   The University sees its work with the Partner College Network as making an important contribution to access and widening participation. It encourages the accreditation of prior learning, where it can appropriately contribute to study on programmes, and ensures that the accreditation process is dealt with by the host schools rather than the partner. Where a 'top-up' degree is offered by a partner, suitable equivalent entry qualifications are

considered at programme approval and recorded in the programme-level appendix to the Memorandum of Agreement. Admissions decisions by partners to the 'top-ups' are then based upon these agreed entry qualifications.

94   The University states that it applies, wherever feasible, the same policies and practices on admissions to its collaborative provision as are applied to its main provision. The majority of admission decisions are taken by the partner in accordance with set guidelines and criteria agreed with the host school, having normally been discussed at approval and periodic review events. However, the audit team saw no evidence of this in the approval and review reports provided. Decisions falling outside these guidelines are referred to the host school (in practice, usually to the link tutor) for a decision and most partner visits confirmed that this process applied to applicants without relevant formal qualifications. However, in one partner college, the audit team was told that decisions were made locally on applicants without relevant formal qualifications as the University's admissions requirements allowed for entrants to be considered based on their work/life experience. The audit team was told by partner staff that all such applicants were interviewed but that there were no formal criteria in place, neither was there evidence that any guidelines had been agreed between the school and the partner college. The audit team therefore recommends that where admissions decisions are being made by partner colleges on applicants without relevant formal qualifications, the University agree with those partners clear criteria to ensure consistency and equity of treatment of applicants.

95   The University states that guidelines for new areas are often developed as a result of 'non-standard' decisions and then formalised at periodic review. However, the audit team saw little reference in the PMRs or the link tutor reports to the process or outcomes of monitoring of admissions decisions.

96   The audit team found it difficult to comment further on the application of the University's admissions policy as there was little documentary evidence in programme reviews and PMRs concerning either the admissions criteria or their application. The University might wish to consider how its monitoring processes could make more explicit some reflection on the appropriateness of the admissions criteria and their application in its partners.

Student support

97   Day to day responsibility for student support is placed by the University with its collaborative partners. It is considered as part of the partner and programme approval and review processes; captured in the Memorandum of Agreement; and then monitored through link tutor visits, PMRs and AIRs as part of the wider category of learning resources. Consideration of student support, however, was often not explicit or evident in the reports. Improvements to the University's student record system, in train at the time of the audit, will provide all partners with direct, live access to the records of their students, which the University hopes will assist partners in identifying individual student support needs.

98   The University's Office of Student Affairs provides advice to specialist partner staff and, in some instances such as careers advice, also provides some direct support to partner college students. The extent of this support depends, in the main, on the proximity of the partner to the University. A number of online interactive support guides and courses are available via the portal, and Partner College Network students are able to obtain information about additional support or advice. Partner College Network students are eligible to become Associate Members of the Students' Union, but the University has recognised for some time that there is a need for clarity about partner college student participation in the University Students' Union. The University is now working with its Students' Union to develop ways of

engaging with partner college students to a greater extent and developing their sense of identity as Greenwich students.

99   The University has developed guidelines for staff to help them support the transition of new students into higher education. The team heard that the guidelines had been distributed but not actively pursued, therefore the team encourages the University to follow this up more widely with partners. Partner college students have also been provided with access to the 'Summer University' prior to the start of their programmes in order to help them to develop underpinning research and study skills; however, staff and students at one partner expressed the concern that newly introduced fees would limit access to these programmes. Some partners have also provided additional classes to address academic skills needs of their new students.

100   Students are informed of the support available to them through a number of means, including student handbooks, induction, programme leaders and link tutors. Students told the audit team that they felt well-informed as to the support available that largely met their needs. The audit team found strong employer links in some of the partners which were felt to be important in supporting students in terms of employability. The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for student support were effective and were continuing to develop and improve.

Staffing and staff development

101   The University expects its partners to have an appropriate system of staff support and development in place. This is first checked through institutional and programme approval, and then through annual monitoring, visits to partner organisations, and periodic review. Evidence of this all happening was seen by the audit team. The University provides access to a range of staff development opportunities for partner staff, including reduced tuition fees for award-bearing programmes. The Regional and Academic Partnerships Unit arranges regular staff development events for staff in the Partner College Network, and the School of Education holds regional and national conferences for LLS Network staff. Specific staff development events are provided for partners, based on identified need, for both academic and support staff.

102   Support for collaborative provision staff is also provided through less formal routes such as through one-to-one or small group sessions during link tutor and other staff visits. Some partner staff have spent more extended periods of time at the University, which appeared to be strongly valued by those involved. Computing and Mathematical Sciences includes a staff forum on its collaborations website, which allows staff to post queries that are responded to by the school's Course Coordinators. (See paragraph 127.) For partner college staff there are regular HE Forum meetings. Partner staff are also invited to attend relevant staff development events and conferences.

103   The University's Educational Development Unit (EDU) is being increasingly proactive in identifying and meeting staff development needs of partners. The value of the unit has been recognised by the University through the allocation of additional staff resource, and EDU staff have started to visit partners to explore their staff development needs.

104   The University recognises that it can also benefit from the experience and expertise of its partner staff, and the team encourages the University to draw on this experience. As an example, partner colleges have considerable experience of using the VLE about to be adopted by the University and could make a valuable contribution to its introduction.

105   Partner staff CVs are approved as part of the initial approval and then as part of the review process. The host school at the University is responsible for ensuring that any new staff are approved prior to teaching on the programme. This is achieved through the provision of CVs by the partner to the link tutor for approval, with all new staff CVs also being appended to the PMR for information.

106   The link tutor plays a key role in all aspects of collaborative provision, but the audit team saw little evidence of an institutional approach either to supporting link tutors in their role or to the sharing of good practice. The team heard how most support came from the school, and, for new link tutors, there was a heavy reliance on mentoring from an experienced colleague. It had been recognised that creating shared resources to support those new to the role would be beneficial. This matter was being considered by EDU. Link tutors told the team that they found the link tutor forum to be valuable. The audit team was encouraged to hear that the role of link tutor was being taken account of in a new University workload model.

107   Considering the importance of the link tutor role, the audit team felt that greater attention should be paid to training and development in relation to the role and would encourage the University to formalise some of the existing support and develop shared learning resources and approaches to induction, based on best practice from across the University.

108   The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for staff support and development were, in the main, effective.

Overall conclusion on the management of the quality of learning opportunities

109   The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students through its collaborative provision arrangements.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

110   According to the Briefing Paper, the University's definition of quality enhancement follows that of QAA, and so is concerned with 'deliberate institutional steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students'. However, the 2009 Institutional audit noted that the University 'has traditionally adopted a relatively "light touch" for centralised enhancement initiatives, but is seeking to increase the momentum for enhancement, while maintaining its balance between devolution and centralisation'. The audit team saw evidence that this 'light touch' approach to centralised initiatives was still prevalent. For instance, in meetings with staff, when examples of enhancement activities were sought, the examples provided consisted mostly of local initiatives within schools or particular partners, and only a few showed evidence of central institutional involvement (see paragraph 113 below).

111   At institutional level, the University has several strategies that contain elements of quality enhancement. The Corporate Plan has nine key objectives, of which two concern enhancing learning and teaching: the provision of innovative programmes, and the provision of a high-quality learning environment.

112   The Learning and Teaching Strategy identifies six key aims, with supporting objectives and activities. Though many of these have the potential to enhance quality, few

were mentioned by staff when questioned about enhancement. Given the period covered by this strategy, it is not surprising that several of the strategy's activities were no longer directly applicable, such as those involving the Division of Learning Enhancement, Access and Partnership, which has since been split into the Partnership Division and the Learning and Quality Unit. No evidence was offered about others, such as the planned use of staff promoted to Principal Lecturer on Teaching Excellence. The e-Learning Strategy is also designed to contribute to quality enhancement. The team saw evidence that the use of technology to support learning in various ways was embedded in the student experience.

113   In the various reports that are compiled for programme monitoring and review, the team saw evidence that staff were asked to reflect, and to identify elements of good practice. However, it was less clear how those aspects identified were taken forward or disseminated more widely in any systematic way, apart from some discussions at the Learning and Teaching Conference or the e-Learning Conference.

114   Among the areas where the audit team did note institutional steps to improve quality of learning opportunities in collaborative provision were:

- multi-school partnership meetings
- the work of the Partnership Development Group
- the introduction of key performance indicators (KPIs) to the School Monitoring and Reporting Document (SMRD)
- the increased investment in the Educational Development Unit (EDU).

115   Multi-school partnership meetings (MSPMs) were introduced in the autumn term of 2010 and are intended to provide an opportunity for University staff to focus on a particular partner institution. There is a meeting for each partner that interacts with more than one school, and representatives from the schools attend, along with staff from administrative offices. There is also an MSPM for NCC Education Group partners, covering a number of centres where teaching is delivered, which seems to be at odds with the stated basis being partner institutions, not groupings. Although it is too early for the team to give a firm judgement, meetings in the initial round have been welcomed by those involved. The team found clear potential for enhancement. There has been a standard agenda for MSPMs, and a standard set of documentation, but the minutes and actions are not always as clear as they might be.

116   The Partnership Development Group works specifically with the Partner College Network. Its original purpose was to enable partner colleges to share and exchange information about their programme planning and development. However, it has also acted as a forum for sharing of good practice, and has identified staff development needs in the colleges and organised events to meet those needs.

117   As stated in paragraph 13, the introduction of SMRDs has allowed the University to require schools to consider risk-based action planning against a set of KPIs. While the audit team recognised that the SMRDs are large documents, which cover a wide range of both mainstream and collaborative provision, the use of KPIs seems, at this early stage in the implementation of SMRDs, to be a useful way to track performance over different centres. Any performance outside the agreed range for particular KPIs triggers a requirement for comment and an associated action.

118   The importance of the EDU with respect to staff development was described in paragraph 103. The team also found that the EDU has a role in contributing to other aspects of institutional enhancement. The audit team heard that EDU was responsible for the annual Learning and Teaching and the e-Learning Conferences, which had some attendance from

staff at partner institutions, primarily in the UK, but sometimes overseas institutions were also represented. Plans were also mentioned for EDU to work with the International Partnerships Manager on the development of training materials for new link tutors. The increased staffing in EDU has made such initiatives possible, and the team affirms EDU's work to support collaborative provision.

119   Judging by the evidence presented to the audit team, there are several good practices in individual schools that are worth disseminating for wider adoption. Current reports and procedures seem to be effective at identifying good practice, but there is more work to be done in transforming such practices into institutional initiatives in a systematic way. Recent changes to the management of collaborative provision will provide better central oversight, which has the potential to facilitate quality enhancement. The University is encouraged to consider these opportunities as the changes become embedded.

120   The audit team found little evidence of systematic enhancement but concluded that recent changes to the management of collaborative provision had the potential to strengthen the enhancement of learning opportunities in the University's collaborative provision.

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

121   The University does not offer postgraduate research programmes through collaborative provision.

Section 6: Published information

122   In its meetings with students, both on partner link visits and during the audit visit itself, the audit team heard no concerns at all from students about the accuracy of the information provided to them, either before or during their study.

123   The Quality Assurance Handbook lists the essential information that should be provided to students, which might be through student handbooks, or some other means. This requirement covers details about the specific programme as well as more general information about access to support, links to important University policies and additional information for collaborative provision students.

124   The student handbooks seen by the audit team were of variable quality. Some were clearly based on a template from the host school of the University, while others were not. However, even the better handbooks did not include all the essential information identified in the Quality Assurance Handbook. In particular, the programme specification was not explicitly included in any of the examples seen. Programme specifications are part of the required information at programme approval and review, but they do not seem to be routinely made available to current students, although selected information from the programme specification can be found in handbooks (and some schools put specifications online). Students who met the team evinced very little, if any, knowledge of programme specifications. The audit team was encouraged to hear that the requirement to supply all the 'essential information' to students was being rolled out to all partner institutions, for existing as well as new programmes. Nonetheless, the team advises that programme specifications should be made consistently available to prospective and current students.

125   Partners deal initially with all student complaints, but where relevant a complaint may be referred to the University. The University stated in its Briefing Paper that students

must 'be made aware (usually through student handbooks) that, ultimately, if they do not reach a satisfactory resolution of an issue involving the partner with the partner institution, they have the right of recourse to the University's procedures'. However, this right is not captured in the Memoranda of Agreement seen by the audit team. Information in handbooks on complaints was inconsistent and potentially confusing. The University should consider reflecting this right of students in the Memoranda of Agreement and might wish to ensure that information provided in the student handbooks on complaints reflects accurately and clearly students' rights. The Memoranda of Agreement specify that appeals about academic procedures are dealt with under the University's regulations, and the team was satisfied that this was communicated to students at partner institutions.

126 The key agent for communication between students in the partner organisation and the University is the link tutor. He or she is expected to meet with collaborative provision students when on visits to the partner, and to be a reliable medium for communication in both directions between the University and collaborative provision students.

127 In the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences, a collaborations website is used to provide information for both staff and students involved in collaborative programmes. On the one hand, this is an effective mechanism for communicating a consistent message to a large number of collaborative partners, while on the other it also provides a vehicle for communication between staff at different partners who teach the same programme, thereby reducing the workload on link tutors, programme leaders and the International Collaborations Director. The team regarded the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences' collaborations website, which is a source of useful information for staff and students involved in collaborative programmes, as a feature of good practice.

128 Two other issues about published information were noted previously (paragraphs 64 and 28): the easy access for all students to external examiners' reports, and the need for an authoritative and up-to-date register of collaborative provision. The University's website lists only 'some of our international university partners', rather than a complete list.

129 A number of mechanisms are used to check the accuracy and completeness of information published by partner organisations. Constraints on the use of publicity and marketing materials are enshrined in the templates for Memoranda of Agreement for international partnerships and for local partner colleges. Collaborative partners are expected to obtain permission to use the University's name and logo. As in many other areas of collaborative provision activity, link tutors have an important role to play in publicity, as they are expected to monitor published materials, both on paper and on the web. In their visit reports, they are asked to comment on publicity material and websites. The audit team saw examples of such comments.

130 In addition to checks by link tutors, the Marketing Office conducts sample checks of websites, and during overseas visits local material is checked by International Office staff. A more systematic review of partner websites is also carried out by the International Partnerships Office. A recent innovation is that Multi-school partnership meetings include a discussion on publicity and marketing as part of their standard agenda for a meeting about a particular partner. This allows interchange of views between staff in different schools on this subject.

131 While these mechanisms for checking of public information seem appropriate, the audit team found some lack of consistency in their application. In visit reports seen by the team, some link tutors commented on publicity checks while others did not. While looking at examples of external credit rating, the audit team noted that the documentation for the School of Health and Social Care included specific advice on the phrasing partners could use in publicity. Scrutiny by the audit team showed that this requirement was indeed being

followed. There was no similar advice for work in the School of Education, and further spot checks showed wide variation in the phrasing used. The audit team would expect that the ongoing effort to standardise work on the credit rating of external courses will pay due heed to the issue of partners' publicity and marketing of such courses.

132   The audit team found that the paper prospectus published by a member of the Partner College Network lacked prominent information about the University. It was not clear which programmes were higher education programmes validated by the University, and it was easy to overlook the message of welcome by the Vice-Chancellor at the start of the prospectus. The website for a franchised provision partner, which had only just been approved at the time of the audit, included a testimonial from an apparently satisfied 2008 graduate from the programme.

133   The audit team concluded that, for the most part, 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 standards of the collaborative awards. However, the University is encouraged to continue to ensure that the current procedures for checking the information published by collaborative partners are followed in all cases.