Audit of collaborative provision

University of Westminster

June 2011

Preface

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions. Where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's provision offered through partnership arrangements as part of the Institutional audit, it can be audited through a separate Audit of collaborative provision.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations and assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations.
The method was endorsed by the then Department for Education and Skills. It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA. It was again revised in 2009 to take into account student auditors and the three approaches that could be adopted for the Audit of collaborative provision (as part of the Institutional audit, a separate audit, or a hybrid variant of the Institutional audit, involving partner link visits).

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002, following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK's) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students studying through collaborative arrangements, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and on feedback from stakeholders.

The Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity results in judgements about the institution being reviewed as follows:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

- the confidence that 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.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision in collaborative partners, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Westminster (the University) from 20 to 24 June 2011 to carry out an Audit of collaborative provision. The purpose of the Audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision delivered through collaborative arrangements. As part of the process, the team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by videoconference and teleconference meetings with staff and students from two overseas partners.

In the Audit of collaborative provision, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Westminster 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 that 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 in collaborative provision

The audit team concluded that the University had effective policies and procedures to support the enhancement of the student experience at partner institutions.

Published information

The audit team found that, with the exception of some information on student assessment, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Features of good practice

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

- the University's genuinely collaborative approach to partnership working (paragraph 7)
- the University's commitment to both widening access to, and enhancing the quality of, higher education through collaborative partnerships (paragraphs 7 and 44)
- the University's commitment to supporting and developing the role of the liaison tutor (paragraph 10)
- the role of the CertEd Consortium in facilitating close collaboration among the member colleges (paragraph 45)
- the role of the Westminster Exchange in facilitating development opportunities for staff at partner institutions (paragraph 47).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that all partnerships are underpinned by extant, signed agreements (paragraph 13)
- ensure that the judgements of revalidation panels take full account of all the information specified by the University's revalidation procedure as well as the reference points suggested in the *Code of practice: Section 7* (paragraph 17)
- ensure greater consistency in the involvement of employers in the design, delivery and review of Foundation Degrees, with reference to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (paragraphs 17 and 32)
- ensure that all certificates and/or transcripts record the name and location of any partner organisations engaged in the delivery of courses of study (paragraph 25).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- expedite plans to bring the management of all provision that meets the definition of collaborative provision in the *Code of practice, Section 2* within the University's new structures for managing collaborative provision (paragraph 11)
- enhance the quality of critical reviews produced for revalidation (paragraph 17)
- finalise the development of a definitive and publicly accessible central repository of programme specifications (paragraph 18)
- make information and guidance on the grading of assessments clear and accessible to all staff, students and external examiners (paragraph 20)
- share external examiner reports with student representatives (paragraph 23)
- adopt a more systematic approach to checking the accuracy of information about the University's awards published on partners' websites (paragraph 49).

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education

sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The Audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students, with the exception of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* and parts of Sections 2, 6 and 7 of the *Code of practice*.

Report

1   An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Westminster (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 20 June 2011. The purpose of the Audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers through collaborative provision and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in relation to collaborative programmes.

2   The audit team comprised Dr Rob Aitken, Professor Gwendolen Bradshaw, Professor Paddy Maher, Professor Clare Pickles and Mr Zain Sardar, auditors, and Ms Jennifer Taylor, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr Will Naylor, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University originated in 1838 as the Polytechnic Institution, which was re-established in 1881 as the Regent Street Polytechnic and combined with two other colleges in 1970 as the Polytechnic of Central London. The Polytechnic became the University of Westminster in 1992. Most of the University's provision is delivered on three campuses in central London. It also has a campus in Harrow. Teaching and research take place across a broad range of disciplines, which are organised into more than 40 departments, grouped into seven schools: Architecture and the Built Environment; Electronics and Computer Science; Law; Life Sciences; Media Arts and Design; Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages; and Business. Some academic provision is delivered through Westminster Exchange, which has school status.

4   As at December 2010, the University had a total of 2,004 students enrolled on 63 collaborative courses, delivered at 24 different partner institutions. These courses were either externally validated (57) or franchised (six). Thirty of the 63 collaborative courses were delivered at eight further education colleges in and around London, 14 were delivered elsewhere in the UK and 19 were delivered overseas. The University's principal overseas partner is the Westminster International University of Tashkent (WIUT), which was established by the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2002 and has independent legal status.

5   The University's last Audit of collaborative provision in 2006 led to a judgement of limited confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. This reflected an essential recommendation for the University to assure the standards of all its awards in collaborative provision, with particular reference to external examiners' oversight of dual award courses and the consistency of its monitoring of student admissions. Following the Audit, QAA was provided with information that indicated that appropriate action had been taken by the University in response to the findings and the Audit was signed off in June 2007. Any particular comments on the areas touched on by the recommendations of the 2006 Audit appear in the text below.

6   The Briefing Paper highlighted other important changes since 2006, the foremost being the major restructuring following the appointment in 2007 of a new Vice-Chancellor. This led to the reorganisation of the University around schools rather than campuses and a reduction in the number of schools from 10 to seven.

7   The University's Collaborative Partnerships Policy describes its intention to develop and manage effective networks of domestic and overseas partners. The University's genuinely collaborative approach to creating and maintaining partnerships with the maximum mutual academic benefit was identified by the audit team as a feature of good practice.

The team also identified as a feature of good practice the University's commitment to both widening access to, and enhancing the quality of, higher education through collaborative partnerships. This was exemplified by its support for the development of college networks in greater London and WIUT's groundbreaking role in the development of higher education in Uzbekistan.

8   Academic Council is responsible for all of the University's academic provision, including collaborative provision. It is advised by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee. The Collaborations Committee (a subcommittee of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee) is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of strategy, policy and processes for the quality assurance and enhancement of collaborations.

9   The University's procedures for the quality assurance and enhancement of collaborative provision are mainly described in a dedicated Collaborations Handbook. Operational responsibility for the maintenance of these procedures resides with the Quality and Standards Office, which is part of the University's Corporate Services team.

10   The day-to-day management of collaborative partnerships is largely the responsibility of liaison tutors, whose wide-ranging role is described in a dedicated Liaison Tutors Handbook. The University and its partners attach considerable value to the role of liaison tutors on which the health of the University's collaborative links depends heavily. The audit team identified the University's commitment to supporting and developing the role of the liaison tutor as a feature of good practice.

11   In addition to its externally validated and franchised courses, the University also has progression agreements with institutions overseas and accredits some work-based training. Both areas conform to the definition of collaborative provision set out in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review,* but are not currently included within the University's definition. The University plans to extend its definition to include these areas. The audit team welcomed these plans and regards it as desirable for the University to expedite them so that progression agreements and accreditation of work-based training become subject to the University's standard management arrangements for collaborative provision. With that exception, the team concluded that the University's framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of its collaborative provision was generally well designed and effective.

12   Prospective collaborative partners are subject to due-diligence checks and risk assessments by the Quality and Standards Office. Subject to the outcome of these checks, and on the production of a compelling business plan by the host school, approval is granted by the University's Executive Board. Following a comprehensive review of its procedures for checking the soundness of partners' management structures and financial position, new procedures are being introduced with effect from 2011-12, whereby the host school is responsible for proposing the extension or termination of the partnership. The audit team welcomed this approach to reviewing partnerships in addition to their associated courses at regular intervals, which is consistent with a recommendation of the 2006 Audit of collaborative provision.

13   Each partnership is governed by a memorandum of collaboration and financial agreement. A standard condition of the successful revalidation of collaborative provision is that the University signs a new memorandum of collaboration with its partner. In one case, however, the University was unable to locate the signed copy of a memorandum with a collaborative partner covering a two-year period following revalidation in 2009. The audit

team, therefore, regards it as advisable for the University to ensure that all partnerships are underpinned by extant, signed agreements.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

14   Once new collaborative partnerships are approved in principle by the University's Executive Board, the associated course proposals follow the University's standard validation process. The full validation panel comprises a minimum of two external subject specialists and its meeting is normally convened at the partner institution.

15   The audit team saw several examples of the validation of courses delivered collaboratively, which conformed to the University's published procedures. The team noted that preparatory meetings, called Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshops, were particularly beneficial, for example by supporting staff development in a range of pedagogic matters related to assessment and feedback.

16   The revalidation of courses follows a very similar process to the original validation, but with an important additional piece of evidence: the Critical Review document. The audit team reviewed several examples of the revalidation of collaborative courses and identified some which had departed from the published procedure. Critical Review documents were particularly problematic; some did not contain the monitoring material prescribed and others tended to omit those evaluative aspects specified by the procedure, instead confining themselves to description. The team also noted, in the case of both the validation and revalidation of Foundation Degrees delivered collaboratively, that panels tended not to have the benefit of any information or evidence from employers. In one particular example, the team observed that the revalidation panel for a Foundation Degree had not considered a range of important information including correspondence from an absent external examiner, the previous validation report and its recommendations, the relevant subject benchmark statement, and any evidence about two of the constituent modules.

17   Against this backdrop, the audit team regards it as advisable for the University to ensure that the judgements of revalidation panels take full account of all the information specified by the University's revalidation procedure, as well as the reference points suggested in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review.* The team also regards it as advisable for the University to ensure greater consistency in the involvement of employers in the design, delivery and review of Foundation Degrees, with reference to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Finally, given the particular weaknesses it observed in the Critical Review documents it saw, the team regards it as desirable for the University to enhance the quality of critical reviews produced for revalidation.

18   Responsibility for the publication and maintenance of programme specifications rests with schools. The audit team observed that some of the specifications for collaborative courses were published on the University's website, but others were not, reflecting the incompleteness of the University's central repository for these documents. The team, therefore, regards it as desirable for the University to finalise the development of a definitive and publicly accessible central repository of programme specifications.

19   All taught provision leading to a university award is subject to annual monitoring by the relevant school. The evidence considered includes course committee minutes, liaison tutor reports, external examiner reports and data on student recruitment, progression and achievement. The outcomes are reported to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and then to Academic Council in the February following the academic year under

review. In addition, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's Annual Monitoring Scrutiny Subcommittee considers a report on schools' performance against the University's key performance indicators and discusses the outcomes with the deans. From 2010-11 the annual monitoring template specifically asks how collaborative provision is addressed, because the University felt it was important to consider this both in terms of each partnership and in relation to campus-based provision.

20   The principles of assessment are laid down in the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. These inform the regulations, which the audit team regarded as clear and comprehensive, and are articulated as processes in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. However, the team found a degree of inconsistency among different courses in the communication of assessment regulations and marking schemes to students, staff and external examiners. The team, therefore, regards it as desirable for the University to make information and guidance on the grading of assessments clear and accessible to all staff, students and external examiners.

21   The University's Academic Integrity Policy is intended to develop students' understanding of plagiarism and its implications, and provide them with developmental support on the first occasion plagiarism is detected. Students whom the audit team met understood plagiarism and were well informed about university procedures.

22   The University regards the primary roles of external examiners in collaborative provision as verifying that standards are appropriate, assisting in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards, and ensuring that assessment processes are fair and operated in accordance with the regulations.

23   External examiners are required to make an annual report to the University. These reports are considered during annual monitoring and included in the Critical Review document at revalidation with a commentary from the course team. The University does not currently share external examiner reports routinely with students or their representatives due to concerns over confidentiality. The University has revised the structure of the external examiner report template for 2010-11 to include a separate section on collaborative provision. The audit team regards it as desirable for the University to share external examiner reports with student representatives at its collaborative partners.

24   An annual overview report of external examiners' reports on collaborative provision is provided to the Collaborations Committee, which looks for any overarching issues or concerns and identifies any areas of good practice. Where a course has separate external examiners for the same course delivered at different sites, the University allows the external examiners to compare standards by arranging for them to confer.

25   The University has sole authority for awarding certificates and transcripts relating to the programmes of study delivered through collaborative arrangements. The principal language of instruction and assessment for all collaborative courses is English. The audit team reviewed a sample of certificates and transcripts and found that none fully met the expectations in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* regarding the name and location of the partner organisation. The team, therefore, regards it as advisable for the University to ensure that all certificates and/or transcripts record the name and location of any partner organisations engaged in the delivery of programmes of study.

26   The University relies on its partners to provide accurate student data in a timely fashion that is then stored on a university student record system. The quality of the data is the responsibility of each school registry and the audit team found evidence that the student record system team works closely with schools to ensure its accuracy.

27   The audit team concluded that, in the context of its collaborative provision, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

28   Each of the University's procedures for the validation, annual monitoring and revalidation of collaborative provision expect course teams, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of learning opportunities for students, alongside academic standards. The audit team noted several aspects of these procedures which were particularly beneficial to the consideration of learning opportunities, including the use of curriculum assessment and enhancement workshops before validation and revalidation panels meet.

29   The University has two main formal ways of identifying the views of students on collaborative courses: module feedback questionnaires and course committees. Students at overseas partners tend to submit their feedback on modules directly using the University's own electronic system, while some partner institutions in the UK employ their own questionnaires. Where partners use their own surveys, course leaders are responsible for analysing the feedback and making the University aware of any concerns through annual monitoring. Thus, concerns are only visible to the University if course leaders report them. The audit team regarded this as a potential weakness, although it acknowledged that safeguards existed in the form of the liaison tutor's informal meetings with students at partner institutions and the tutor's monitoring of course committee minutes.

30   All partner institutions are expected to convene course committees with student representation and the students whom the audit team met confirmed that these committees existed and functioned properly. Course committee minutes are available to liaison tutors, who may include any concerns in their annual reports. The minutes are also considered during annual monitoring and comprise part of the evidence base for validation and revalidation.

31   Student representatives participate in the management of the quality assurance of collaborative provision primarily through their attendance at course committees. All the students whom the team met agreed that their representatives were proactive in soliciting students' views. Students are not members of validation or revalidation panels and they are not involved in curriculum assessment and enhancement workshops. The University may wish to consider involving students in these processes in the future.

32   Some of the Foundation Degrees provided by partner institutions incorporate work placements and work-based learning, in accordance with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. The University has strong links with employers, but some of the students whom the team met indicated that there was no assessment associated with their work-based learning and there were also examples of workplace visits being substituted for formal work placements. This contributed to the team's recommendation about the involvement of employers in the design, delivery and review of Foundation Degrees set out in paragraph 17.

33   Partner institutions' capacity to provide adequate learning resources is a standard consideration at both validation and revalidation. To help panels make this consideration, a representative from the University's Library Service normally visits the partner to assess the resources available. The memoranda of collaboration between the University and its partners specify the learning resources students are entitled to. These resources include a

university computing and library account, library borrowing rights, access to the virtual learning environment, and access to the online library catalogue.

34   The University monitors the adequacy of learning resources for students on collaborative courses through annual monitoring and liaison tutors' reports. In general, students whom the audit team met were satisfied with learning resources.

35   Admissions standards for collaborative provision conform to the University's general admissions requirements. Liaison tutors are required to monitor the admissions decisions taken on the University's behalf by partner institutions. The Liaison Tutors Handbook describes how this monitoring should be conducted. Annual audits of admissions procedures are also conducted by academic administrators.

36   The University's Briefing Paper stated that responsibility for students' academic and personal support normally rests with the partner institution and that this is confirmed in the Administrative Annex to the Memorandum of Collaboration. However, this statement was not consistent with the memoranda the audit team saw. Notwithstanding this oversight, the students whom the team met were generally very satisfied with both the academic and pastoral support they had received.

37   The University monitors its partners' performance in providing student support through its liaison tutors and annual monitoring. The evidence reviewed by the audit team indicated that this monitoring occurred effectively.

38   The University's partners are responsible for appointing teaching staff. The University checks that these staff are appropriately qualified and competent by scrutinising curriculum vitae during validation and revalidation and requiring partners to keep the University abreast of any staffing changes between these events. Staff at partner institutions whom the audit team met understood this obligation and confirmed that they met it.

39   The University's primary means of supporting teaching staff in partner institutions is the liaison tutor, who provides advice and guidance on admissions, marking standards, the provision of feedback and supporting student representation. Staff at partner institutions whom the audit team met spoke very positively about the role played by the liaison tutors in supporting their delivery of the University's courses.

40   Professional development of teaching staff at partner institutions occurs through curriculum assessment and enhancement workshops during validation and revalidation, and in opportunities for partner staff to take part in accredited professional development.

41   The audit team concluded that, in the context of its collaborative provision, 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

42   The University pursues enhancements to its collaborative provision through its standard quality assurance mechanisms (particularly annual monitoring) by disseminating good practice to partners and through supporting the professional development of partner institutions' teaching staff.

43   The University's annual monitoring procedure helps to promote enhancement by prompting schools to provide details of any good practice in collaborative provision in their annual reports to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's Annual Monitoring Scrutiny Subcommittee. The audit team saw evidence of schools responding to this requirement appropriately.

44   The University has played an active role in enhancing higher education provision in Uzbekistan as part of the development of the Westminster International University of Tashkent (WIUT). This role has gone beyond promoting its own courses to collaboration in a number of projects funded by the European Union. The University's work in Uzbekistan contributed to the team's identification of its commitment to enhancing the quality of higher education through collaborative partnerships as a feature of good practice.

45   In Greater London, the University has promoted close collaboration among the eight member colleges of the CertEd Consortium by supporting the development of a common Certificate in Education/PGCE curriculum and employing a full-time liaison tutor in the Westminster Exchange. Regular meetings among the colleges' course leaders and university staff provide opportunities for the exchange of good practice and the University has also facilitated the creation of online resources for the dissemination of good practice. The audit team identified the role of the CertEd Consortium in facilitating close collaboration among the member colleges as a feature of good practice.

46   The University supports the professional development of staff at partner institutions through opportunities for continuing professional development, the annual learning and teaching symposium, teaching fellowships, and online resources. The University's Teaching Fellowships are open and have been awarded to staff at partner institutions. The majority of this support for staff development is delivered by the Westminster Exchange, although liaison tutors also contribute.

47   The prominent role played by the Westminster Exchange in supporting quality enhancement, particularly through the professional development of staff at partner institutions, led the audit team to identify the Westminster Exchange as a feature of good practice.

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

48   The University had no students registered on collaborative research degrees at the time of the Audit.

Section 6: Published information

49   The University's new standard memorandum of collaboration makes its partners responsible for the accuracy of marketing material, but specifies that all such material must be approved by the University before it is published. The University further reserves the right to audit any material produced by its partners. These audits generally take the form of spot checks by the Quality and Standards Office. However, the audit team found several examples of inaccurate information about the University's awards on partners' websites. This indicated to the team that the University's spot checks were insufficient. The team, therefore, regards it as desirable for the University to adopt a more systematic approach to checking the accuracy of information about the University's awards published on partners' websites.

50   Once they are admitted to a collaborative course, students are given a course handbook. The handbooks contain a wide range of information about the course, the University's policies and procedures, and the support that students are entitled to. The audit team examined a number of course handbooks and discussed them with students at partner institutions. Students generally regarded the handbooks as useful and accurate. There was, however, some criticism of the completeness of the information on assessment, which contributed to the recommendation set out in paragraph 20. The team further noted that some course handbooks did not include the full programme specification, and that, in some of these cases, the full programme specification was not available through the University's website either. This contributed to the team's recommendation on the development of a definitive repository for programme specifications in paragraph 18.

51   The students whom the team met demonstrated their awareness of the University's procedures for academic appeals and complaints. They also understood the relationship they had with the University as the awarding body.

52   The audit team found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision, notwithstanding those few areas noted in paragraph 50.

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the University's genuinely collaborative approach to partnership working (paragraph 7)
- the University's commitment to both widening access to, and enhancing the quality of, higher education through collaborative partnerships (paragraphs 7 and 44)
- the University's commitment to supporting and developing the role of the liaison tutor (paragraph 10)
- the role of the CertEd Consortium in facilitating close collaboration among the member colleges (paragraph 45)
- the role of the Westminster Exchange in facilitating development opportunities for staff at partner institutions (paragraph 47).

Recommendations for action

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

55   The team advises the University to:

- ensure that all partnerships are underpinned by extant, signed agreements (paragraph 13)
- ensure that the judgements of revalidation panels take full account of all the information specified by the University's revalidation procedure as well as the reference points suggested in the *Code of practice, Section 7* (paragraph 17)
- ensure greater consistency in the involvement of employers in the design, delivery and review of Foundation Degrees, with reference to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (paragraphs 17 and 32)

- ensure that all certificates and/or transcripts record the name and location of any partner organisations engaged in the delivery of courses of study (paragraph 25).

56   It would be desirable for the University to:

- expedite plans to bring the management of all provision that meets the definition of collaborative provision in the *Code of practice, Section 2* within the University's new structures for managing collaborative provision (paragraph 11)
- enhance the quality of critical reviews produced for revalidation (paragraph 17)
- finalise the development of a definitive and publicly accessible central repository of programme specifications (paragraph 18)
- make information and guidance on the grading of assessments clear and accessible to all staff, students and external examiners (paragraph 20)
- share external examiner reports with student representatives (paragraph 23)
- adopt a more systematic approach to checking the accuracy of information about the University's awards published on partners' websites (paragraph 49).

Appendix

University of Westminster's response to the Audit of collaborative provision report

QAA's confidence in the soundness and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities is an important public affirmation of the University's genuinely collaborative approach to partnership.

Westminster's effective framework of policies, procedures and due-diligence processes secured welcome acknowledgement from the auditors. Endorsement of the increasingly significant role played by subject specialist liaison tutors as ambassadors at University level is significant.

The lead pedagogical role of Westminster Exchange (WEx) for our wider community of scholars is recognised for its contribution to teaching partnerships, notably in the Westminster Group of Associate Colleges, the CertEd Consortium in London, and the Informatics Institute of Technology, Sri Lanka. Our definition of collaborative provision has been broadened to reflect all our teaching partnerships in accordance with the auditors' advice.

The profile of Westminster's ground-breaking role as co-founder of Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) in the report is also significant. The development of learners as independent thinkers is key to the University's success, and acknowledgement of its influence through EU-funded dissemination projects on the UK model of student-centred learning is important.

The Westminster approach is based on a partnership of equals. This extends beyond institutions to other governments and national agencies, facilitating a strategic role in extending educational opportunities internationally and in the London region. QAA's acknowledgement of the University's good practice in enhancing the quality of higher education through partnerships, as well as widening access for a diverse group of learners, is particularly welcome.