University of Westminster

Audit of collaborative provision

June 2011

Annex to the report

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Introduction

An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Westminster (the University) from 20 June to 24 June 2011. The purpose of the Audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University'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 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 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 could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that 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 of good practice:

- the University's genuinely collaborative approach to partnership working (paragraph 14)
- the University's commitment to both widening access to, and enhancing the quality of, higher education through collaborative partnerships (paragraphs 15 and 92)
- the University's commitment to supporting and developing the role of the liaison tutor (paragraph 20)
- the role of the CertEd Consortium in facilitating close collaboration among the member colleges (paragraph 94)
- the role of the Westminster Exchange in facilitating development opportunities for staff at partner institutions (paragraph 97).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- ensure that all partnerships are underpinned by extant, signed agreements (paragraph 30)
- 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 40)
- 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 40 and 71)
- 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 55).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- 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 23)
- finalise the development of a definitive and publicly accessible central repository of programme specifications (paragraphs 35 and 103)
- enhance the quality of critical reviews produced for revalidation (paragraph 40)
- make information and guidance on the grading of assessments clear and accessible to all staff, students and external examiners (paragraph 43)
- share external examiner reports with student representatives (paragraph 50)
- adopt a more systematic approach to checking the accuracy of information about the University's awards published on partners' websites (paragraph 101).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The University of Westminster (the University) traces its origins to the Polytechnic Institution, founded in 1838. The Institution's name changed to the Royal Polytechnic Institution in 1841 and in 1881 it was re-established as the Regent Street Polytechnic to provide classes for working adults in engineering, science and commerce. In 1970, the Polytechnic of Central London combined the Regent Street Polytechnic with two other colleges and in 1992 the Polytechnic was rededicated as the University of Westminster.

2   Most of the University's provision is delivered on three campuses in central London. It also has a campus in Harrow. Teaching and research takes place across a broad range of disciplines, which are organised into more than 30 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. In addition, some academic provision is delivered through the Westminster Exchange, which has school status.

3   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 of two different types:

- external validations, where a course is validated by the University for delivery externally by a partner institution. The course could be developed jointly with the University or wholly by the partner (57 courses)

- franchises, where the University authorises the delivery of the whole or part of one of its own courses for delivery by a partner institution (six courses).

4   Thirty of the 63 collaborative courses were delivered through eight further education colleges in and around London, 14 were delivered elsewhere in the UK and 19 were delivered overseas. The University's primary overseas partner is the Westminster International University of Tashkent (WIUT), which was established by the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2002 as part of its national programme for reform and modernisation of the education system. The shared name reflects the two institutions' aspirations for the longevity of the partnership, but WIUT has independent legal status and is not a branch campus. The University also has a major partnership with the Informatics Institute of Technology, Sri Lanka.

5   In addition, the University has a number of progression agreements with institutions overseas and accredits some work-based training. Both conform to the definition of collaborative provision set out in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, but the University does not include them within its own definition of collaboration. This is discussed in paragraph 23. The University does not offer any courses leading to joint or dual awards.

6   According to the University's Corporate Plan, Westminster 2015, its vision is to be 'a diverse, vibrant learning environment, fostering innovation and creativity, informed by practice, inspired by research focussing on the globally relevant areas in which we excel.'

The information base for the Audit of collaborative provision

7   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 by 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; in addition, the team had access to information through a dedicated website.

8   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the latest Institutional audit (March 2010)
- the report of the previous Audit of collaborative provision (March 2006)
- Integrated quality and enhancement review reports published by QAA since the latest 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

9   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, and broad confidence in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements were managed effectively. The limited confidence judgement reflected an essential recommendation that the University 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. The report also contained five advisable recommendations and four where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to the timeliness of responses to planned actions and in dealing with urgent resource issues affecting students; the applicability of the University's policies and practices to collaborative provision; the implementation of the University's policy on the chairing of assessment boards at partner institutions; and the implementation of procedures at approval and revalidation to ensure partner institutions' initial and continuing capacity to maintain the quality of the student experience and appropriate academic standards.

10   The 2006 Audit of collaborative provision was signed off by QAA in June 2007, after the University demonstrated it had addressed the findings satisfactorily. In its Briefing Paper for the present Audit, the University explained how it had addressed the recommendation of the 2006 audit report. In relation to dual awards, the University had taken steps to ensure that any assessment contributing to a university award was seen by an external examiner appointed by the University. A subsequent review of dual awards had led them to be phased out by the time of the 2011 audit visit. To provide more consistent monitoring of student admissions, the role and reporting responsibilities of liaison tutors had been strengthened, and tutors' reports recording the outcomes of admissions monitoring now fed into annual monitoring and were also overseen by the Collaborations Committee. An annual independent audit of admissions records by an academic administrator was also introduced. The timeliness of the University's response to urgent resource issues had been improved by the reorganisation of the committee and management structure, and the applicability of the University's policies and practices to collaborative provision had been clarified by the publication of a dedicated Collaborations Handbook.

11   The Briefing Paper also highlighted several other important changes since the 2006 Audit of collaborative provision. Chief among these was the major restructuring of the University following the appointment in 2007 of a new Vice-Chancellor. The restructuring:

- led to the fundamental reorganisation of the University around schools rather than campuses, while also reducing the number of schools from 10 to seven
- combined a range of hitherto separate administrative units into a single Corporate Services
- amalgamated several separate posts and teams with responsibilities for enhancement into the Westminster Exchange.

12   The restructuring was accompanied by the introduction of a more streamlined, risk-based approach for annual monitoring of courses, changes to the academic calendar and a comprehensive review of the undergraduate curriculum model. The new undergraduate academic model, which was implemented in 2008-09, introduced 30-credit modules to what had previously been a predominantly 15-credit module system and required extensive review and revalidation of courses. A review of the academic calendar resulted in the introduction from 2008-09 of a specified element of guided independent study which was refined following review in 2009-10 and 2010-11. All of these new elements also apply to the University's collaborative provision.

13   The audit team regarded the University's response to the recommendations of the 2006 Audit of collaborative provision as satisfactory. Any particular comments on the areas touched on by the recommendations appear in the relevant sections below.

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

14   The University's strategy for collaborative provision is articulated in its Corporate Strategy and External Engagement Strategy. Embedded within the latter is a Collaborative Partnerships Policy, which describes the University's intention to develop and manage effective networks of domestic and overseas partners, and explains the University's view of the advantages which accrue to partner institutions from these partnerships, including the expansion of their higher education portfolios and enhancements to their quality assurance and enhancement systems. The Policy also recognises the benefits that the University derives from partnerships, including an enhanced profile and reputation locally and internationally, the opportunity to forge research links, and the impetus to develop new and different courses. This sense of partnerships providing for an equal exchange of benefits was reinforced in discussions with staff from the University and its partners. It was clear to the audit team that the University's approach to creating and maintaining partnerships was genuinely collaborative in the sense of seeking the maximum mutual academic benefit. The team, therefore, identified the University's genuinely collaborative approach to partnership working as a feature of good practice.

15   The audit 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. It is discussed in more detail in Section 4 of this annex.

16   Academic Council is responsible for all of the University's academic provision, including collaborative provision. It is advised on matters relating to quality and standards by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and on learning, teaching and student support by the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee. The Collaborations Committee, a subcommittee of the QAEC, is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of strategy, policy and processes for the quality assurance and enhancement of collaborations with other institutions for the delivery of taught courses leading to university awards. It has played an important role in supporting the recent revisions to the University's approach to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of collaborative provision by the Quality and Standards Office.

17   Responsibility for the standards and quality of courses delivered through a collaborative partnership rests with the school where the relevant subject expertise resides (or with the Westminster Exchange in the case of around 28 Professional Graduate Certificate of Education and Certificate of Education courses). Thus, a partner offering university awards in more than one discipline may have links with more than one school. At WIUT, additional coordination is provided through the presence of university staff, including a Deputy Rector, and through two joint committees: a strategic-level Partnership Board chaired alternately by the University's Vice-Chancellor and the Rector of WIUT; and a more operational Academic Development Group, whose membership includes liaison tutors.

18   Schools are led by deans (and the Westminster Exchange by the Director of Learning and Teaching Development). Deans discharge their responsibilities for the standards and quality of the provision provided or overseen by their schools with the support of administrative staff, who are members of Corporate Services (thereby facilitating consistency in practice among different schools). School learning, teaching and quality subcommittees are responsible for developing and reviewing school policies and strategies for learning, teaching and quality enhancement, monitoring the implementation of university policies and strategies, and reviewing the outcomes of student feedback. To enhance links

with partners, the membership of the school subcommittees was extended in 2010 to include liaison tutors.

19   The day-to-day management of collaborative partnerships is largely the responsibility of liaison tutors, who are appointed by the relevant dean (or the Director of Learning, Teaching and Pedagogic Research). Liaison tutors' specific duties, which are set out in detail in the Liaison Tutors Handbook, are many and varied. They include:

- providing advice and guidance to staff at partner institutions on the full range of university policies, procedures and regulations
- supporting external examiners in their examination of the academic standards of the collaborative courses
- monitoring the partner's performance against the University's requirements and reporting back to the school and the Collaborations Committee
- providing advice and guidance to students studying at partner institutions.

20   Thus, the role of liaison tutor is vitally important to the health of the University's collaborative provision, and this is reflected in the publication of the Handbook, the existence of a liaison tutors forum (which is responsible, among other things, for monitoring and reporting on quality and standards and identifying good practice in collaborative provision), and more generally in the value which the University and its partners attach to the role. In addition, where a partnership is terminated, the liaison tutor joins the Leaving Institutions Monitoring Group, which is responsible for protecting the standards and quality of the associated courses as they are being wound down. The audit team identified the University's commitment to supporting and developing the role of the liaison tutor as a feature of good practice.

21   The University's regulations, policies and procedures for taught provision are set out in the Handbook of Academic Regulations and the Quality and Enhancement Handbook. Many of the approval, monitoring and review processes for courses delivered on-campus are the same or very similar to those for collaborative provision. The University has recently reviewed and renewed a number of its policies, processes and procedures for collaborative provision and brought these together into a separate Collaborations Handbook 2011, which should provide a useful and accessible resource for those staff involved with collaborative provision in both the University and its partners.

22   The University has adopted an approach to risk assessment in which risk registers are maintained at both university and school levels, and for the WIUT partnership. The university risk register has a section on collaborative risk which was close to completion at the time of the Audit. School risk registers which are held by the Planning Office cover generic risks, some of which may apply to collaborative provision. The audit team was told by senior staff that the use of risk registers was still bedding-in so that some overlap between different registers was inevitable; however, this was also seen as positive in providing different perspectives on risk. The registers were 'live' documents that were deemed helpful by staff and were regularly reviewed through the committee structure. The University intends to keep its use of registers under review with the intention of a cautious approach to streamlining its processes, an approach which the team considered prudent.

23   The University's definition of collaborative provision encompasses its franchised and validated courses, but excludes its 'progression partnerships' in which accredited study at a partner institution is formally recognised for entry at some point into one of the University's courses delivered in London. It also excludes the accreditation of in-company training overseen by the Westminster Exchange. The exclusion of these arrangements

means they are not subject to the University's standard management arrangements for collaborative provision, such as oversight by the Collaborations Committee. The audit team's review of a range of evidence associated with progression partnerships and accreditation did not raise any concerns about the standards and quality of this provision. Nonetheless, the team felt it would be beneficial for the University to extend its definition of collaborative provision so as to make it consistent with the definition in the *Code of practice, Section 2*, thus bringing all its collaborative provision under the aegis of the processes and procedures described in this annex. In this connection, the team was encouraged to learn that the University planned to do exactly that. The team regards it as desirable for the University to expedite its 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.

24   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.

Selecting and approving a partner organisation or agent

25   A new collaboration may be proposed by the prospective partner institution or a member of university staff. In either case, the proposal is normally referred to the school for further consideration and the proposed partner asked to complete a Partnership Enquiry Form. A set of due-diligence checks and risk assessments are then undertaken. Before January 2011, for international partnerships, these were conducted by the International Office and for UK partnerships within schools, but they are now the responsibility of the Quality and Standards Office. The University's senior management team considers the results of these checks and the business plan from the relevant school in deciding whether the partnership should be approved in principle, deferred for further information or rejected.

26   At the time of the Audit, only one partnership had been considered through the new selection and approval procedures. It was, therefore, too early for the audit team to take a view on their effectiveness. However, the team noted that the due-diligence and risk assessment processes were comprehensive, and the fact that they would be carried out and reported on through the single agency of the Quality and Standards Office should enhance consistency compared to the previous arrangements.

27   The 2006 Audit of collaborative provision observed that the University lacked a formal procedure for reviewing partnerships separately from their associated courses, and therefore advised it to implement such procedures at revalidation as were necessary to determine partners' continuing capacity to maintain the quality of the student experience and appropriate academic standards. The University subsequently undertook a comprehensive review of its processes for checking the soundness of a partner's management structures and financial position and introduced new procedures with effect from 2011-12, whereby the host school is responsible for proposing the extension or termination of the partnership. In light of the recommendation of the last Audit, and the University's recent experience of one of its private partners being taken over by a new company, the audit team welcomed the University's new procedures for reviewing partnerships at regular intervals.

28   Recommendations for the closure of collaborative courses are normally submitted by the Dean of School to the Head of Academic Services and Academic Registrar and then considered by the QAEC. Under procedures approved in late 2010, if the recommendation to close the partnership is approved, the Leaving Institutions Monitoring Group is charged with protecting the standards and quality of the provision as it is wound down.

Written agreements with a partner organisation or agent

29   Once a new partnership has been approved in principle, a memorandum of collaboration and financial agreement are drafted. Final versions are agreed and signed after the successful completion of validation. Following consultation and legal guidance, the University introduced a new template for the memoranda in the 2010-11 academic year, alongside an enhanced procedure for dealing with financial agreements. The audit team regarded the new template as clear and comprehensive, with the exception of the sections on student support. This is discussed in more detail in paragraph 79.

30   One of the standard conditions 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

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Validation

31   Once new collaborative partnerships are approved in principle by the senior management team, the associated course proposals follow the University's standard validation process. The process has three stages: the Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshop (CAEW), the initial validation meeting, and the full panel meeting. The Validation Panel Chair is a member of academic staff with experience of the validation and review procedures selected from a school (or the Westminster Exchange) independent of that hosting the proposed course. The full Validation Panel comprises a minimum of two external subject specialists and its meeting is normally convened at the partner institution. Where this is not possible, a subgroup of the Panel will visit the partner's premises to determine whether the partner and its staff are capable of delivering the course to the required standard.

32   The maximum period of approval for any collaborative course is five years, after which it must be reviewed. This is slightly different to campus-based provision where the Panel may decide to approve indefinitely, subject to a review after a maximum of six years.

33   The audit team saw several examples of the approval of courses delivered collaboratively, which demonstrated that the process operated in accordance with the procedure outlined above. The team noted that the CAEWs were particularly beneficial, for example by supporting staff development in a range of pedagogic matters related to assessment and feedback.

34   The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook describes the University's processes for the major and minor modification of existing awards and articulates the distinguishing criteria. Modifications affecting both curriculum and regulations must be endorsed by the relevant school's learning, teaching and quality subcommittee.
Minor modifications may be processed by the Quality and Standards Office; major changes require academic consideration from an independent representative of Academic Council.

If the changes are approved, course leaders are responsible for submitting revised documentation, including a new programme specification, to the Quality and Standards Office. The audit team heard that while the classification of a given change was not always straightforward, discussion among the Quality and Standards Office, the Validation Panel Chair and the school would prevent significant change occurring without proper consideration.

35   The Briefing Paper emphasised the University's commitment to programme specifications and the audit team found evidence of the systematic use of programme specifications in course handbooks and during validation. Responsibility for the publication and maintenance of accurate 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.

Annual monitoring

36   All taught provision leading to a university award is subject to annual monitoring by the relevant school. The process can be tailored to meet the needs of individual schools to some extent, though it must consider a prescribed set of evidence including 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 (QAEC) and then to Academic Council in the February following the academic year under review. In addition, the QAEC'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.

37   The University requires collaborative partners to participate fully in annual monitoring even though some partner colleges have their own quality assurance processes. From 2010-11, the annual monitoring template specifically asks how collaborative provision was addressed, because the University felt it had become difficult to distinguish from campus-based provision.

Revalidation

38   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. This comprises two main elements: the cumulative monitoring material from the previous three years; and the critical self-evaluation, which is normally a single written account whose evaluative aspects should identify the strengths and weaknesses of the course and provide indicators of ongoing improvements.

39   The audit team reviewed several examples of the revalidation of collaborative courses and identified some that 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 independent of the teaching staff. In one particular example, 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. In this particular case it was hard to see how the Panel had fully discharged its responsibilities.

40   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.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

41   The Quality and Standards Office is responsible for monitoring changes to the Academic Infrastructure and prompting the relevant deliberative committee to consider any potential concomitant revisions to the University's quality assurance framework. In consequence, the University's processes and procedures for quality assurance and enhancement are closely mapped to the Academic Infrastructure. However, the audit team noted that, in practice, the University's engagement with parts of the *Code of practice* and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* during validation and revalidation sometimes fell short of its published expectations. This is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 38 to 40.

Assessment policies and regulations

42   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. All taught courses, including those delivered collaboratively, must adhere to these regulations and processes, although some exceptions may be approved at validation or revalidation. Examples of good practice in assessment are available through guides produced by the Westminster Exchange.

43   The audit team reviewed the University's approach to communicating its assessment regulations and marking schemes to students, staff and external examiners by reading module handbooks and external examiner and liaison tutor reports, and discussing assessment with staff and students. It found a degree of inconsistency among different courses (for instance, in several cases marking schemes were communicated to students verbally rather than through course or module handbooks), with the result that some students, staff and external examiners were confused about assessment criteria. 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.

44   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 the University's procedures.

External examiners

45   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 operate in accordance with the regulations.

46   The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook describes procedures for the nomination, approval and briefing of external examiners, which are aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. Induction of external examiners is the responsibility of schools. The QAEC provides an induction agenda to schools to encourage comprehensiveness and consistency. New external examiners also receive an institutional induction pack. In 2009-10, the guidance to external examiners was revised, asking them to report specifically on examples of good practice and quality enhancement. This evidence contributes to annual monitoring. 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 meet.

47   There are two stages to assessment boards: subject boards consider module results for a subject area, and conferment boards consider the full set of module results of individual students, including progression and exclusion issues, and then make awards. External examiners are appointed to provide subject area expertise to subject boards. With one exception, external examiners must attend all conferment boards considering final awards except where the board follows referred or deferred assessment and the external examiners have agreed that this may be conducted by correspondence. The exception is the Westminster International University of Tashkent (WIUT); in this case two of the external examiners do not travel to the overseas partner because the course leaders attend the Assessment Board at the University in London.

48   The Administrative Annex of the standard memorandum of collaboration specifies the location of assessment boards. The appointment of assessment board chairs is the responsibility of the dean. The University responded to the previous Audit of collaborative provision by requiring all assessment board chairs to be university staff, with the proviso that the nominated chair may be the liaison tutor only where that tutor has had no involvement with the moderation or marking of the work being assessed.

49   External examiner reports are considered during annual monitoring and they are included in the Critical Review document at revalidation, with a commentary from the course team.

50   The University does not currently share the full text of external examiner reports routinely with students, although anonymised reports and action plans that arise from them are shared with student representatives. 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.

51   External examiners are required to make an annual report to the University which includes both quantitative scores and a narrative. In the case of collaborative provision, they are asked to comment on the comparability of the course with any equivalent campus-based provision. 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.

52   External examiners' scores are one of the key performance indicators used in annual monitoring. Scores of 1 (the lowest score), along with any serious adverse comment, and 5 (the highest score) are included to ensure appropriate action is identified and that good practice can be widely disseminated. Scores of 1 or other significant concerns are investigated by the chair of the QAEC, and the quantity of 1 and 5 scores are included in the aggregate key performance indicator report.

53   Deans are responsible for ensuring that a written reply is sent to each external examiner for the courses under their purview and that appropriate action is taken in response to the points raised. The audit team reviewed a number of external examiner reports from several collaborative courses and the associated responses from the schools. The responses included a forward-looking action plan but it was not clear to the team how the documentation confirmed that previous actions had been completed. In addition, the team noted one partnership wherein the University had not responded to a particular external examiner's criticisms for two consecutive years. However, the University demonstrated that remedial measures had now been put in place to the examiner's satisfaction.

54   At the time of the Audit, the University was conducting a major review of the role and function of external examiners and the way they are used, together with any consequential amendments that might be needed to the assessment board structures.

Certificates and transcripts

55   The University has sole authority for awarding certificates and transcripts relating to courses delivered collaboratively. 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* 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 courses of study.

Management information - statistics

56   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. The Planning Office also provides an additional quality assurance check on data before they are returned to the Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey and the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

57   Once partners provide the data, they are then used systematically in annual monitoring, revalidation and in the determination of the University's performance against its key performance indicators. Staff from partner institutions whom the audit team met indicated that they experienced little difficulty in seeking or providing data to the University. Trends and comparisons between students entering courses with advanced standing from partner organisations and students on equivalent courses delivered on-campus are monitored by schools.

58   The individual student record is validated and updated at several stages during the academic year and students are encouraged to check their own details. Students whom the audit team met confirmed they were able to do so.

59   At the time of the audit visit the University had recently embarked on a major enhancement to its management information systems and processes, stimulated in part by an internal audit report. As part of this project it had already established a Student Data Quality and Management Subcommittee and created a senior position to hold responsibility for data quality within Student Administration. It had also established a working party to develop the University's capacity for live business reporting, which was aiming in part at enabling staff with no expert knowledge of the student record system to access quantitative data to support quality assurance. The audit team regarded this as a potentially beneficial development.

Overall conclusions on the management of academic standards

60   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

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

61   Each of the University's procedures for the validation, annual monitoring and revalidation of collaborative provision, described in Section 2 of this annex, expect course teams, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of learning opportunities for students alongside academic standards. Features salient to the quality of learning opportunities include:

- the use of curriculum assessment and enhancement workshops before validation and revalidation panels meet. These workshops, which are facilitated by the Westminster Exchange, provide an opportunity for staff at partner institutions to consider a wide range of issues affecting quality including personal tutoring, personal development planning, and the composition of the curriculum. The workshops were identified as a feature of good practice at the University's 2010 QAA Institutional audit
- the expectation that validation and revalidation panels will consider students' views, by meeting groups of students and reviewing course committee minutes
- the due-diligence checks employed during the approval of partner institutions, which include an appraisal of the physical, learning and human resources available to support students in their learning
- the convening of validation or revalidation panels on the partner institution's premises, to allow the panel to consider the availability of learning resources first-hand. Where this is not possible, a subgroup of the panel will visit the partner's premises to make this consideration.

62   The audit team's scrutiny of a range of documents associated with these procedures confirmed that they were operating effectively, with the exception of the revalidation procedure, which is discussed in paragraphs 38 to 40.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

63   The University's processes and procedures for quality assurance and enhancement are closely mapped to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). However, the audit team noted that, in

practice, departures from the University's published procedures meant that it was sometimes also failing to fully engage with the *Code of practice*. In particular, the team saw examples of revalidations where panels had been unable to consider the full range of evidence specified by the University's procedures owing to weaknesses in the Critical Review document submitted by the course team. This is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 38 to 40.

64   The Quality and Standards Office is responsible for keeping partner institutions up to date with any revisions to its quality assurance framework, including where these are brought about by changes to external reference points.

Management information - feedback from students

65   There are two main vehicles for 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 highlighting any concerns through annual monitoring. Thus, concerns are only visible to the University to the extent that course leaders report them. The audit team regarded this as a potential weakness, though they also acknowledged that safeguards existed in the form of the liaison tutor's informal meetings with students at partner institutions and their monitoring of course committee minutes.

66   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.

Role of students in quality assurance

67   Student representatives participate in the management of the quality assurance of collaborative provision primarily through their attendance at course committees. Whereas those representatives from overseas partners whom the team met indicated they had been formally inducted to their role by the partner institution, some of the representatives from UK partners said they had not. They had, however, received some advice and guidance from the liaison tutor. All the students whom the team met seemed to agree that their representatives were proactive in soliciting students' views. Moreover, the team heard several examples of partner institutions acting on concerns raised by student representatives.

68   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.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

69   The University's principal mechanism for linking subject-based and pedagogic research with teaching is the Teaching Informed and Enriched by Research (TIER) project, which is recognised and part-funded by HEFCE's Teaching Quality and Enhancement Fund. TIER is a principal theme for development in the 2010-11 academic year, and as such is included in all Curriculum and Assessment Enhancement Workshops (CAEWs) including

those conducted with partner institutions. The work of TIER is also disseminated through the annual Learning and Teaching Symposium, a guide published by the Westminster Exchange, and the Good Practice Exchange website.

70   The University acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that the dissemination of TIER to partner institutions had so far been limited. The evidence reviewed by the audit team tended to support this view: although there were examples of several local partner institutions engaging with TIER, primarily through the Learning and Teaching Symposium, and enhancing their provision as a result, the engagement of overseas partners was less obvious. In this context, the team was encouraged to learn that the Westminster International University of Tashkent (WIUT) planned to establish its own Learning and Teaching Symposium.

Other modes of study

71   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 audit team visited two partner institutions providing Foundation Degrees and read evidence from several others. Strong links with employers were evident, 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 40.

72   The University provides very few courses fully online or through distance learning, either itself or collaboratively (though it is in discussion with some partners, including WIUT, about expanding validated provision through online delivery). The audit team reviewed one example of a postgraduate course delivered through flexible learning, and verified that the distance learning materials had been appropriately scrutinised during its validation.

Resources for learning

73   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.

74   A Library and IT Service Level Agreement forms part of the memoranda of collaboration between the University and its partners. The key components of the Agreement cover provision of university computing and library accounts, library borrowing rights, access to the virtual learning environment (VLE), and access to the online library catalogue. In addition, many of the University's UK partners provide support to students using their own VLEs. Access to the University's electronic library resources, however, is restricted by license agreements with publishers.

75   The University monitors the adequacy of learning resources for students on collaborative courses through annual monitoring and liaison tutors' reports, which are overseen by the Collaborations Committee.

76   The audit team discussed learning resources with all of the students whom it met. In general, their views were very positive. Students confirmed they had received a proper induction to the resources available and many praised the University's own VLE and, where

available, the VLE provided by the partner. Students also indicated that any concerns they had about the VLE or access to specialist equipment had been dealt with swiftly.

Admissions policy

77   Admissions requirements 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 staff in partner institutions and provide annual written reports (within the liaison tutor reports) to the University's Academic Registrar and the relevant head of department. The Liaison Tutors Handbook describes how this monitoring should be conducted (for instance, by specifying what proportion of application forms should be audited by the tutor), and explains which areas the annual written report is expected to cover, such as the details of any non-standard applications and the appropriateness of the partner's recruitment policies and selection procedures. The audit team's scrutiny of a selection of liaison tutor reports demonstrated that this procedure worked effectively.

78   The University has several progression partnerships with overseas institutions, whereby students who achieve a particular award are guaranteed admission to the University, sometimes with advanced standing. These partnerships are established according to the normal procedures for selection and approval described in Section 1, and the audit team saw evidence of schools mapping the standards and curricula of the partners' awards against the University's courses to ensure that these courses are suitable for students who progress. However, progression partnerships fall outside the University's definition of collaborative provision. In consequence, they are not subject to the University's normal oversight of this provision, such as that provided by the Collaborations Committee. The audit team concluded that it would be beneficial for progression partnerships to have that oversight. This contributed to its recommendation regarding the extension of the University's definition of collaborative provision set out in paragraph 23.

Student support

79   The University's Briefing Paper stated that responsibility for student support usually rests with the partner institution and that this is recorded in the Administrative Annex to the memorandum of collaboration. However, this statement was consistent neither with the signed memoranda which the audit team read nor with the revised template for memoranda, wherein student support services were referred to in general terms in the main body of the document but not specifically in the annex. The team did, however, note that some of the entitlements of students at partner institutions, such as access to the University's Career Development Centre and Counselling Service, were specified in the Collaborations Handbook.

80   The ambiguity about the documentary locus for specifying partners' responsibilities for support notwithstanding, the audit team found that students' experience of support tended to be very positive. The sample of student handbooks for collaborative courses which the team reviewed provided comprehensive information about the services on offer and the students whom the team met were generally very satisfied with both the academic and pastoral support they had received.

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

Staffing and staff development

82   The University's partners are responsible for appointing teaching staff.
The University checks 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.

83   The University's primary means of supporting teaching staff in partner institutions is the liaison tutor, whose formal list of responsibilities includes providing 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. This contributed to the team's identification of the University's commitment to supporting and developing the role of the liaison tutor as a feature of good practice.

84   Teaching staff at partner institutions also interact with other university staff through opportunities to shadow university staff and, at WIUT, by the presence of the First Deputy Rector, whose support and guidance was regarded as very beneficial by the other staff who were spoken to by the audit team.

85   The University's commitment to the professional development of teaching staff at partner institutions is manifest in its use of CAEWs during validation and revalidation, which partner staff commended to the audit team, and in opportunities for partner staff to take part in accredited professional development. The University provides two courses accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA): an MA in Higher Education (with PgDip and PgCert intermediate awards, the latter providing Fellowship of the HEA) and a PG Certificate of Special Study in Supporting Learning (a 20-credit course leading to Associate status of the HEA). Selected modules from the PgDip stage can be taken as continuing professional development and this opportunity is open to staff from partner institutions, with a fee waiver available for staff from partner colleges who teach on the University's courses. Seven partner staff have successfully completed a short course on Mentoring in the Lifelong Learning Sector. However, the team also heard from some partner staff that, while they appreciated being offered such development opportunities, few had enough time to take advantage. The University recognises the problem and Westminster Exchange is considering a more flexible delivery arrangement.

86   In order to meet its own particular requirements for staff development which reflect the relative weakness of higher education in central Asia, WIUT has helped to develop its own Postgraduate Certificate in Special Study in Teaching and Learning, which is also accredited by the HEA. The course encompasses student learning, curriculum development, and quality assurance and enhancement. The University described the course as the backbone of WIUT's staff development programme. It is also available to staff from other local universities and international schools in Uzbekistan.

87   Partner colleges in London and the surrounding area who are members of the University's CertEd consortium enjoy further opportunities for staff development through the regular consortium meetings and the termly Good Practice Exchange. These are discussed in more detail in Section 4 of this annex.

Overall conclusion on the management of the quality of learning opportunities

88   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

Management information - quality enhancement

89   The University's commitment to enhancing the quality of its provision is manifest in all of the relevant policy documents, including the overarching Corporate Strategy. In practice, 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.

90   As part of annual monitoring, schools considers progress on action plans and examples of good practice highlighted in course leaders' reports, liaison tutor reports and external examiners' reports. Each school produces an annual monitoring and review document for the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's (QAEC's) Annual Monitoring Scrutiny Subcommittee. A new template was introduced for 2010-11. This requires schools to report on progress against last year's annual monitoring action plan, any approved school plan and the School Quality Enhancement Plan, and to provide details of examples of quality enhancement and good practice within the school and in any validated collaborative provision. There is also a specific section for the school to report evidence of enhancement and good practice that has been identified specifically in respect of collaborative provision. The school annual monitoring documents are considered by the QAEC's Annual Monitoring Scrutiny Subcommittee. which meets with each school dean. The Subcommittee then reports to the QAEC. The review of annual monitoring produces recommendations for enhancements for each school, including their collaborative provision courses.

91   The Collaborations Committee also monitors quality enhancement in collaborative provision by receiving the review of annual monitoring produced by the QAEC for Academic Council, as well as a summary of the liaison tutor reports produced by the Collaborations Manager.

92   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 include the enhancement of higher education in Uzbekistan more broadly through collaboration in a number of projects supported by the European Union. For example, the University worked with WIUT, the Uzbek government and a Polish university on a TEMPUS project, Capacity Building for Independent Learning in Higher Education in Uzbekistan. The project developed training packs for Uzbek universities to implement independent learning. The University also collaborated with European Union and Uzbek institutions on another TEMPUS project, Developing Alliance Between Universities and Business in Uzbekistan, to strengthen the integration of higher education in Uzbekistan with business and student employability. 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.

93   In Greater London, the University has promoted close collaboration and peer-to-peer learning among the eight college members of the CertEd Consortium, in part by appointing a dedicated liaison tutor in the Westminster Exchange. The University's support is evident in:

- the development of a common Certificate in Education/PGCE curriculum
- monthly meetings among the college course leaders and the liaison tutor
- triannual meetings of the Good Practice Exchange, which brings together CertEd/PGCE college course leaders and course leaders for the teacher education courses run by the Westminster Exchange
- the development of dedicated web-based tools for disseminating good practice.

94   The audit team identified the role of the CertEd Consortium in facilitating close collaboration among the member colleges as a feature of good practice.

95   The University supports the development of staff at partner institutions through continuing professional development, the annual learning and teaching symposium, teaching fellowships, and online resources. The majority of this support for staff development is delivered by the Westminster Exchange, although liaison tutors also contribute.

96   The Westminster Exchange organises the University's annual learning and teaching symposium, which has a different theme each year. The team noted that staff from partner colleges in London and the surrounding area had attended recent symposia and presented papers. Two papers are presented by staff from WIUT each year. The Westminster Exchange also offers a range of continuing professional development activities. These include the PGCert in Learning and Teaching for Higher Education as well as the opportunity to take individual modules as short courses. The Westminster Exchange also validates the PGCert in Special Study in Teaching and Learning which is delivered at WIUT for WIUT staff.

97   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.

98   The University of Westminster Teaching Fellowships are awarded each year to recognise individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the enhancement of learning and teaching. The Teaching Fellowships are open to, and have been awarded to, staff at partner institutions and one of the Fellows from a partner institution successfully applied to the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme with the University's support.

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

99   The University had no students registered on collaborative research degrees at the time of the Audit. Some research degrees may require the support of a partner, for example where a specific element of practical work may be undertaken in another institution, but all research students are registered as university students and have a university member of staff as Director of Studies.

Section 6: Published information

100   The University's new standard memorandum of collaboration makes its partners responsible for the accuracy of marketing and other promotional material, but specifies that all such material must be approved by, or on behalf of, the University's Director of Academic Services 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.

101   The safeguards in the standard memorandum notwithstanding, the audit team found several examples of inaccurate information about the University's awards on home and overseas 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.

102   Once they are admitted to a collaborative course, students are given a course handbook. The handbooks, which are scrutinised during validation and updated annually thereafter, contain a wide range of information about the course, the University's policies and procedures, and the support that students are entitled to. In addition, students receive a generic student handbook, Essential Westminster, which provides further information about studying at the University.

103   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 43. The team also noted that not all students were aware of Essential Westminster; the University recognises that this document should be modified to make it more relevant to students on collaborative courses and plans to publish a new version in 2011. Finally, the team 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 35.

104   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.

105   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 paragraphs 101 and 103.