



## Audit of Collaborative Provision

### University of Bradford

#### Follow-up report

December 2012

#### Background

1 Institutions that receive a judgement of 'limited confidence' are asked to submit an action plan to QAA, within three months, indicating how they intend to address the audit report's recommendations. Subsequently, QAA asks for a progress report on how the action plan has been implemented. Providing QAA is satisfied that the necessary measures have been taken, a recommendation is made to the QAA Board that the audit can be formally signed off.

2 Following a relatively slow start, the University's response to the Audit of Collaborative Provision report has been wholly constructive and the importance of the recommendations and the value to the University of adopting them has become increasingly clear to staff at all levels. The University has engaged thoroughly with the need to develop a robust quality- management structure and, at least equally challenging, a culture of staff engagement with institutional imperatives and the expectations of the higher education community. The strengthening of the role of institutional managers and the supporting committee structure in ensuring the fitness for purpose of the University's approach to collaborative provision is contributing significantly to the embedding of change. This, alongside the commitment of senior staff to ensuring the University's continuing alignment with external expectations and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education in particular, constitutes strong grounds to expect that the changes achieved thus far will become routine business in the future.

3 As all the recommendations in the report have now been considered and appropriate actions agreed and implemented, QAA is now in a position to complete the audit, according to its published procedures, and to confirm the confidence of the public and company members in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision.

#### Discussion

4 The Audit of Collaborative Provision in April 2010 of the University of Bradford resulted in a judgement of limited confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its collaborative provision. The institution submitted an action plan addressing the recommendations (two essential, seven advisable and three desirable) within the 18 months allowed for this purpose, and in accordance with normal procedures a visit to the University was undertaken to explore and discuss the evidence provided in support of the University's claim to have addressed the recommendations.

5 In June 2012 the report to the QAA Board on the University of Bradford's response to the limited confidence judgement in the Audit of Collaborative Provision stated that: 'eight recommendations (including the two essential recommendations) had been addressed in full, but that four (three advisable and one desirable) had been addressed only in part. Accordingly it is not possible to submit the normal sign-off template to the Board on this occasion'.

6 Following the meeting of the Board and discussions with the Higher Education Funding Council for England it was agreed that a further visit should take place before the end of October 2012 to report on the University's progress in meeting the four remaining recommendations. After this visit had taken place it was confirmed that all recommendations have been met in full and the audit can be formally signed off.

### **Advisable recommendation**

- The University should ensure that its review of external examining takes full account of collaborative provision, with specific reference to consistent follow-up of external examiners' recommendations and to their attendance at Assessment and Examination Boards.

7 This recommendation contains three main themes, and the University provided clear evidence that all of them have been satisfactorily addressed:

- 7.1 The University has approached the first theme (taking full account of collaborative provision) by strengthening the training, induction and support given to external examiners and establishing a working group which has revised institutional regulations on external examining to include a specific focus on collaborative provision. Copies of these regulations have been made available within the University and to collaborative partners.
- 7.2 The second theme (follow-up of recommendations) has been similarly supported by publicity, instructions and training events. An analysis of external examiners' reports for academic year 2011-12 indicates that over 95 per cent of examiners consider that their recommendations of the previous year had been acted upon.
- 7.3 The third theme (attendance at Boards) has been satisfactorily met with an attendance rate of 81.4 per cent (as against 69.2 per cent in academic year 2009-10). Absences of external examiners must now be pre-authorised by the pro-vice-chancellor concerned. In the one Board where this was not adhered to in 2011-12, the Board concerned was required to be reconvened with the external examiner present.

### **Advisable recommendation**

- The University should develop a systematic process for periodic review of partner institutions' capacity to support delivery of University of Bradford awards.

8 The basis of this recommendation was a concern that the University, while reviewing the programmes delivered through collaborative provision, was not taking a holistic approach to reviewing the partner institutions themselves in such a way as to enable it to be confident that its partners continued to meet institutional requirements and expectations. The University has taken a range of measures to address this concern, including a partnership strategy, the institution of a partnership board for each partner organisation, an Academic Partnerships Sub-Committee of the Learning and Teaching Committee, an Academic Partnerships Office and a new post of Director of Academic Partnerships. It is confirmed that significant improvements have been made since the

institutional audit report: the work thus far of partnership boards, which was explored in some detail, appears thorough and incisive, the new Sub-Committee is operating satisfactorily and the documentation has been carefully prepared and is fit for purpose.

### **Advisable recommendation**

- The University should establish robust arrangements for institutional oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes to ensure that appropriate decisions are made on entry.

9 The audit team's initial concerns about admissions reflected a lack of institutional control over a process which had been delegated to the faculties and departments which were themselves operating collaborative partnerships. These bodies had been approaching admissions with different levels of commitment and, in some cases, were making inappropriate decisions. The University has responded by instituting measures which include a revised Admissions Policy which ensures, through the Head of Admissions, the exercise of institutional-level authority over admissions on all sites, supported by appropriate training. The University has, in particular, developed a risk-based approach to admissions whereby mature and trusted partners have devolved authority; a second tier of partners is trusted to make standard offers (but not to exercise discretion in the cases of non-standard entrants) and in the case of a third tier of mainly newer or smaller partners, the University itself makes admissions decisions. This structure has been supported by a series of partner reviews designed to assign each partner to one of these three categories. This approach was rigorously and conscientiously applied.

### **Desirable recommendation**

- The University should ensure that appropriate staff and students from partner organisations are more actively involved in the periodic review of courses.

10 This recommendation reflected a concern that periodic review did not consistently place collaborative provision students at the heart of practice or address the experiences of partner organisation staff. The University has addressed it by strengthening the guidance given to review panels and developing a framework for the use of telephone or video-conferencing of the reviews to ensure that partner voices are heard. A review which has taken place since the previous QAA visit, involving an institution in Malaysia, was planned and organised to facilitate partner staff and student involvement, including a meeting with a group of students by video-link, was successfully achieved and will constitute a model for future such events.

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