De Montfort University

MAY 2006

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales. For institutions that have large and complex provision offered through partnerships, QAA conducts collaborative provision audits in addition to institutional audits.

The purpose of collaborative provision audit

Collaborative provision audit shares the aims of institutional audit: to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

Collaborative provision audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the awarding institution to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements; and
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, (or authorises to be published) about the quality of its programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards and the standards of those awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Collaborative provision audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which includes descriptions of different HE qualifications
- The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects

- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Collaborative provision audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of collaborative provision audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team six weeks before the audit visit
- visits to up to six partner institutions by members of the audit team
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff from the institution and from partners
- talking to students from partner institutions about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work through visits to partners. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews how institutions are working towards this requirement.

Contents

Appendix

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) visited De Montfort University (the University) from 9 to 12 May 2006 to carry out a collaborative provision audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff of the University, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its collaborative provision. As part of the process, the team visited four of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met staff and students.

The words 'academic standards' are 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.

'Academic quality' is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their awards. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

In a collaborative provision audit both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the collaborative provision audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view is that:

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

The audit team also concluded that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the University currently publishes and authorises to be published about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards, and about the standards of those awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the initiatives taken by the University to enhance the experience of students in partner organisations, particularly through the production and dissemination of customised paper and internet-based information about its services

- the work of the University to facilitate effective relationships with staff in partner organisations, through such mechanisms as the Associate College Network; Educational Partnerships; faculty away days; dedicated administrative support for 'non-standard' UK and international partnerships; and staff training in the use of the virtual learning environment for e-learning.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University consider further action in a number of areas, to ensure that the academic quality of programmes and the standards of awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained. The team considers it advisable that the University:

- ensures, as part of its current development of a strategic framework for international activity, the clear articulation of the relationship between faculty-based groups and the recently established International Strategic Development Committee, and clarity concerning that Committee's relationship with the University's executive and deliberative arrangements

- considers the ways in which it might achieve, for University staff, greater clarity of role responsibilities in relation to the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, while also exploring how it might simplify the arrangements between the centre and faculties

- reviews the appropriateness of its distinction between progression and articulation, and ensures clarity in the related procedures, particularly in respect of due diligence checks; and considers the merits of requiring a record of the formal articulation of programmes, particularly in respect of the mapping of learning outcomes

- concludes its discussions on the use of journals in the monitoring process, so as to clarify its expectations about, and improve consistency of, their use in collaborative provision

and considers it desirable that the University:

- continues to examine ways of enhancing the participation of students in partner organisations in student representation activities, in particular, (for students within the Associate College Network), the HE Forum

- while continuing to acknowledge the strength of localised (and sometimes informal) mechanisms for gathering student feedback at partner organisations, adopts a more rigorous approach to its systems for gathering end-of-module feedback and ensuring that the outcomes are fed back to students.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University is making systematic and effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision.

Main report

Main report

1   A collaborative provision audit of De Montfort University (the University) was undertaken from 9 to 12 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

2   Collaborative provision audit is supplementary to institutional audit of the University's own provision. It is carried out by a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. It provides a separate scrutiny of the collaborative provision of an HEI with degree-awarding powers (awarding institution) where such collaborative provision was too large or complex to have been included in its institutional audit. The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' *(Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning*), September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

3   In relation to collaborative arrangements, the audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its collaborative provision; and for the discharge of its responsibilities as an awarding institution. As part of the process, the audit team visited four of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met staff and students.

Section 1: Introduction: the institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision

4   Under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), the former Leicester Polytechnic was designated De Montfort University. At the time of the audit, the University had approximately 23,000 students and 3,500 staff, and offered more than 400 programmes across six faculties: Art and Design; Business and Law; Computing Sciences and Engineering; Education and Contemporary Studies; Health and Life Sciences; and Humanities.

5   An analysis of enrolments provided by the University indicates that in the academic year 2005-06, 2,863 students were enrolled in partner organisations in the UK, of whom 2,298 (80 per cent) were enrolled in colleges within the Associate College Network (see below, paragraph 26). A further 437 students were enrolled in partner organisations overseas, giving a total of 3,300 students in partner organisations. All six faculties have some involvement with UK-based partner organisations. The most prominent faculty as far as international collaborative activity is concerned is the Faculty of Business and Law.

6   The self-evaluation document prepared by the University for the purposes of the collaborative provision audit (the CPSED) set the University's collaborative provision in the context of its key values, which include 'a commitment to work in the wider community and to promote widening participation' in higher education (HE) Its portfolio of collaborative activities is seen as contributing to its identity as 'a provider of professional, creative and vocational education'.

7   At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of finalising a new strategic plan for the period 2006-07 to 2011-12. The draft plan was still subject to further discussion within the University before submission to the Board of Governors for approval in September 2006. A member of the audit team was invited

to see a draft of the Plan on a confidential basis. The draft Plan confirms the University's continuing overall commitment to widening participation and to professional, creative and vocational education. It emphasises regional engagement and acknowledges the key role to be played in this by its partner organisations within the East Midlands Development Region.

8   International development, including collaborative partnerships, will be an important feature of the new plan. The CPSED reported that international collaborative provision had been rationalised in recent years, following an internal review in 2004, resulting in 'more focused provision with a smaller number of international partners, where there is scope for development and potential for progression to DMU'. The draft plan confirms that the future approach to international development is to be cautious and focused, with careful management of risk. The University plans to increase the number of international students, studying either in the UK or in partner organisations overseas, to 10 per cent of the total student population (the number is currently 7 per cent) during the plan period.

Background information

9   The published information available to the audit team included:

- the report of the institutional audit of the University (March 2005)

- the reports of the overseas audits of the University's collaborations with Fontys Hogeschool (The Netherlands) and Fachhochschule Bielefeld (Germany) (August 1997); Twintech Institute of Technology (Malaysia) (September 1999); and Niels Brock Business College (Denmark) (November 2002)

- the report of the overseas audit of De Montfort University in South Africa (November 1999)

- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level for the University and its collaborative partners for the five years preceding the audit.

10   The University provided QAA with the following documents:

- the CPSED

- the University's Register of Collaborative Provision

- documentation relating to the four partner organisations visited by the audit team.

11   In addition, the audit team had access to a range of the University's internal documents in hardcopy or on the University's website, including an area of the intranet dedicated to the provision of information to support the audit. The team is grateful to the University for the ready access it was given to this information.

The collaborative provision audit process

12   Following a preliminary meeting at the University in September 2005, QAA confirmed that between the briefing and audit visits there would be four visits to partner organisations. QAA received the CPSED in December 2005 and documentation relating to the four partner organisations in March 2006.

13   The University's students were invited, through their Students' Union (SU), to contribute to the audit process in a way that reflected the Union's capacity to represent the views of students in partner organisations offering the University's awards through collaborative arrangements. At the briefing visit, the audit team was able to meet officers of the SU as part of a wider student group.

14   The audit team undertook a briefing visit to the University from 20 to 22 March 2006 with the purpose of exploring with senior members of University staff, senior staff from partner organisations, and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the CPSED and the linked documentation. At the end of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was agreed with the University. It was also agreed that certain audit trails would be pursued through specific case-studies prepared by the University.

The trails related to the University's management of its international collaborative provision, as illustrated through two partnership links, and its management of cross-site provision (that is, the same provision offered by two or more partner organisations), as illustrated through one Foundation Degree and one HND programme.

15   During its visits to the partner organisations, the audit team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives. The team is grateful to the partner organisations for their help in furthering its understanding of the University's processes for managing its collaborative arrangements.

16   The audit visit took place from 9 to 12 May 2006 and involved further meetings with University staff. The audit team is grateful to all those who participated in meetings.

17   The audit team comprised Mrs J Lydon, Mr D Parry, Dr P Smith and Professor M Stewart, auditors, and Ms I Pennie, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms S J Clark, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

18   The University's most recent institutional audit was in March 2005; it resulted in broad confidence judgements in respect of its arrangements for managing the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards, and the reliability of the information that it publishes about those programmes and awards. For the purposes of the current audit, the University provided information to illustrate how it had responded to the March 2005 report. It was clear to the current audit team that regular attention had been given to the report's recommendations through the deliberative structure. Although the audit had not covered collaborative provision, the team noted that aspects of its recommendations; concerning the roles and responsibilities of external examiners, the consistency between subject authority boards, requirements in respect of annual reports and programme journals, and the equivalence of the student experience, were likely to be directly relevant to the audit of collaborative provision. These matters are considered in more detail elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraphs 44-46, 50-53, 59-65 and 74-80).

19   The last full audit of the University's collaborative provision took place in May 1996. Since that audit, the University has had three audits of specific overseas collaborative partnerships in The Netherlands and Germany (1997), Malaysia (1999) and Denmark (2002). There has also been an audit of the University's operations in South Africa (1999). All of the resulting reports commented favourably in the University's provision, although scrutiny of the recommendations suggests a number of common themes, including staff development in partner organisations; annual/module monitoring; and the role of external examiners. Each of these matters is considered elsewhere in this report (see below, paragraphs 44-46, 50-53 and 70-73).

20   The current audit team was satisfied that the University had reflected and acted on the findings of these external audits of its collaborative activity, and was giving careful attention to the action to be taken in the light of its last institutional audit.

Section 2: The collaborative provision audit investigations: the awarding institution's processes for quality management in collaborative provision

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

21   Since 2001, the University has undergone significant change. This has included withdrawing from its operations in Lincolnshire, closing its operations at Milton Keynes, and rationalising operations on its campuses in

Leicester and Bedford. The net effect of these developments has been to consolidate the University's work on four campuses, compared with the 10 in operation in 2001. In addition, the University has recently announced that its Faculty of Education and Contemporary Studies in Bedford will be joining the University of Luton with effect from 1 August 2006, to create a new university for Bedfordshire. The process of transfer is to be jointly managed with the University of Luton. At the time of the current audit, arrangements were being made for advising students, including those in partner organisations, of their position.

22   In 2002-03, during this period of change, the University conducted an internal review of its collaborative provision. As a result, it was agreed that the University should aim to develop a more strategic relationship with 'a small number of organisations capable of collaborating on the development of new programmes and of delivering a critical mass of HE in FE activity'. In addition, in December 2004, the University's Strategic Management Group received a report of a review of all existing international activities, assessed in terms of viability and risk. The report was prepared by the Education Partnerships (EP) unit, which has oversight, at corporate level, of the student experience in partner organisations and the relationships between students and the University. An outcome of this report was that the EP was mandated to work with faculties to rationalise all provision offered overseas.

23   One longer-term outcome of the first internal review referred to above was the production of a 'University Collaborative Strategy', which was agreed by the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG) in November 2005. The Strategy contains a number of 'key principles' to guide collaborative provision at the University. In summary, these principles are intended to ensure that collaborative provision supports the University's commitment to widen opportunities for access to HE, consistent with the University's overall mission and staff expertise. Collaborative provision should also provide opportunities for strategic development

in areas which the University wishes to advance, as well as consolidating regional commitment, and be financially sustainable.

24   The CPSED reported that the University had recently established an international strategic development committee (ISDC), one of whose roles is 'to ensure that all international collaborations are compatible with the University's strategic intentions'. The ISDC is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International Strategy and Overseas Relations) and provides advice to the VCG on new ventures. It scrutinises proposals from faculties and recommends to the VCG whether or not to proceed, in principle, with a new initiative. The audit team's scrutiny of ISDC's minutes and discussion with University representatives involved in international collaborative provision, indicated significant recent debate about international activity of various forms, including institutional collaboration, along with the production of a document entitled 'Strategic Framework for International Activity 2006-2010'. The team was advised that the Strategic Framework was at a very preliminary stage of discussion, had still to be agreed by the VCG and could be radically revised. It was hoped, nonetheless, that the framework would be finalised by September 2006. Key objectives of the framework in its present form include the requirement that, by the end of 2006-07, all continuing international activity should be backed by a fully costed business plan, be conducted within a contractual framework approved by the University's Department of Legal Affairs and operate within a single, agreed set of protocols. These objectives acknowledge implicitly the need to develop a consistent, corporate approach to international collaboration by all faculties and relevant departments. The team noted the development of faculty-based mechanisms, which would help to give effect to the Strategic Framework, once it had been agreed. In the meantime, however, it will be important for the University to ensure that international activities are not entered into in what could, in effect, be a strategic vacuum.

25   The cautious, strategic and centralised approach to international collaboration represented by the Strategic Framework reflects what was described as a 'limited appetite' within the University for establishing a new generation of international franchises, joint ventures or branch campuses. In recent years, the University has attempted to focus its resources on a restricted list of 'corporate target' countries and regions, primarily India and China, but also including Cyprus, Greece, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan and Thailand. As far as international collaboration is concerned, this range of activities is now set within the overall target contained in the University's draft Strategic Plan (see above, paragraph 7), namely that the number of international students studying either in the UK or in partner organisations overseas should grow to 10 per cent of the total student population by 2010.

26   The audit team noted that the University's approach to international collaboration was complemented by a similarly strategic and focused approach to UK-based collaborative activity reflected in, for example, the establishment of an associate college network (ACN). The ACN represents the core of the University's UK collaborative provision, comprising 11 partner organisations and having a strong regional focus. The partnerships involved have developed over a long period of time, some since the mid 1980s. The CPSED indicated that the University's 'realistic objective' was to maintain about 1,200 FTE students in the ACN, including on Foundation Degree programmes with the possibility of some redistribution, to obtain critical mass.

The awarding institution's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in collaborative provision

27   The CPSED described the University's framework for managing quality and standards in collaborative provision in the context of an overall institutional approach to managing quality and standards which 'devolve(s)

responsibility to the faculties, with central monitoring and support'. However, in recognition of the potentially higher risks involved with collaborative provision, the processes of partner approval and the validation of new collaborative ventures are centrally managed through the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ). The faculties undertake much of the day-to-day operational liaison in respect of programme delivery. In addition to the roles of DAQ and the faculties, at corporate level the EP has 'oversight of the student experience in partner links and the relationships between students and the University'. In practice, the audit team found that EP's oversight was primarily of ACN provision, although it had been extended to include other UK provision in some recent developments.

28   Institutional responsibility for the quality and standards of all collaborative provision, including oversight of the experience of students outside the ACN, rests with the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC), reporting to the Academic Board. According to the CPSED, in each faculty the Faculty Academic Committee (FAC) oversees the delivery of all academic provision including that related to partner organisations. Each FAC reports direct to ASQC and considers validation reports, reports from subject authority boards (SABs) (see below, paragraph 31) and from its own subcommittees, including the Faculty Collaborative Provision Committee (FCPC). In turn, the FCPC maintains 'an overview of collaborative operations, through programme journals and annual reports, EP reports and student feedback, and consideration of achievement data'.

29   From the evidence available to it, the audit team concurred broadly with the University's view that AQSC and the supporting committee structure provided an effective mechanism for maintaining institutional oversight of collaborative provision. In practice, however, the team found some variation to the position described in the CPSED in respect of faculty committees: the FCPCs appeared to

focus primarily on UK-based provision, particularly that within the ACN, and oversight of international collaborative provision rested with the FACs. The recent development of faculty-based international committees was not mentioned in the CPSED and, in the view of the team, had the potential to cause some lack of clarity over responsibilities. Staff who met the team described these committees as 'informal management groups' and were unclear about their relationship to FCPC or FAC or about their role in the approval, monitoring and management of international partnerships. As part of its current development of the Strategic Framework for International Activity (see above, paragraph 24), the University is advised to ensure the clear articulation of the relationship between faculty-based groups and the International Development Committee, and clarity concerning that Committee's relationship with the University's executive and deliberative arrangements.

30   In respect of the ACN, the University's formal committees are supplemented by a series of network groups, designed to enable staff from the partner organisations and the University to discuss common issues, and to bring about quality improvement. At strategic level, there is an ACN steering group, the membership of which includes the heads of partner organisations. Operational groups include an ACN marketing group, an associate libraries network, and a heads of quality group, which discusses and provides feedback to the University on a range of quality management topics. Staff who met the audit team described these groups as useful forums, providing ACN staff with a ready means of sharing practice and keeping up to date with University policy, and providing the University with feedback to inform the development of that policy and practice. In the view of the team, the ACN was therefore functioning as an effective vehicle for all partners within the network to inform and be informed of institutional policy, procedures and practice.

31   At programme level, each collaborative programme has a University programme leader and each of the modules offered collaboratively has a University module leader, responsible for ensuring module evaluation takes place and, where the provision is offered by more than one partner organisation, for liaison between locations. The SABs are responsible for the development, management, quality and standards of one or more discrete subjects and the modules associated with them. A Faculty collaborative coordinator, working closely with the Faculty Head of Quality, 'is responsible for the effective and efficient operation of all collaborative programmes within the faculty'. There is also a range of other faculty-based liaison arrangements designed to support partner organisations (see below, paragraph 70). At each partner organisation, there is a local programme manager and, within the ACN, an HE coordinator who liaises with EP and relevant faculty staff in respect of general matters, such as changes to teaching teams and the operation of local programme boards. Outside the ACN, additional support is provided by faculty administrative support staff with a specific remit for named partner institutions; their role was seen by staff who met the audit team as a helpful element of the programme management arrangements.

32   At an operational level, the University's procedures for managing collaborative activity are set out in a Guide to the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative Partnerships and Provision, produced by DAQ. The Guide, which came into use at the start of 2005-06, provides a comprehensive overview of the key quality processes supporting the University's portfolio of collaborative activity; details of the duties and responsibilities of those involved with collaborative provision; procedures for the development, approval and review of such provision; and arrangements for the suspension or closure of programmes. Templates and advice are also provided. The audit team noted that the publication of the Guide did not involve the introduction of new procedures, but rather a consolidation of existing procedures into a single, coherent

framework, drawing on existing strengths and refining areas where the need for improvement had been identified (see below, paragraph 36). In the view of the team, the comprehensive nature of the Guide was a reflection of the careful approach of the University to the management of collaborative provision. The team was also able to confirm that the development of the Guide had involved appropriate reference to, and effective use, of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

33   The CPSED reported that quality assurance procedures relating to collaborative provision had been the subject of an internal audit in 2002-03, as a result of which 'there has been greater clarification of roles and responsibilities and process during collaborative validations' which has been incorporated into the Guide. More generally, however, the audit team's discussions with staff suggested that there remained some lack of clarity in respect of the breadth of roles and responsibilities at faculty level, particularly in respect of provision outside the ACN. By way of example, the team found a tendency in the CPSED and in meetings to refer in general terms to the work of the Faculty Collaborative Coordinator, the FCPC and EP, although in practice their responsibilities appeared to the team to be largely restricted to focused on UK based provision, particularly the ACN. Further comment on this matter is provided below, paragraph 39.

34   The formal relationship between the University and each partner organisation is set out in a memorandum of agreement, supplemented by operational agreements which describe in more detail each party's responsibilities in a range of areas. Staff from partner organisations who met the audit team found these agreements to be helpful documents which aided enhancement activities. In respect of academic standards, the CPSED made clear that responsibility was 'located firmly with the University through the operation of its validation processes and the (University-based) Award Boards'. A common set of regulations applies for all of the University's students, except where additional requirements are explicitly authorised, and student work from all partner organisations is subject to internal moderation and external examination. Further comment on these matters is provided below, paragraphs 50-53 and 68.

The awarding institution's intentions for enhancing the management of its collaborative provision

35   The CPSED reported that during the last two years, the University's arrangements for the approval and review of collaborative provision had been evaluated by two working groups of the AQSC. The first working group considered arrangements for the overseas triennial review framework; the second considered ways of streamlining and bringing together in one framework the approval and review arrangements of both UK and international collaborative provision (see below, paragraph 38). These reviews complemented those from which two documents emerged, and to which reference has already been made, namely the University Collaborative Strategy and the Strategic Framework for International Activity 2006-2010 (see above, paragraphs 23-24), which taken together provide a strategic framework within which collaborative activity can be maintained and enhanced.

36   The audit team noted that other recent actions by the University to enhance the management of collaborative provision were reflected in the procedures set out in the Guide. Aspects that were new when the Guide was issued in 2005, included the involvement of external peers in all collaborative partner approval and re-approval activity, and the requirement that faculties and central departments produced critical appraisal reports in an agreed format for all programme and partner re-approvals. The AQSC has asked DAQ to undertake an evaluation of the Guide after the first year of its operation and to report back in January 2007.

37   Other enhancement activities planned by the University include a review of collaborative Foundation Degrees, intended for 2006-07, and consideration by the DAQ and EP of simpler arrangements for the collection of student views at programme level. In addition, the draft Strategic Plan for the DAQ commits it to instigating and facilitating improved ways of working to support new programme proposals, including programmes offered on a collaborative basis. These new arrangements are to be piloted in late 2006. The team was satisfied that the University had demonstrated a willingness and capacity to reflect on its collaborative provision in the light of both internal and external stimuli. It also noted that the University's revised and consolidated committee and procedural arrangements, introduced as a result of the lengthy and still unfinished period of reflection over the last four years, were likely to result in a more strategic and focused approach to collaborative provision.

The awarding institution's internal approval, monitoring and review arrangements for collaborative provision leading to its awards

38   As noted above, paragraph 35, the University has recently reviewed its arrangements for the approval and review of collaborative provision. The CPSED reported that the reviews were informed by overseas reviews undertaken by ASQC, the report of the QAA audit of the University's partnership with Niels Brock Business College, an internal audit of adherence to quality assurance procedures, and meetings with partner organisations. According to the CPSED, the main findings of the reviews 'indicated that the arrangements…were sound, but a number of suggestions for improvement were made'. These included the extension of the period between institutional reviews from three to five years (following an initial review after three years) and the alignment of the period of approval for collaborative programme provision with the period of approval for internal provision. These revisions took effect from

2005-06 and it was therefore too early for the audit team to judge the effectiveness of the revised procedures. Nonetheless, the team was satisfied that the University had given careful consideration to its arrangements. Based on its discussions with staff and scrutiny of the Guide, the team concluded that there were grounds for confidence in the University's ability to implement the revisions effectively.

39   The University's procedural arrangements for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision are clearly articulated within the Guide. The audit team was satisfied that the arrangements constituted a comprehensive and generally effective framework, which took account of the University's own evaluations of previous arrangements. However, in the view of the team, the arrangements taken as a whole, with the variety of roles, responsibilities, relationships, and differing arrangements for varying forms of collaboration that they entailed, were perhaps overly complex. While staff who met the team felt that this provided assurance of the thoroughness and robustness of the processes underpinning the security of standards, their responses indicated a lack of clarity over some aspects of the current arrangements. There was, for example, some uncertainty about the responsibilities of the EP and FCPC in relation to provision outside the ACN, and about the locus of responsibility for maintaining the University's Register of Collaborative Provision, also reflected in the difficulty experienced by the team in establishing a definitive list of current partners. There was also some evidence, as identified by the AQSC, that SABs were not fully aware of their responsibilities for the monitoring of collaborative programmes (see below, paragraph 45). In this respect, the team would support the comment of the March 2005 institutional audit team that the complexity of arrangements 'may need to be more actively managed (and preferably reduced) if the University is to limit the scope for some of the unhelpful inconsistencies at operational level' (IA Report, paragraph 38). The University is advised to consider further the ways in which

it might achieve greater clarity of role responsibilities in relation to the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, while also exploring how it might simplify the arrangements between the centre and faculties.

Approval and re-approval of partnerships

40   The CPSED outlined the procedures for the approval of new partnerships. All such proposals are considered by the VCG; proposals for international partnerships also require endorsement from the recently established ISDC, prior to referral to the VCG. These considerations are informed by due diligence checks by the EP and in future all partnership development proposals will require a full business case, adopting the model currently used by the EP. The audit team saw evidence of consideration by the VCG of a recent UK collaborative partner proposal, although because of the relatively recent establishment of ISDC and the continuing internal debate about the new Strategic Framework for International Activity, it was not able to observe the way in which the VCG or ISDC would consider international proposals or undertake due diligence checks. Following a VCG decision to support development, all partnerships are subject to an approval exercise. This process involves the formation of a University approval panel, including external members and, where appropriate, representation from the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB), and normally includes a site visit to meet staff and students at the partner organisation. The process is similar in respect of review and re-approval of partnerships. Reviews are scheduled to take place three years after initial approval and subsequently at five-year intervals (see above, paragraph 38).

41   The University has a standard agenda of matters for approval and re-approval panels to explore, although the focus of scrutiny may vary according to the risk and type of partnership; 'the best way forward' is determined at an early meeting of the 'key players'. The audit team was satisfied that the University's approach permitted an appropriate degree of flexibility in determining the process to be followed by individual panels, within the framework provided by the standard agenda. The team's review of documentation and discussions with staff confirmed the rigour of the approval and re-approval process, including the role played by the DAQ in providing evidence to the AQSC on the follow up of conditions and recommendations. In particular, the use of the follow-up meetings held six months after the event enabled the University to ascertain progress made in relation to any conditions and recommendations. The team also noted that the University's use of corporate service heads as panel chairs had the potential to aid staff development, by spreading and increasing expertise in matters relating to the quality management of collaborative provision.

42   The University has formal 'articulation' and 'progression' agreements with two international organisations. A draft procedure for the consideration of partners seeking similar agreements was made available to the audit team. ASQC minutes provided evidence that this draft was under consideration, and that the procedures contained within it were, in effect, a reflection of current practice. However in discussion with staff, the team found that there appeared to be some lack of clarity about the differences between articulation and progression and about whether or not due diligence checks were part of the approval process. In addition, the team noted that the process for approval of both articulation and progression required mapping of the partner programme to the learning outcomes of the specified University programme. While the team saw an example of an articulation link that had been approved by a SAB, the procedures for mapping and the documentation to support the SAB approval were not evident, leaving the team uncertain as to how the process had operated. The University is advised to review the appropriateness of its distinction between progression and articulation, and to ensure clarity in the related procedures, particularly in respect of due diligence checks. It may also wish to consider the merits of requiring a record of the formal articulation of

programmes, particularly in respect of the mapping of learning outcomes.

Review of programmes

43   Collaborative programmes are reviewed as part of the partnership review process and that any validations for a fixed term period are re-validated under this process. Collaborative provision is also considered during the University's internal periodic reviews of subject areas although, to avoid duplication, 'the scrutiny…focuses on the contribution collaborative provision makes to the subject'. The CPSED reported that the processes for programme review had recently been enhanced 'and now require a more systematic scrutiny and evaluation of quality indicators' such as external examiners' reports, EP and faculty reports, and increased attention to student feedback at programme level. While the University did not provide evidence of the enhanced process, owing to its recent adoption, the audit team was generally confident of its ability to implement the revisions in accordance with its intentions.

Programme monitoring

44   Within the ACN, the monitoring of programmes uses the same method as that used by the University for its internal provision. Each programme team maintains a programme journal, described in the CPSED as 'an ongoing record of enhancement activity plus a record of action points and progress'. The journal is monitored by the Faculty Head of Quality and FCPC 'so that generic issues can be identified from a faculty, University or partner perspective'. The journals are also reviewed by the DAQ, and the AQSC is informed of overarching actions for the University; the resulting action plan is monitored and progressed by AQSC. The CPSED stated that the journal system had been 'generally well received' by the ACN, a view that was confirmed by the partner organisation staff who met the audit team, who also described the staff development provided by the University in support of the process.

45   Matters relating to the effectiveness of a journal system have been a recurring theme in previous QAA audits of the University. Most recently, the Institutional Audit of March 2005 suggested that it would be desirable to ensure that staff shared the same understanding of the purpose of journals and SAB reports (see below, paragraph 46). The monitoring process for collaborative provision outside the ACN was reviewed in May 2004, following the QAA audit of the University's partnership with Niels Brock Business College. The result was a decision to replace programme journals with an annual report and associated action plan, to be submitted to the relevant SAB for consideration, and to the DAQ and other central departments for information. The audit team learnt that in practice some partner organisations had continued with the use of journals, and that the AQSC had recently noted that annual reports, where used, were generally of a more descriptive nature with 'limited evidence of consideration by SAB'. In the light of its discussions with staff, the team was also unclear as to whether the journal was intended to be a reporting tool or an enhancement tool. The University is advised to conclude its discussions on the use of journals in the monitoring process so as to clarify its expectations about, and improve consistency of, their use in collaborative provision.

46   Drawing upon the information provided in the journals and annual reports, each SAB is required to produce an annual report which covers all of the provision within its remit, including collaborative activities. The SAB reports are considered by the relevant FAC and in turn inform the FAC's annual report to the AQSC. The audit team saw evidence that collaborative provision was covered within SAB reports and that the AQSC had given careful consideration to the content. It also saw evidence that, in accordance with the statements in the CPSED, the AQSC had identified an institutional agenda of matters arising from the monitoring process and that the agenda had been reviewed regularly to ensure that appropriate action was taken to address the generic matters raised.

47   In addition to the formal monitoring processes described above, the audit team noted the significant role played by the EP in keeping an overview of individual partnerships within the ACN and in contributing to the maintenance of effective lines of communication. The EP monthly management reports provide the University with regular, current information about the partner and the routine meetings between EP staff and HE coordinators provide an additional channel for discussion of relevant issues, including matters relating to the quality of the student experience. The audit team noted that matters arising from recent visits included student access to the University's managed/virtual learning environment and ways in which students might be better informed about the University. The team agreed with the University's view that the increased frequency of such visits, coupled with an increase in the number of visits by faculty collaborative coordinators, had contributed 'to a general improvement in communication'.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

48   Since 2003-04, the University has required all approval and review panels for international collaborative provision to include an external adviser as a member of the panel; this requirement was extended to all UK collaborative provision in 2005-06. Where relevant, the panels also include representation from the appropriate PSRB. The CPSED reported that there was no expectation that an external advisor would be appointed to a panel established to consider the franchise of an existing award to an ACN partner because the curriculum would have already been validated with external input.

49   The audit team saw evidence of the consistent use of external panel members for all new approval events, including staff external to the faculty, representatives of PSRBs and external advisors drawn from other institutions. It noted that the University's decision to include

an external panel member on all review panels, with effect from 2005-06, was a welcome and necessary development, given that programme re-approval was part of the review process. The team was satisfied that the University was making strong and scrupulous use of independent external advice in its approval and review processes for collaborative provision.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

50   The CPSED highlighted the role played by external examiners in the maintenance of academic standards: they are involved in the assessment process and report on collaborative and multi-site provision. For all provision, the University's approach to external examining is laid down in the Guide to External Examining, published by DAQ in 2003. The regulations that apply are included in the Handbook and Regulations for Undergraduate Awards and its counterpart for postgraduate qualifications.

51   According to the CPSED, external examiners are appointed to modules and programmes as part of the normal University process, following nomination by the relevant faculty. All appointments are made by the University. An external examiner who is to have responsibility for collaborative provision must be 'entirely independent to all sites and staff involved'. In cases where programmes are delivered both by the University and by partner organisations, external examiners have oversight of all delivery, thus enabling them to compare standards and quality. Where the provision is validated by the University but delivered only by a partner organisation, external examiners are selected in consultation with the partner to ensure appropriate subject expertise and the procedure then follows that for all appointments. The audit team was informed that in a small number of cases, external examiner appointments had not run consecutively and that in such cases, academic integrity was maintained by assigning extra duties to an appropriately qualified existing examiner. While the team was satisfied that standards and quality had not been adversely

affected by these circumstances, the University may wish to consider whether it has in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that appointments are always made in good time.

52   The CPSED reported that DAQ received all external examiners' reports and was responsible for their circulation to faculties, SAB chairs and collaborative partners. The initial response to a report is the responsibility of the relevant dean of faculty, who also highlights matters requiring SAB consideration. The SAB responses are normally completed in consultation with the partner organisation. Institutional matters are referred to appropriate central departments through the External Examiner Audit Group (EEAG), a subcommittee of AQSC, and the reports are also scrutinised by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality) and, in respect of their own faculties, the faculty heads of quality. In effect, therefore, many departments and offices are involved in considering the same reports. In the view of the team, the initial response from the Dean and the escalation of institutional matters to the EEAG are areas of strength. However, the team noted a number of cases where both partner organisations and SABs appeared to be uncertain about whether there was a need to supplement the initial response from the Dean with further explanation and therefore close the loop with the external examiner, and wondered whether the complexity of the procedure might have contributed to the apparent confusion.

53   There are no separate reports on collaborative programmes, except where a programme is delivered by a single collaborative partner. Instead external examiners must state explicitly where a programme is delivered at more than one location, and comment 'on comparability of the provision across sites', including the University. The CPSED was frank in acknowledging that in practice not all external examiners' reports contained such detail, and outlined the steps taken by the University to secure a more consistent response. Although external examiners are not required to visit partner organisations as part of their contract, the audit

team saw evidence that a number of visits had taken place and had been appreciated by the partners. The CPSED also made it clear that, while it was exceptional for an external examiner to have to raise the same issue on more than one occasion, the rare instances where this had occurred had highlighted 'a shortfall in process' that the University had addressed in 2004 by revising the procedures to require 'a higher degree of monitoring at faculty level'. Overall the team was satisfied that the University's procedures for securing and considering the views of external examiners for collaborative provision were generally robust and thorough, contributing to confidence in its ability to safeguard the standards of its awards.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

54   As noted in the CPSED, the University's response to all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure was judged by the March 2005 institutional audit team to be 'timely and appropriate'. In respect of validation, the CPSED emphasised that 'the same quality management policies and procedures…apply equally to all provision, wherever located' and expressed confidence that 'the FHEQ [*The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*] and *Code of Practice* are followed'. A 'key…mechanism' for ensuring that the Academic Infrastructure is observed is the use of programme and module templates that form part of approval and review documentation and are used as reference points thereafter in partner organisations as well as in the University. The templates require programme teams to give consideration to the FHEQ when compiling documentation for approval and review.

55   The audit team was provided with evidence to demonstrate that the University had given careful consideration to the *Code of practice,* published by QAA*,* and had mapped the *Code's* precepts and guidance against its internal quality management documentation. The team was satisfied that the various DAQ guides took appropriate account of the

Academic Infrastructure, including the section of the *Code* relating to collaborative provision, and that appropriate reference was made to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. Its meetings with staff in partner organisations suggested that there was generally a good level of awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and its implications. In respect of the *Code*, the team did encounter some uncertainty about the locus of responsibility for maintaining the formal Register of Collaborative Provision (see above, paragraph 39), a matter that the University will no doubt wish to address. Nonetheless, the team was able to confirm that the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure in its collaborative provision was systematic and effective.

Review and accreditation by external agencies of programmes leading to the awarding institution's awards offered through collaborative provision

56   Various elements of the University's collaborative provision have been reviewed by QAA. The reviews have covered individual international partnerships (see above, paragraph 19) and, at subject level, provision that is offered through the ACN institutions. The findings of these reviews have been generally favourable, and the audit team was satisfied that the University had made effective use of the review reports to inform its own internal reviews and procedural changes (see above, paragraph 38).

57   The University works with around 30 PSRBs and the CPSED made clear that PSRB standards were regarded as 'a significant external reference point'. The PSRBs are involved as appropriate in programme approval and review (see above, paragraph 49) and the audit team saw evidence of the systematic reporting and consideration of PSRB reports and associated action plans at the ASQC. In the context of collaborative provision, the team noted the recent development of a Foundation Degree in Dental Technology offered by several partner organisations, (and subsequent

development of a BSc in Dental Technology), and saw evidence of the ways in which the General Dental Council (GDC) had been involved and engaged in the programme's development, from conception and approval through to continuing monitoring of the programme delivery. The team agreed with the University's view that the GDC's involvement provided a sound basis for the validation of this cross-site provision.

58   While most of the University's current collaborative provision does not involve PSRB accreditation, the CPSED reported that the development of Foundation Degrees had involved extensive work with employers and provided the potential for future PSRB recognition. Examples include a Foundation Degree in Families, Parenting and Communities, developed in consultation with SureStart and now delivered in five locations, and a Foundation Degree in Criminal Justice (Police Studies), developed in consultation with local police authorities (see below, paragraph 66).

Student representation in collaborative provision

59   The March 2005 institutional audit team concluded that the University provided generally effective arrangements for student representation at both institutional and local level, and found the support given to student representatives to be a feature of good practice. The CPSED stated that the University 'takes full account of student views and does its best to ensure that the student voice is heard'.

60   For students studying at partner organisations within the ACN, a key mechanism for student feedback is the 'HE Forum'. Forum meetings take place in each partner organisation, are attended by a representative from EP, and 'provide an opportunity for students to share views about their experience in general and raise matters with the University'. Local issues are referred to the partner organisation for resolution, while matters for consideration by the University are recorded and reported by the EP representative and the resulting actions are monitored. The

CPSED stated that this mechanism had been used to resolve a variety of issues: examples included the availability of student ID cards, clarifying placement visits and improving access to the University's facilities. The audit team saw evidence that reports of issues raised and actions taken had been placed in a forum action log of individual partner organisations; that the EP's monthly reports, which include coverage of the student experience, allowed matters to be dealt with promptly; and that an EP newsletter provided further information that was considered helpful by students who met the team. The team also noted that the forum mechanism was supplemented by written feedback from students, which bypassed EP and was considered direct by the relevant University faculty, with no link to the Forum (see below, paragraph 65).

61   The CPSED reported that the University, through the Heads of Quality Group, had evaluated the effectiveness of the HE Forum in 2004. The review identified a range of positive features and a number of areas for further development, including the provision of training for student representatives 'in line with practice on the main DMU campus', and the desirability of increasing student attendance. In its discussions with partner organisations, the audit team was provided with a diverse picture of the forum's effectiveness. Where student representatives had been appointed, it was clear that the forum was an important mechanism and that students were generally content with the agenda, minutes and follow-up action. However, in other cases there was limited knowledge of the forum, the team heard that attendance could be poor, and it appeared that some students did not have a representative. One organisation had ceased to use the forum owing to a lack of student involvement. Similarly, while some students confirmed that training for student representatives was provided by the University's SU, others commented that the training that they had anticipated had not yet been made available.

62   Partner organisations outside the ACN do not have an HE forum because the collaborative programmes that they offer tend to relate to only one faculty of the University. In these cases, according to the CPSED, 'arrangements for student representation focus on participation in programme management boards and meetings with programme leaders'. In its discussions with partner organisations, students were positive about their experience of making representation in respect of issues surrounding any aspects of their programmes and matters of a personal nature. The team heard that such issues were normally resolved through feedback questionnaires and also by informal means, through representation to staff. The team noted that in these cases, the relatively small size of the provision had undoubtedly contributed to students' confidence in their ability to raise issues and concerns.

63   Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University had established appropriate mechanisms for the representation of students in partner organisations, and it was clear that the formal routes available were supplemented by opportunities (some informal) to raise matters directly with staff. However, it would be desirable for the University to continue to examine ways of enhancing the participation of students in partner organisations in student representation activities, in particular for ACN students the HE Forum.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

64   The CPSED commented that because much of the University's collaborative provision was 'relatively small scale', 'opportunities for students to provide feedback operate effectively at an informal level, through face-to-face contact…Partner institutions are able to deal with issues as they arise and close loops in a timely way'. The audit team's discussions with students both at the University and at partner organisations confirmed the importance of informal feedback, facilitated by the closeness of the relationship between staff and students.

65   In terms of formal feedback, 'at module level a variety of methods may be used to gather student views, as is consistent with published AQSC guidance'. The method of collection may follow a uniform faculty approach or it may be designed for a particular cross-site programme, and there is no standard form for module feedback. The audit team examined examples of module feedback from students at partner organisations, both in the UK and overseas. The team noted that feedback forms in international organisations were completed for each module in exactly the same way as by students studying at the University in Leicester. The forms were sent by the international partner to the University for analysis, and a summary was provided for the SAB, with full discussion of the data. The sample forms provided for the team covered a variety of matters, from progression and attendance statistics to comments on programme content, teaching and assessment. The team's meetings with UK partner organisations confirmed that module forms were also in general use, and were sent by the partner to the University. However, the team's discussions with students suggested that the use of such forms could be patchy: some students had not seen the forms or had completed them only once; others appeared to have completed only end-of-programme questionnaires (required by the partner) rather than the module questionnaires produced by the University. Students who had provided feedback were not always clear about the action that had been taken in response. The CPSED recognised the need for firmer guidance in this area, 'with a view to achieving more consistency between faculties' and reducing the need for partners to administer a variety of methods. The team believed that it was important for the University to continue to acknowledge the strength of localised (and sometimes informal) mechanisms for gathering student feedback, but to adopt a more rigorous approach to its systems for gathering module feedback and ensuring that the outcomes are fed back to students.

66   The March 2005 institutional audit team suggested that the University should consider 'how its engagement with the employers of its students can be made more visibly a part of its quality management arrangements'. Referring back to this recommendation, the CPSED emphasised that inputs from employers 'feature prominently in the development and assurance of collaborative provision'. By way of example, the CPSED drew attention to the extensive work with employers during the development of Foundation Degrees (see above, paragraph 58). The claims in the CPSED were supported by the documentation made available to the current audit team and by the team's discussions with partner organisations. In particular, where partner organisations were themselves potential or actual employers, it was clear that good links with the University existed, both formal and informal, which enabled immediate or rapid feedback.

Student admission, progression, completion and assessment information for collaborative provision

67   The CPSED reported that 'use is made of information about recruitment, progression and achievement for a range of purposes from informing strategic planning to monitoring performance on modules' and that both the University and its partner organisations were 'equally sensitive to the need to maintain viable student numbers and progression rates'. Official statistics are maintained by the University, although it is recognised that partners will also keep their own records, and there is a range of mechanisms in place to ensure that the data are given appropriate consideration. These include the ACN Steering Group (see above, paragraph 30), institutional reviews, and SAB discussions of module reports and comparative performance data. The March 2005 institutional audit team identified as a feature of good practice the quality of the University's data gathering, analysis and report generation tools, while noting that they were not being fully used by staff, including the Management

Information System (MIS) statistical reports, which summarised student entry profiles, student progression and achievement. The CPSED reported that the University was taking steps to make the MIS reports more widely available by providing its partners (initially those within the ACN) with access to the on-line data, with appropriate support and training provided through EP.

68   The audit team noted that the University's maintenance of statistics was aided by its approach to admissions and assessment in collaborative provision. Undergraduate applications are received by the University through UCAS and distributed to partner organisations for processing; unusual cases are referred back to the University programme leader for consideration. In respect of the few postgraduate collaborative programmes, the admissions criteria are approved by the University and administered by the partner; again applications are referred back in cases of difficulty. There is also direct correspondence to applicants from the University's central admissions unit. In respect of assessment, all students on University programmes sit the same assessment, regardless of where the programme is delivered, and all examinations are overseen by the University's Examinations team. Award board meetings are the responsibility of the relevant University faculty. The University therefore has ready access to admission, progression and award statistics for programmes offered collaboratively, and is well placed to make comparisons across partners, and between partners and University-based provision.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff in collaborative provision; appointment, appraisal, support and development

69   The CPSED articulated the University's belief that the quality of teaching staff 'is paramount'. The approval process for new collaborative ventures includes scrutiny of staff curricula vitae (CVs) and discussion of staff development needs; thereafter, partner

organisations are required to submit the CVs of new teaching staff for scrutiny by SAB chairs. The audit team was informed that if a SAB chair was unable to approve the CV of a member of staff at an partner organisation, or if a member of a partner organisation's teaching staff was ill, as a short-term measure to ensure quality, the University would organise temporary cover and/or assist with a staff development plan. These arrangements were confirmed in the team's meetings with staff at partner organisations. Several of the faculties maintain registers of staff CVs and it is the intention that all faculties follow this practice in the future.

70   The University described its approach to staff development at partner organisations as 'proactive' and 'aligned to University, Faculty and College priorities'. All staff involved in the delivery of University programmes receive a newsletter entitled 'Staff Development Matters' and can book onto any of the workshops advertised. All staff have full access to the University library and there are also reciprocal arrangements for offering substantial staff discounts on master's programmes. Staff at partner organisations confirmed to the audit team that they had access to staff development opportunities, and the team's examination of staff development activity records from September 2004 - February 2006 indicated that staff development activities were well attended by staff from partner organisations, particularly sessions relating to training in the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) for e-learning, programme planning, and personal development planning. The team noted in particular the commendable practice, in one faculty, of bringing all teaching staff from the University and partner organisations together once a year for the 'faculty away day'. This event enabled teaching teams from all sites to review provision and discuss curricular development and delivery; it also provided an opportunity for staff development and sharing of ideas on curricula by staff from partner organisations. The team met staff who had attended the away days, and spoke highly of the benefits. The team noted that staff development matters in international partner

organisations was also addressed by arranging for University module leaders to liaise with their international counterparts. In addition, the CPSED reported that regular training was available for non-academic staff, and covered matters such as the conduct of examinations. This was confirmed in the team's discussions at partner organisations.

71   The audit team explored the University's expectations in respect of the formal qualifications of staff teaching on collaborative programmes. The team noted that a teaching qualification was required and that although the University collaborated with partner organisations in the delivery of an Higher Education Authority-accredited Certificate/PGCE Post Compulsory Education; further education teaching qualifications were also considered acceptable. The team's discussions with staff at partner organisations confirmed that achievement of a teaching qualification was considered as an important contribution to staff development.

72   University monitoring of teaching staff at partner organisations takes place through the various forms of faculty visits, and through feedback from students. The audit team noted that University staff may also teach modules at partner organisations, a process which clearly aided the achievement of commonality in academic standards and might be further encouraged. The University provides no direct feedback to partners on staff performance, but staff at partner organisations who met the team felt that any difficulties would emerge through student feedback and external examiners' comments, and would be addressed by the University. The team heard that peer observation of teaching was encouraged, but that it was the responsibility of the partner to use systems appropriate for this purpose; there was no requirement to use the University's process. The team saw documentation which indicated that consideration was being given to introduction of peer observation at an international partner, but there was lack of clarity as to when and indeed whether this would take place. In the view of the team, the monitoring of the quality of teaching staff in

partner organisations, especially overseas, might be enhanced by sharing of information on the outcomes of peer observation of teaching, to inform staff development.

73   Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University was taking appropriate steps to ensure the quality of the staff involved in the delivery of collaborative programmes. The team noted in particular that the practices of faculty away days, and of involving University staff in teaching at partner organisations, made a significant contribution to assuring quality and establishing a shared understanding of academic standards.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

74   The CPSED made clear that the University's presence in partner organisations varied and that in some ACN colleges, students were located in HE centres. It reported that there were long-standing links between the University's library and librarians in partner organisations and, in respect of the ACN, the Associate Libraries Network (see above, paragraph 30) has existed since 1990. Students have full access to the University's library resources, including, where appropriate, membership of reciprocal schemes such as UK Libraries Plus; they may borrow from any University library in person or access materials by post through the partner's library. The CPSED acknowledged that students had on occasion experienced difficulty in accessing the University's library stock, and that measures had been taken to address this matter by, for example, enabling students to reserve books on-line. Most of the students who met the team confirmed that they had been given full access to the library within a short time of enrolling and although some instances of difficulties were reported, these appeared to be exceptions rather than the rule. Students also confirmed that the full rights of access were invaluable, although some commented that there were also specialised resources in partner organisations that were not available at the University.

75   The CPSED reported that the management of e-learning in collaborative provision had been 'actively promoted by the University e-learning co-ordinator working closely with EP'. Staff in UK partner organisations have access to the University's chosen VLE platform, and relevant staff development sessions have been provided for e-learning coordinators in each partner organisation. Partners have also received 'substantial HEFCE [Higher Education Funding Council for England] funding to invest in capital equipment to underpin the implementation of the VLE'. The audit team noted, however, that as of September 2005, VLE take-up among staff (and students) at the partner organisations had been slow, in part because of training needs, but also because the organisations had their own VLE, or were involved with another HE partner with a different VLE system. Some students who met the team also said that they would appreciate more VLE training. In the view of the team, it would be worthwhile for the University to examine ways to ensure more consistent use is made of its VLE in partner organisations.

76   In general, students who met the audit team indicated that they were satisfied with information technology (IT) provision, and that they had adequate access to such provision, either through the partner organisation or through their own resources. In respect of international partner organisations, the team saw evidence that learning resources and the associated student support matters had been given attention through the AQSC. The CPSED reported that staff could gain access to the VLE through the relevant programme leader at the University, and the team noted that students would have access to library and learning resources locally and were not therefore dependent on DMU provided materials. Overall, therefore, the team had confidence in the University approach to ensuring that appropriate learning support resources were available to students studying at partner organisations in the UK and overseas.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

77   In commenting on the provision of academic guidance and support for students in collaborative provision, the CPSED emphasised the importance of supporting students 'in their transition to Higher Education and throughout their studies'. This commitment is 'given prominence' in the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2004-2007, and reflects the University Mission to develop 'all students as confident, independent learners' and enable them 'to realise their academic and professional aspirations'.

78   The CPSED commented that students studying at partner organisations had 'particularly good opportunities for academic guidance and personal support because of the smaller scale of the provision'. In addition to partner-based induction, all ACN students are invited to an induction day at the University, although the audit team heard that take-up varied depending on the distance to be travelled and whether students were full or part-time. Thereafter, learning and guidance materials produced by the University's Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS) are said to be available electronically to students and staff in UK partner organisations. The materials cover a range of topics, including essay-writing, reading strategies, verbal presentations and writing skills. The SLAS also invites partner organisation staff to participate in staff development workshops held at the University, in addition to events arranged within the partner organisations. The team noted that the SLAS played an important role in skills development for students in the ACN, who had been offered assessment of their skills and experience in order to ascertain their levels of confidence in areas from IT to numeracy and verbal communication. The University also provides information on where students should go to obtain help and advice (see below, paragraph 81).

79   There is a University framework for personal tutoring and PDP, which was endorsed by the University Learning and Teaching

Committee and Academic Board in 2003-04. This framework 'sets out University expectations and an entitlement for students, and identifies roles and responsibilities of both personal tutors and tutees'. There is no requirement for partner organisations to adopt the framework 'where they already have effective systems in place (as verified at partner approval and subsequent review)' and have mapped these systems against the University's framework. The audit team noted that a PDP steering group was monitoring the implementation of PDP in the ACN and was informed that the system of PDP in partner organisations was at least as rigorous as that undertaken by students at the University. Evaluative reports from the SLAS on the operation of the framework in partner organisations indicated that the PDP system was sound. From its discussions with students from partner organisations, the team noted that there appeared to be some variability in the provision of personal tutoring, particularly within the ACN network, a matter to which the University may wish to give further consideration.

80   The audit team learnt that matters relating to students with special needs were covered during programme approval and that SLAS provided guidance on the provision of support in relation to dyslexia and other learning needs. The University's responsibilities in respect of disability are defined in the operational agreements (see above, paragraph 34). There is also information to enable staff to develop learning support packages to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. Responsibilities of partner organisations include developing learner support packages, diagnostic processes, such as those for dyslexia, and liaising with the University in respect of students with disabilities who intend to progress to the University. The team's discussions with students indicated that the University had been helpful in assisting with disabled student matters.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

The experience of students in collaborative provision of the published information available to them

81   The University has gone to some lengths to provide timely, appropriate and customised information for students in partner organisations. A particularly important publication is the Associate College Handbook, 'Ask', and a supplement to the Handbook, 'Ask the Question'. The former publication provides basic information on a range of matters including students' rights and responsibilities, University regulations, learning, teaching and assessment activities, tutors, library and student advisory services. The latter adopts a question-and-answer format based on the most frequently asked questions from students in the ACN. Since the start of 2005-06, a monthly newsletter, Uni News, again aimed specifically at ACN students has further supplemented these annual publications. The newsletter is edited by EP but the content is intended to come primarily from staff and students in partner organisations and from the University's SU. The audit team noted that issues covered in the first eight editions of the newsletter included progression routes, top-up degrees, note taking and report writing.

82   In its meetings with staff and students at partner organisations, the audit team heard of one instance where prospectus information published by the University had omitted reference to a particular programme offered by a partner, but was informed that the omission had been identified and rectified as a result of the regular meetings between the respective directors of marketing. Students to whom the team spoke, both in and outside the ACN, were generally positive about the availability and utility of the information produced for them by the University. They appeared to know from the outset that the qualification for which they

were studying was awarded by De Montfort, although some were unclear about their status in relation to the University. Information about progression to other University awards was reported to be easily available, although students in one partner organisation claimed not to have received much information on progression opportunities. Some commented on the volume of information and questioned whether so much information really was necessary, but few appeared to have found it inaccurate or limited in scope. Some students suggested that communications from and with the University had improved, particularly at faculty level, although others suggested that the availability of information varied between faculties. Awareness of 'Ask' and 'Ask the Question' also varied. The team viewed as a feature of good practice the initiatives taken by the University to enhance the experience of students in partner organisations, particularly through the production and dissemination of customised paper and internet-based information about its services.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information on collaborative provision leading to the awarding institution's awards

83   The audit process included a check on the University's progress towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (Teaching Quality Information - TQI). The ASQC has formal oversight of the University's TQI website and monitors progress in the University's response to TQI requirements. The University was one of six institutions to participate in the HERO pilot to test TQI implementation, and a cross-University steering group was established in early 2003 to manage the process of ensuring that the University's TQI website was appropriately and accurately populated. Since the start of 2005-06, the steering group has been chaired by the Head of DAQ. The March 2005 audit team found that the University had published all of the required TQI information by the due date.

84   The audit team noted that there appeared to be uncertainty among some faculty-based staff as to where responsibility for TQI lay within the University. The team was advised, however, that information about the existence and purpose of the TQI website had been produced by the EP for partner organisations. From its scrutiny of the information provided on the website, the team concluded that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the University is currently publishing and authorising for publication, about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards, and about the standards of those awards.

Findings

85   An audit of the collaborative provision offered by De Montfort University, (the University), was undertaken from 9 to 12 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. As part of the audit process, the audit team visited four of the University's partner organisations. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice in its collaborative arrangements.

The effectiveness of the implementation of the awarding institution's approach to managing its collaborative provision

86   The University's approach to managing its collaborative provision is comprehensive, careful and somewhat complex. At the time of the audit visit, the University was in the final stages of developing a new strategic plan for 2006-07 to 2011-12. The draft plan suggests a continuing focus by the University on regional, UK-based collaborative activities intended to contribute to increased access to HE in the East Midlands, and the development of a cautious, strategic and more focused approach to international collaboration, intended to support the University's objective of increasing international student numbers. The core of the University's UK collaborative provision is an associate college network (ACN), comprising 11 partner organisations, and having a strong regional focus.

87   The University's overall framework for managing quality and standards is based on the devolution of significant responsibility to faculties, with central monitoring and support. In recognition of the potentially higher risks involved with collaborative provision, however, the key processes of partner approval and the validation of new collaborative ventures are centrally managed. Institutional responsibility for the quality and standards of all collaborative provision rests with the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC), reporting to the Academic Board; at faculty level, responsibility rests with the Faculty Academic Committees (FAC) and their subcommittees; at programme level, each collaborative programme has a University programme leader and each of the modules offered collaboratively has a University module leader, while the relevant Subject Authority Board (SAB) is responsible for the development, management, quality and standards of one or more discrete subjects. Key operational roles are undertaken by the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ), Educational Partnerships (EP) and named officers within faculties, including the Faculty Collaborative Coordinators and Heads of Quality. It is clear that this framework provides an effective mechanism for maintaining institutional oversight of collaborative provision, although the complex pattern of committees, units and individuals involved in the various processes has the potential to cause some lack of clarity as to the locus of responsibility for particular tasks.

88   The University's approach to managing its collaborative provision has particular strengths in relation to the various initiatives taken to enhance the experience of students in partner organisations, and in respect of the work undertaken to facilitate effective relationships with staff in partner organisations.

The effectiveness of the awarding institution's procedures for assuring the quality of educational provision in its collaborative provision

89   The University's procedures for managing collaborative activity are set out in the Guide to the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative Partnerships and Provision.

The Guide came into use in its current form at the start of 2005-06 and reflects various refinements to previous procedures made in the light of internal and external reviews. The Guide provides a single source of guidance for staff on the key quality processes supporting the University's portfolio of collaborative activity, and its development has involved appropriate reference to, and effective use, of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

90   The University's arrangements for the approval of new UK and international partners follow a broadly similar procedure which includes due diligence checks prior to consideration by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group (VCG). For international partners, approval by the newly established International Strategic Development Committee (ISDC) is also required before consideration by VCG. Thereafter, all proposed partnerships are subject to an approval exercise and programme validation. Documentary evidence suggests that the approval process is rigorous and thorough, although there may be a need to clarify aspects of the revised arrangements for international partner approval and the procedures to be used for the consideration of partnerships involving articulation or progression agreements.

91   The arrangements for review and re-approval of collaborative partners have recently been revised such that the review period, after an initial three-year scrutiny, has been aligned to the five-year period of campus-based provision. Collaborative programmes are reviewed as part of the partnership review process and are also considered during the University's internal periodic reviews of subject areas. All reviews require the involvement of external advisers and, where appropriate, the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body. The University has recently made a number of enhancements to its processes for programme review and while the audit did not provide evidence of the enhanced processes, owing to their recent adoption, there are generally grounds for confidence in the University's ability to implement the revisions in accordance with its intentions.

92   Within the ACN, the monitoring of programmes uses the same method as that used by the University for its internal provision. Each programme team maintains a programme journal, intended to be a continuing record of enhancement activity coupled with a record of action points and progress. Matters relating to the effectiveness of the journal system have been a recurring theme in previous audits of the University, and in 2004, the University decided that the partner organisations outside the ACN should cease to maintain journals and should instead submit an annual report to the University. In practice some partner organisations have continued with the use of journals. There also remains some lack of clarity as to whether the journal is intended to be a reporting tool or an enhancement tool. The University is advised to conclude its discussion on the use of journals in the monitoring process, in order to clarify the expectations and improve consistency of use for all collaborative provision.

93   The University has established a range of procedures for securing feedback on the quality of collaborative programmes and for managing the quality of the student experience. For students studying at partner organisations within the ACN, meetings of an HE forum provide an opportunity for students to share views about their experience in general and raise matters with the University. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that the matters raised, and the subsequent actions, are recorded. The University has evaluated the effectiveness of the forum and identified a number of areas for further development. Current evidence suggests that the effectiveness of the forum can vary between partners and that it would be desirable for the University to continue to examine ways of enhancing the participation of students in partner organisations in student representation activities.

94   Informal mechanisms for obtaining student feedback are supplemented by more formal mechanisms, including the use of

module questionnaires provided by the University, although the precise method used can vary between faculties. However, there appears to be some inconsistency in the use of questionnaires within individual partner organisations and within individual programmes, and students are not always clear about the action that is taken in response to their feedback. The University has recognised the need for firmer guidance in this area.

95   The University's procedures for assuring the quality of educational provision in its collaborative provision include a range of processes designed to assure the quality of teaching at partner organisations. The approval process for new collaborative ventures includes scrutiny of staff curricula vitae (CVs) and discussion of staff development needs; thereafter, partner organisations are required to submit the CVs of new teaching staff for scrutiny by SAB chairs. All staff involved in the delivery of University programmes have access to a range of staff development activities provided by the University and the practices of faculty away days, and of involving University staff in teaching at partner organisations, make a significant contribution to assuring quality and establishing a shared understanding of academic standards. The monitoring of the quality of teaching staff in partner organisations, especially overseas, might be further enhanced by sharing of information on the outcomes of peer observation of teaching, to inform staff development.

96   The University's willingness to continue to review its arrangements, and to make amendments where appropriate, is a strength that gives grounds for confidence in its ability to implement recently agreed revisions to its quality management procedures. Its arrangements remain complex, however, and there is an apparent lack of clarity in certain areas. It also appears that the practice of differentiation between the ACN, other UK provision and international provision is not always helpful in providing clarity. The University is advised to consider the ways in which it might achieve greater clarity of role

responsibilities in relation to the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, while also exploring how it might simplify the arrangements between the centre and faculties. Overall, however, broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the University to assure the quality of its collaborative provision, and to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

The effectiveness of the awarding institution's procedures for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through collaborative provision

97   The University's procedures for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through collaborative provision include the external examiner system, shared procedures in relation to assessment, and the use of statistical information. A common set of regulations applies for all of the University's students, except where additional requirements are explicitly authorised, and student work from all partner organisations is subject to internal moderation and external examination.

98   All external examiner appointments for collaborative provision are made by the University using its standard process, and external examiners are appointed to modules and programmes as part of the normal University process. In cases where programmes are delivered both by the University and by partner organisations, external examiners have oversight of all delivery, thus enabling them to compare standards and quality. Their reports, which should comment explicitly on comparability of the provision across sites, are considered by a range of committees and officers. The University has taken steps to secure such comment from all external examiners. The University's procedures for securing and considering the views of external examiners for collaborative provision are generally robust and thorough, if somewhat

complex, contributing to confidence in its ability to safeguard the standards of its awards.

99   The University has ready access to admission, progression and award statistics for programmes offered collaboratively, and is well placed to make comparisons across partners, and between partners and University-based provision. The findings of the audit suggest that broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

The awarding institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision

100 There is evidence that the University's policies and procedures for collaborative provision have been informed and guided by the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure, including the section of the *Code of practice* relating to collaborative provision, published by QAA. Care has been taken to map the precepts and guidance of the *Code* against internal quality management documentation and appropriate reference has been made to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements. Staff in partner organisations demonstrate a generally good level of awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and its implications. The findings of the audit suggest that the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure in its collaborative provision is systematic and effective.

The utility of the collaborative provision self-evaluation document as an illustration of the awarding institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations in collaborative provision, and to act on these to enhance quality and safeguard academic standards

101 In the view of the audit team, the collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) provided for the audit did not encapsulate fully the complexity of the University's arrangements for collaborative provision, and it also somewhat underplayed the comprehensive and extended self-evaluation of UK-based and international collaborative provision undertaken by the University in recent years. Nonetheless, the CPSED provided a helpful basis from which to explore the University's arrangements in more detail.

Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of its management of quality and academic standards in its collaborative provision

102 Within the last year the University has taken a number of initiatives which have the potential to enhance the management of quality and academic standards in its collaborative provision. At a strategic level, these have included the production by the VCG of a 'University Collaborative Strategy' and the production by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International Strategy and Overseas Relations) of a 'Strategic Framework for International Activity 2006-2010'. At an operational level, the Guide to the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative Partnerships and Provision was agreed in principle in February 2005 and has been used throughout 2005-06. The impact of these developments has yet to be evaluated by the University but they build on its experience of UK-based and international collaborative activity over many years and, in the view of the audit team, provide a comprehensive, strategic and operational framework for the continuing development of such activity and the enhancement of its management.

Reliability of information provided by the awarding institution on its collaborative provision

103 The University provides a good deal of customised, paper and internet-based information to students in partner organisations about the University itself, the support it provides for students to complement that provided by partner organisations and progression opportunities. Students generally find this information to be accurate, helpful and timely. A University-wide steering group is responsible for overseeing the collection and verification of information for the Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO) website, while the DAQ is responsible for ensuring that the information is placed on the HERO website. The University was involved in the HERO pilot to test the implementation of the requirement on all higher education Institutions to publish qualitative information about its educational provision, and the Institutional Audit of May 2005 confirmed that the University was aware of, and had complied with, the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. Scrutiny of the information provided on the TQI website indicates that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the University is currently publishing, and authorising for publication, about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards and about the standards of those awards.

Features of good practice

104 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the collaborative provision audit, the audit team noted in particular:

i   the initiatives taken by the University to enhance the experience of students in partner institutions, particularly through the production and dissemination of customised paper and internet-based information about its services (paragraphs 60, 80, 81)

ii   the work of the University to facilitate effective relationships with staff in partner institutions through such mechanisms as the Associate College Network; Educational Partnerships; faculty away days; dedicated administrative support for 'non-standard' UK and international partnerships; and staff training in the use of the virtual learning environment for e-learning (paragraphs 30, 31, 47, 70, 73, 75).

Recommendations for action

105 It is advisable that the University:

i   ensures, as part of its current development of a strategic framework for international activity, the clear articulation of the relationship between faculty-based groups and the recently established International Strategic Development Committee, and clarity concerning that Committee's relationship with the University's executive and deliberative arrangements (paragraph 29)

ii   considers the ways in which it might achieve, for University staff, greater clarity of role responsibilities in relation to the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, while also exploring how it might simplify the arrangements between the centre and faculties (paragraph 33, 39, 52)

iii   reviews the appropriateness of its distinction between progression and articulation, and ensures clarity in the related procedures, particularly in respect of due diligence checks; and considers the merits of requiring a record of the formal articulation of programmes, particularly in respect of the mapping of learning outcomes (paragraph 42)

iv   concludes its discussions on the use of journals in the monitoring process, so as to clarify its expectations about, and improve consistency of, their use in collaborative provision (paragraph 45)

and desirable that the University:

v   continues to examine ways of enhancing the participation of students from partner organisations in student representation activities, in particular, for students within the Associate College Network, the HE Forum (paragraph 63)

vi   while continuing to acknowledge the strength of localised (and sometimes informal) mechanisms for gathering student feedback at partner institutions, adopts a more rigorous approach to its systems for gathering end-of-module feedback and ensuring that the outcomes are fed back to students (paragraph 65).

Appendix

De Montfort University's response to the collaborative provision audit report

The University and its partners welcome the judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of academic standards and learning opportunities in relation to its collaborative programmes. The insights provided by the audit team in the report have been well received and will help the University continue to improve and enhance the experience for its students based in partner organisations.

The report comments positively on the framework for quality and standards and it records that the University has a 'careful approach' to the management of collaborative provision (CP). This view confirms the institution's own strategic position regarding collaborative ventures, which is to pursue its commitment to widening participation and professional, creative and vocational education in partnership with a small established network of institutions. Careful management of risk is a feature of the University's approach.

The audit team have recorded confidence in the University's capacity to reflect critically and note that the commitment to streamlining is likely to result in a more strategic and focused approach to CP. Work on streamlining has started and proposals to improve the clarity of roles at faculty level, particularly in relation to international provision, will be approved in November 2006. The audit team were not satisfied that the University is clear in the detailed differences between articulation and progression. The report suggests that a record of the mapping against learning outcomes was maintained. These points are accepted and are being taken forward for resolution by November 2006.

The University notes the recommendation that it considers simplifying arrangements between the centre and faculties and this is being pursued, in line with a broader review of monitoring arrangements.

The audit confirms the University's view that local provision for making informal feedback by students is an important feature, to be sustained. To enhance and harmonise the more formal arrangements for student feedback, two pilot schemes are being implemented with a partner college in 2006-07.

The report comments positively on the work of the University to enhance the experience of students on collaborative courses and to facilitate effective relationships with staff in partner organisations. The University considers that this work contributes significantly to the overall quality of the learning opportunity of students in partner organisations.