QAA

Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit

Frameworks, guidance and formal agreements

Sharing good practice

Summary

The reports on Collaborative provision audits conducted between 2005 and 2007 indicate that, in general, the frameworks established by institutions for the management of quality and academic standards in their collaborative provision are sound and effective. Nevertheless, most reports provided advice on how particular aspects of the frameworks might be improved.

The reports describe the various models or types of collaboration undertaken by institutions, and the relationships between these and the quality management arrangements employed. Recommendations in this context focused on the need for clarity in the use of terms and their procedural implications. Particular difficulties were associated with accreditation agreements in a number of institutions.

The reports' consideration of formal agreements between awarding and partner institutions suggests several recurring themes, including: the relationship between types of collaboration and the contracted arrangements and responsibilities; the relationship between institutional and programme elements in agreements; arrangements for the review and renewal of agreements; and the need for ratification of agreements prior to the operation of programmes.

The guidance provided on frameworks and processes for managing quality and standards in collaborative provision emerged as a widespread strength in awarding institutions and was linked with numerous features of good practice.

Preface

An objective of Institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning'. To provide institutions and other stakeholders with access to timely information on the findings of its Institutional audits, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) produces short thematic briefing papers, describing features of good practice and summarising recommendations from the audit reports. Since 2005 these have been published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit*' (hereafter, *Outcomes*). The first series of these papers drew on the findings of the Institutional audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004, and the second on those reports published between December 2004 and August 2006.

According to the definition in the *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)* (2004), **collaborative provision** denotes 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. The present series relates to the separate Collaborative provision audits which were conducted in 30 institutions in England and Northern Ireland between May 2005 and March 2007. A list of the Collaborative provision audit reports on which the series is based is available in Appendix 1 (page 18). It should be noted that Collaborative provision audits were carried out only in those institutions where provision was deemed to be sufficiently extensive and/or complex to warrant an audit separate from the Institutional audit; in other institutions, collaborative activity (where present) was incorporated into the scope of the Institutional audit. The present series does not draw on the findings of those Institutional audits in relation to collaborative provision; for further information about collaborative provision as examined by Institutional audits, see the papers *Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports* in series 1 and series 2 of the *Outcomes* papers.

A feature of good practice in Institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, **in the context of the particular institution**, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes* paper, therefore, identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 6, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each audit report, the second to the relevant paragraph(s) in Section 2 of the Main report. Throughout the body of this paper, references to features of good practice in the audit reports give the institution's name and the number from Section 2 of the Main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps

best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics to be covered in the *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit* series can be found at Appendix 2 (page 20). These topics do not match directly the topics of *Outcomes* series 1 and 2, given the different nature of the provision considered by Collaborative provision audit, though there is some overlap between the titles in the three series.

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Introduction

1   This paper is based on a review of the 30 reports on Collaborative provision audits conducted in England and Northern Ireland and published between May 2005 and March 2007. The paper examines the frameworks and typologies used by institutions to characterise their collaborative activities, the nature of the formal agreements between institutions and their partners, and the related guidance provided to collaborative partners.

2   It is clear from the reports that institutions have engaged seriously with the challenges of developing frameworks and guidance for collaborative activity. In the great majority of reports, audit teams indicated that confidence can be placed in the standards of awards offered via collaborative partnerships, and in the quality of learning opportunities provided to students.

3   11 reports identified features of good practice relating to the frameworks and guidance associated with collaborative provision (hereafter CP); many of these related specifically to the written guidance provided by the awarding institution to its collaborative partners.

4   Not surprisingly, in such a complex and developing area of activity, many reports did make also recommendations for further consideration of specific aspects of the quality frameworks, including the relationship between central and peripheral (faculty, school, department) systems and procedures, and the nature of formal partnership agreements.

5   As regards guidance, the focus of this paper is on the guidance provided by institutional documentation. Staff liaison and support arrangements will be covered elsewhere in this series and are therefore given only cursory treatment here.

Features of good practice

6   Consideration of the Collaborative provision audit reports relating to audits conducted up to March 2007 shows the following features of good practice:

- the established, strong, central strategic system for managing collaborative provision that is also sensitive to local needs [University of Wolverhampton, paragraphs 178 (i); paragraphs 21, 27, 33-43, 52, 59, 60 and 148-151]

- [the University's] effective application of process review and internal academic audit to collaborative provision [Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 139 (iii); paragraphs 27 and 65]

- the way in which the University's conventions for furnishing its school-level and institution-level committees with supporting information enables them to check, from primary data, that responsibilities for approval, monitoring and review of programmes and courses, which have been delegated to departments, centres, and programme teams, have been properly discharged in line with its stated expectations [University of Bradford, paragraphs 33 and 231]

- the clarity of the Quality Assurance Manual that has helped to establish comprehensive guidelines for the operation of quality management processes to be applied to collaborative provision [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 136 (iv); paragraph 36]

- the section of the Procedures Handbook on collaborative provision that helps to engender a shared understanding of the University's requirements [Middlesex University, paragraph 171 (ii); paragraphs 43, 49, 116, 117 and 132]

- the work of the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality in providing comprehensive guidance notes and training for partners to supplement the clearly specified procedures for approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision within the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook [Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 188 (ii); paragraph 65]

- the high quality guidance given on the development and delivery of CP, as exemplified by the Collaborative Procedures Handbook and the operations manuals [University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 156 (i); paragraphs 34, 37 and 38]

- the development and implementation of operations manuals for individual programmes and partners [University of Sunderland, paragraph 143 (ii); paragraphs 32 and 45]

- the use of formal liaison documents for the establishment of specific communication arrangements between each partner and their University liaison officer [Kingston University, paragraph 205 (i); paragraph 36]

- the refinement of standard quality assurance documentation to accommodate the requirements of partner institutions and associated guidance [University of Plymouth, paragraph 195 (i); paragraphs 62, 144 and 162]

- the comprehensiveness of the documentation and guidance available to staff in support of their work relating to collaborative provision [University of Derby, paragraph 146 (v); paragraph 92 (extract)].

Themes

7   The themes for consideration in this paper are as follows:

- The framework

- Frameworks and typologies

- Agreements

- Guidance and support.

These are considered individually below; within each, a number of sub-themes are identified.

The framework

8   The section of the audit reports specifically related to this theme is that entitled 'The awarding institution's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in collaborative provision'.

9   Over half the audit reports noted the close linkage between general institutional quality assurance arrangements and those employed for CP. Reports commented on the way in which quality assurance processes for CP replicated or were incorporated into those employed internally by the awarding institution. This general policy of

alignment of quality assurance arrangements was designed to ensure the maintenance of equivalent quality and academic standards in CP. The approach had, by the same token, the aim of ensuring that matters relating to CP were not dealt with in isolation.

10   Likewise, many of these reports noted the additions and refinements made to institutional quality assurance systems when applied to collaborative arrangements and their particular risks. Provisions specific to collaborative activity noted in reports concerned such matters as: institutional approval; programme approval and review; annual monitoring; translation and moderation arrangements; communication and liaison; committee arrangements; documentation; student information; and requirements in respect of different collaborative models or types (see also the section: Frameworks and typologies, page 12).

11   Institutions' regulatory frameworks for assessment and awards, and the associated procedures, generally applied in all essentials across CP. In a range of cases, reports stated that no fundamental differentiation was made, whether between internal and collaborative programmes or between different types of collaborative programme. Other reports commented on variations in procedures based on types of collaborative arrangement. Thus, while franchised programmes were likely to be incorporated into internal assessment procedures, validated programmes might operate more discretely under processes determined at approval. In one case, it was noted that the assessment regulations employed in such cases might nonetheless be modelled on the validating institution's. One report explicitly noted that assessment procedures were determined by the type of partnership involved.

12   Reports observed that in many institutions responsibility for managing quality and academic standards was largely devolved to faculties, schools or departments, albeit within a central framework and subject to central oversight. Thus, wherever (as was common) internal quality management systems were both devolved and integrated, CP also was subject to devolved arrangements. These arrangements might (as already stated) be subject to adjustments or exceptions devised to address perceived risks or to accommodate differing types of collaboration. In relation to safeguards, several reports noted the complete or partial retention of validating, and also reviewing, powers by central deliberative bodies, as against the local arrangements generally in place for internal programme approval.

13   Reports also noted the contribution of the link or liaison tutor role to the sound working of CP frameworks. Critical features in determining the effectiveness of the role included the clarity with which it was specified and the consistency of its implementation. In addition, reports drew attention to a variety of other liaison and networking devices such as joint boards and committees, academic collaboration, and staff development and support. This aspect of institutional arrangements for managing collaborative activity gave rise to the identification of a wide range of features of good practice, as well as a number of recommendations. The topics of liaison and staff development are the subject of another paper in this series (*Arrangements for monitoring and support*), and are therefore merely summarised here in paragraphs 56-59.

14   Of the 30 reports under consideration, about two-thirds included statements to the effect that the regulatory framework for the management of quality and standards in CP was generally sound and effective. Some added caveats to such statements, others withheld any broad evaluation, and one concluded that the framework's effectiveness had not been demonstrated. Of the 30 reports, nearly four-fifths included recommendations directed to the institutional framework: of the 19 reports which broadly endorsed the framework, 12 nevertheless included recommendations for its improvement.

15   A major consideration for the audit reports was the effectiveness of institutional overview of CP, when systems for managing quality are reliant to varying degrees on responsibilities discharged at a local level, whether by faculties, departments or partner institutions. Two-thirds of reports included recommendations in this territory, and in two instances reports stated that it was 'essential' for institutions to fulfil the recommendations (see paragraphs 27 and 40).

16   Recommendations focused on a number of key areas: the effectiveness of central oversight; the consistency of local implementation and practice; and the clarity of structures and responsibilities. These aspects were in most cases interrelated, both in the reports' analysis and in the formulation of advice, although emphasis altered with circumstances.

17   A number of features of good practice were also identified in relation to institutional frameworks and their operation. In one case, the audit team found that the framework as a whole constituted a feature of good practice. The report noted the institution's use of 'a system for managing quality and standards that was comprehensive and generally effective', and referred to the preceding Institutional audit report's comments on the institution's assimilation of the Academic Infrastructure and its 'secure overview' of the quality and standards of its academic programmes. The report concluded that the institution had established a 'strong, central strategic system for managing CP that [was] also sensitive to local needs' [University of Wolverhampton, paragraphs 178 (i); 21, 27, 33-43, 52, 59, 60 and 148-151].

18   Another report identified good practice in an institution's 'effective application of process review and internal academic audit to CP'. It noted that as a consequence of these activities, critical aspects of quality management procedures, such as approval, monitoring and review, had been redefined in the light of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, and observed that the outcome had given rise to 'significant improvement in the way the University understands, organises and communicates to partners its CP arrangements' [Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 139 (iii); paragraphs 27 and 65]. In another case, the report's focus was on the 'orderly' availability of primary data, such as external and internal examiners' reports, to both school and institutional committees, enabling them to monitor the quality management responsibilities delegated to programme teams and other local bodies, and to ensure that they had been properly discharged 'in line with the University's stated expectations' [University of Bradford, paragraphs 231 and 33].

Central oversight and procedural consistency

19   A number of reports included recommendations related to the way in which the institution maintained central oversight of its collaborative activity, and ensured consistency in the way procedures were operated across the range of partnerships. One report identified the need, in a context of 'substantial' delegation of responsibility for the management of academic standards and quality, to strengthen the central committee's role in oversight of CP 'policy, procedures and regulations'. Areas of responsibility contributing to this recommendation included programme development, aspects of the annual monitoring process, assessment and moderation, and application of the Academic Infrastructure.

20   A similar recommendation concerning the need for improvement of central oversight of 'authority for quality assurance…delegated to schools and partnerships' noted instances of variable local practice occurring in validation, monitoring and review; accreditation of prior learning (APL); and written agreements. A third report, noting the respective contributions of partner institutions and internal schools to the quality management framework, found information slippage both between partners and schools and between schools and the centre. The recommendation addressed the need for enhancement of institutional oversight of standards and quality in CP, 'so that the University can assure itself that its policies and procedures operate effectively and are implemented consistently across all partners', and directed attention particularly to the upward transmission of data via the annual monitoring system. This report also, as in the first example above, pointed to inconsistent staff awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and its role in relation to CP as a further issue for institutional oversight.

21   In all three instances, audit reports nonetheless reached the overall judgement that the institutional framework for managing quality and academic standards in CP was well-founded and effective.

22   In a further case, where management of collaborative programmes was in the course of being devolved to faculties, the audit team registered two concerns about the institution's future capacity to maintain effective oversight of its CP. The first concern related to the intended conflation of internal and collaborative programmes in annual monitoring reports from faculties to the centre, the second to the risk that local flexibility in addressing CP would produce undesirable inconsistencies in practice between faculties. The associated recommendation advised the institution to ensure that its procedures gave it the requisite oversight of local processes for assuring quality and standards in CP. Another audit report noted the virtues of an institution's integration of its CP into general internal quality assurance procedures. However, the report also observed that the institution's review processes did not employ data that would enable the performance of collaborative programmes and partner institutions to be compared, a fact which must necessarily limit the awarding institution's overview of its CP 'both within and across partnerships'.

23   A further report showed concern about the implementation of the transfer of primary responsibility for the quality management of CP to individual schools, and noted the need for a clear schedule and allocation of responsibilities for the transition process; as in the other instances given, the report nevertheless endorsed the overall framework for management of quality and academic standards in its application to CP.

24   Some reports addressed particular details of the framework structure leading to variable extents of institutional involvement in, and oversight of, collaborative developments. Thus, in one institution with largely devolved systems of responsibility for CP, a significant expansion of overseas CP was projected. The report noted the structural exclusion within these systems of the central administrative body and committees responsible for the institution's accredited and associate college arrangements (both in the UK and overseas). The report went on to suggest that this exclusion raised issues of consistency of approach in the initiation, development and monitoring of CP and advised that the institution keep its devolved arrangements under review.

25   One report distinguished between arrangements for reviewing programmes and for achieving an effective overview of partner institutions, particularly where these were operating a diversity of programmes. While individual programmes came within the awarding institution's standard arrangements for annual monitoring, the monitoring of partner institutions had relied on more informal exchanges. The report noted, however, the introduction of a more systematic process of institutional monitoring which had the potential to provide an effective overview of each partner institution and could enable the institution to identify general themes relating to partnership arrangements. Similarly, in the context of a devolved system managed largely at faculty level, another report noted that there was no formal requirement for meetings between senior staff of the awarding and partner institutions, thus limiting the extent to which the effectiveness of the partnership operation could be appraised, difficulties identified, and a systematic central overview of the provision gained.

26   In another institution whose framework for management of quality and academic standards in CP was judged to be largely well founded, the audit team observed a number of areas of inconsistency in local operations. These included external participation in programme approval, annual monitoring and evaluation, student feedback, student handbooks, and CP data. The institution was advised to 'review the extent to which the interpretation and implementation of its policies and procedures [was] appropriately consistent within departments and across all collaborative partnerships'.

Academic standards

27   Several recommendations related to the way in which the standards of awards offered via collaborative partnerships were assured. One report found that the university concerned was 'failing to ensure the proper oversight of the standards of its awards'. This comment arose from the fact that the institutional quality framework did not require external examiners to scrutinise student work completed at overseas partnerships prior to the conferment of degrees under dual award arrangements. The recommendation deemed it 'essential' for the institution 'to assure the standards of all its awards in CP, with particular reference to external examiners' oversight of dual award programmes'. The same report found that variable admissions practices were being operated in relation to CP, and that institutional monitoring of these processes was also variable; again, it was deemed 'essential' for the institution to address these issues in order to safeguard academic standards.

28   Another report's recommendation concerned the need to reduce variability in assessment and moderation practices in the interests of assuring consistency of standards for a programme operated within different partnerships and in different locations.

Clarity of responsibilities

29   Excessive complexity in quality management arrangements, leading to a lack of clarity in responsibilities and oversight, was a common focus for recommendations. Reports identified four, often linked, contexts for this:

- delegation of responsibilities from the centre to faculties/departments, and so on
- linkage between local and central processes
- the relationship between executive and deliberative responsibilities
- variety of types of collaboration.

30   One report concluded that 'the combination of the complexity of structures and processes developed by the University to manage its different types of CP, and a lack of clarity as to the locus of responsibility for specific aspects of management, allied to a high degree of devolution to schools, offered scope for inconsistency of practice'. Another report found it advisable for the institution concerned to 'clarify and simplify [its] deliberative structures for CP, to improve central and consistent oversight of the authority for quality assurance that it has delegated to schools', and so on. A third report found that the 'complex system of committees and groups' led to a failure to identify problems at institutional level and a lack of routine monitoring by the centre of departmental reporting on CP. There were associated difficulties in identifying good practice and in providing feedback to partner institutions on the outcomes of quality assurance procedures. In another case, a report advised a university to keep under review its reallocation of responsibilities for the development, administration and quality assurance of CP, 'given the risk of overlap in activities and replication of effort between the faculties and the central functions involved'.

31   Elsewhere, a report noted the similarity of the membership of the institutional executive and deliberative bodies overseeing collaborative arrangements. The institution was advised to monitor the overlap between executive and deliberative structures with a view to their clearer separation. Another report noted, within a complex structure of institutional and faculty bodies overseeing UK and overseas CP, a lack of clarity concerning a series of executive/deliberative relationships at both central and local levels and also between these levels of responsibility. The institution was advised to clarify and simplify its arrangements.

32   A further report described a 'complex framework' for the management of quality and standards in CP, containing 'a large number of committees and groups with responsibility for the management of partnerships…located both within the executive and deliberative structures and at University and school levels'. The report additionally noted the role of the various models and types of collaboration in determining applicable procedures and requirements. Finally, the report observed the extent to which this complex framework entailed 'a substantial delegation of responsibilities to

schools and their programme leaders', which had led to 'significant variation in the manner and rigour with which schools and teams discharge their responsibilities'. The associated recommendation was addressed to the reassessment of the location of responsibilities for the management and development of CP, and clarification of the relationships between the various groups and committees within its executive and deliberative structures.

33   Another report, while noting the potential benefits arising from an institution's division of responsibility for UK and overseas partnerships within its framework for managing CP, nonetheless observed the divergent practice attributable to this separation and the limits it placed on dissemination of good practice. The institution was encouraged to coordinate systems and procedures for UK and overseas CP.

Frameworks and typologies

34   A notable feature of the audit reports under consideration is the clear account they generally gave of the various types of collaborative activity undertaken by each awarding institution. This they did at the outset of the main section of the report under the heading of 'The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision'. Many reports subsequently addressed the implications of the different types of arrangement for quality management regimes, and a number of reports made recommendations concerning the relationship between a particular type of collaborative activity and the related quality management operations. A typical summary of the relationship stated: 'Systems for managing quality and standards are adapted to reflect the requirements of different types of partnership arrangements'. Similarly, another summary stated: '…the distribution of authority for quality assurance between the University and its partners…varies according to the nature of the collaboration'. Some reports noted institutional taxonomies based on the degree of delegation to partners and the associated levels of risk in the arrangement.

35   Typologies and the associated quality management systems may be complex: 'The procedures associated with each of the five models of collaboration are qualified by the additional requirements that apply to the various types of partner organisation', or: 'The approach to the management of collaboration arrangements and for [sic] assuring the standards of awards and the quality of the student experience is determined by both the category of collaborative arrangement and the type of award'.

36   Some reports noted a broadly uniform approach to the quality management arrangements for CP, but with specific exceptions for accreditation and comparable relationships where the partner's internal procedures were adopted following approval. Other reports commented on the 'flexible' view taken by some institutions of generic types and categories of collaboration, and of an approach to quality management steered case by case, 'according to the specific requirements of each partnership…to achieve an effective match between each party's capacities and capabilities'. Some reports noted the state of flux regarding categories of co-operation. One report noted an institution's replacement of its established typology, which 'had become unduly constricting and complex', by a new structure which, while 'no less rigorous', would be 'more responsive'.

37   Recommendations addressed various respects in which the relationship between institutional typologies and quality management arrangements for CP raised concerns for audit teams about security of quality and standards. These concerns derived largely from ambiguous or incomplete typologies and registers of CP. Two recommendations addressed the need for clear definition of distance and distributed learning and the associated procedural requirements. One recommendation concerned the omission of articulation arrangements from the institutional typology, and the need to consider the advisability of reviewing institutional procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of articulations 'to ensure that it [the institution] can safeguard the interests of students following such programmes'. Another recommendation concerned lack of clarity in the institution's distinction between 'articulation' and 'progression' and the implications of this for the approval process.

38   Two recommendations considered institutional understandings and use of the term 'franchise'. In one case, there was what was called a 'dual use' of the term, which was linked with risks to the security of assessment arrangements where the awarding institution had no corresponding internal programme to that under 'franchise'. In the other case, the franchise identified had been omitted from the institutional collaborative register and was subject to a 'lack of clarity among senior staff regarding [its] exact status'. The audit team concluded that 'this loss of institutional oversight [had] the potential to put quality and standards at risk'.

39   In another case, a recommendation arose from inconsistencies in the way the term 'outcentre' was used in relation to UK and overseas locations. It was noted that the use of the term lacked a 'coherent rationale', and that this could have implications for quality assurance arrangements. The report concluded that there was a need for a more inclusive typology and recommended its review and updating.

Accreditation arrangements

40   Accreditation arrangements were the subject of recommendations in four reports. In one case, the concerns were such as to produce an overall judgement of limited confidence. The associated recommendations deemed it 'essential' that the institution 'strengthen the means by which it establishes confidence in the security and comparability of the academic standards of its awards provided through accredited partners' and that it 'implements valid and reliable mechanisms to enable it to have confidence that the quality of the learning opportunities and student support provided through all its accredited partners are managed effectively and meet the University's requirements'. The key factor in this outcome was the audit team's view that 'the University's model of accreditation has not enabled the University reliably to ensure that its partners can sustain the requirements of accreditation'. Particular contributory aspects included the composition of institutional accreditation panels, over which both quantitative and qualitative concerns were raised, and the differences in the understandings of the requirements of accreditation by the accrediting and accredited institutions. The need to intensify monitoring arrangements was seen by the team to indicate the inappropriateness of the accreditation model for the partnerships in question.

41   The question of the monitoring of accredited partnerships by the awarding institution arose also in two further cases. In one, a recommendation derived in part from the audit team's view that the University should 'strengthen its procedures for

monitoring the quality and standards of accredited provision' as, for the purposes of 'regular monitoring', the accrediting institution was taking the partner's internal management of quality and standards too much on trust. The recommendation derived also from the need for the University to define generic criteria for the achievement of accredited status. In the other case, the audit report conveyed a number of concerns respecting the effectiveness of the accrediting institution's oversight of the management of quality and standards by the accredited partner. These concerns included the conduct of monitoring and of examination boards, and the role of the external examiner. The institution was advised to 'ensure that it exercises in full its responsibilities under the terms of the agreement with its accredited partner in order to ensure that its processes for monitoring quality and standards are clear and effective'.

42   A further institution was advised to 'review and strengthen its processes for ensuring that it has appropriate oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through tripartite arrangements with an accredited college'. The audit team's concern was that the arrangements in place might leave the University, as the awarding body, ill placed to detect 'emerging problems' with standards or quality in tripartite arrangements which entitled the accredited institution to validate as awards of the University programmes run by one of its own partners.

Agreements

43   Several themes emerged from the audit reports' consideration of formal agreements between awarding institutions and their partners. These were: the relationship between the nature of an agreement and the institution's collaborative typology; the relationship between the institutional and programme elements in agreements; arrangements for the review and renewal of agreements; ratification of agreements and the commencement of programme operation; variability and ambiguity in agreement drafting; and the legal standing of agreements.

44   Several reports observed the way in which an institution's different types of collaboration influenced the arrangements and responsibilities set out in agreements. One report recommended review of the use of some key terms employed 'indiscriminately' for agreements across the different types of collaboration so as to enhance consistency and understanding. Another noted an institution's development of a number of standard templates reflecting the different categories of collaborative relationships.

45   Reports described various approaches to the sequencing and design of institutional and programme approval and agreements. Several reports noted that institutional or programme-level agreements included as an attachment operational manuals detailing responsibilities for a range of matters affecting programme quality and standards. In three instances, the development of operational or liaison guidelines for individual programmes was judged to be a feature of good practice.

46   A number of reports indicated the formal linkage between the review of programmes and of their associated agreements. Some reports noted the requirements for approval of interim revisions to agreements. One institution was invited to consider harmonisation of review of institutional agreements with programme revalidation.

Another was advised of the need to 'ensure the timely review of all partner contracts, including those in respect of accredited provision'.

47   Three reports noted instances of enrolment of students and operation of programmes prior to ratification of agreements. In one of these cases, the report advised the institution to 'take the necessary steps to ensure that collaborative agreements are signed before students are enrolled on the associated programmes'.

48   As in the example noted in paragraph 44, some reports detected lack of clarity or undue variability in institutional formulation of agreements, and made recommendations accordingly. In one case, the contractual obscurity related to the requirements for the appointment of external examiners. Conversely, another report noted the introduction of an institutional template for agreements designed to provide 'additional assurance of consistency of approach in the operation of collaborative agreements'.

49   Linked with the above cases were two recommendations, in one case advising the institution to acknowledge the 'legally binding' nature of the institutional agreement, as stated in the *Code of practice*, Section 2, precept A10 (September 2004), and in a second advising that the institution should ensure that agreements, as the 'legal foundation' for collaborative provision, remained current.

Guidance and support

50   The relative strength of this aspect of the framework, whether in terms of documentary guidelines or of liaison and support initiatives, was reflected in the number of features of good practice associated with this area.

Documentary guidance

51   One report, identifying good practice in the guidance published by an institution to inform the management of quality and standards in its CP, found the range of regulatory and procedural documents 'comprehensive, informative, useful and clear…fulfilling a positive role in the maintenance of standards' [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 136 (iv);paragraph 36]. Another report, also noting as a feature of good practice the 'comprehensive' and clear nature of the procedural handbook 'that helps to engender a shared understanding of the University's requirements', commented on its updating in the light of Section 2 of the *Code of practice* [Middlesex University, paragraph 171 (iii); paragraphs 43 and 42].

52   A further report commented on the 'comprehensive overview of the key quality processes' and 'single, coherent framework' supporting CP provided by the institutional guide. This report, too, noted the 'appropriate reference to' and 'effective use' of the *Code of practice* in the development of the guide. One report particularly identified as a feature of good practice the provision of 'comprehensive guidance notes and training for partners' to supplement the general procedural handbook [Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 188 (ii); paragraph 65].

53   Recognition of good practice in the development of operations manuals for individual programmes has been referred to in paragraph 46. In one such case, the report noted the inclusion in the manual of both statements on quality assurance standards and policies, and specification of the different staff roles in each type of

arrangement. The report identified good practice in the quality of the guidance provided by the combination of the overall CP handbook and the individual operations manuals [University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 156 (i); paragraphs 34, 37 and 38]. A second report, similarly, observed the utility of programme operations manuals in 'clarifying the particular responsibilities of staff both within the University and in its partner organisations' [University of Sunderland, paragraph 143 (ii); paragraphs 32 and 45]. In a further such instance noted, the programme agreement was supplemented by a liaison document outlining the processes by which the agreement would operate in respect of communication and support [Kingston University, paragraphs 205 (i); paragraph 36].

54   Several audit reports made recommendations on the written guidance provided for the quality management of CP. One report noted that the introduction of an institutional manual of academic regulations and procedures, including a section on CP, had been recommended by the previous Institutional audit report, but the document was still in draft form at the time of the Collaborative provision audit. The Collaborative audit team viewed the completion of the manual as an urgent matter. It further recommended 'that the University consider developing an operational handbook/procedures manual for staff in the University and partner organisations involved in the management and delivery of CP, in order to provide a single point of reference for the day-to-day management of this provision'. Another report, which had found merit in an institution's development of operations manuals for individual programmes, nonetheless advised the institution of the desirability of providing a single accessible documentary resource for CP which could be used by staff in the University and in partner institutions.

55   Another report, while noting the key role of the operations manual in the conduct of each partnership agreement, found that its effectiveness was being compromised by both inconsistent formulation within types of collaboration and lack of cross-reference to underlying institutional policies and procedures. The institution was advised to review the manual to make it 'a comprehensive operational guide for partnership'.

Liaison and support

56   Liaison and support arrangements will form the subject of another paper in this series; they are therefore dealt with only briefly here.

57   Audit reports described a great variety of developments to facilitate effective communication between awarding and partner institutions and to support quality and standards in CP. Numerous advisory and networking initiatives were associated with features of good practice. These included generic key features such as link tutor systems; administrative support and guidance; cross-membership of boards and committees; regional and associate college structures; partnership events and fora; academic collaboration and support; and sharing of good practice and staff development.

58   The importance of the link tutor role to the effective implementation of quality management frameworks for CP was confirmed in numerous reports. Thus, one report

stated, 'The [link tutor] role is central to supporting the management of standards and quality effectively' [University of Huddersfield, paragraph 188(i); paragraph 39]. Another's observation was that 'experienced staff are appointed to serve as link tutors in recognition of the key part they play in ensuring the application of the University's regulatory framework for CP' [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 136 (iii); paragraph 34]. Good practice in the employment of link tutor systems was identified in a number of other reports also [University of Greenwich, paragraph 171 (i); University of Westminster, paragraph 117 (i); University of Ulster, paragraph 179 (ii); University of Lancaster, paragraph 208 (i)].

59   Correspondingly, recommendations on link tutor arrangements showed a general concern with the need, in largely devolved structures, for a consistent system of link tutors providing the awarding institution with a secure general overview of its maintenance of quality and standards.

Conclusions

60   Almost all the 30 reports on Collaborative provision audits conducted between May 2005 and March 2007 indicated that institutions' frameworks for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in this area were generally sound and effective. At the same time, most reports made recommendations to institutions on specific aspects of their frameworks which were in need of, or would benefit from, improvement.

61   The role of institutional typologies in effective quality management of collaborative provision received extensive consideration in reports, giving rise to a number of recommendations with a general focus on definition of terms and their procedural implications. Particular difficulties were identified with some accreditation agreements.

62   Guidance on frameworks for managing quality and standards in collaborative provision emerged as a common strength in awarding institutions and was linked with a range of features of good practice based on documentation, liaison and support.

Appendix 1 - the Collaborative provision audit reports

2004-05

Middlesex University

Open University

2005-06

De Montfort University

Kingston University

Liverpool John Moores University

London Metropolitan University

Nottingham Trent University

Oxford Brooks University

Sheffield Hallam University

The Manchester Metropolitan University

University of Bradford

University of Central Lancashire

University of East London

University of Greenwich

University of Hertfordshire

University of Hull

University of Lancaster

University of Leeds

University of Northumbria at Newcastle

University of Plymouth

University of Sunderland

University of Westminster

University of Wolverhampton

2006-07

Bournemouth University

Staffordshire University

The University of Manchester

University of Bolton

University of Derby

University of Huddersfield

University of Ulster

The full reports can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews.

Appendix 2 - titles in *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit*

Approval and review of partnerships and programmes

Frameworks, guidance and formal agreements

Student representation and mechanisms for feedback

Student support and information

Assessment and classification arrangements

Progression and completion information

Use of the Academic Infrastructure by awarding institutions and their partners

External examining arrangements in collaborative links

Learning support arrangements in partnership links

Arrangements for monitoring and support

Papers are available from www.qaa.ac.uk/outcomes.