



Audit of collaborative provision

University of Essex

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit of collaborative provision: report

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Essex (the University) from 28 June to 2 July 2010 to carry out an Audit of collaborative provision. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers through collaborative arrangements.

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

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

The Audit also considered provision at University Campus Suffolk, which is validated jointly by the University of Essex and the University of East Anglia. The findings of the audit on the management of the provision at University Campus Suffolk are presented separately at the end of this report.

Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Essex is that in the context of its collaborative provision:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

The University has taken a proactive approach to supporting the professional development of partner institution staff in order to enhance the learning experiences of students. The outcomes of its formal quality assurance processes have been used to support and encourage the formation of cross-partner groups and to set in motion joint activities to share good practice that enhances student learning experiences and strengthens the higher education ethos in partner institutions. There is scope for a more systematic use at university level of management information to enhance the management of learning opportunities in the University's collaborative provision.

Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The audit found that the University's systems and procedures for the management and operation of its postgraduate research provision at partner institutions are sufficient to ensure that the student experience meets the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Features of good practice

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

- the coherence of the framework for the management of the security of academic standards in collaborative provision
- the systematic mapping of the guidance in the *Code of practice* against the operation of provision in partner institutions
- the extent of the use of external input, including academic experts, practitioners, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, in the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision
- the comprehensive specification for the annual monitoring process
- the structured approach to the support for and provision of staff development in partner institutions.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- strengthen the reporting and consideration at institutional level of matters related to the provision of learning resources at all partner organisations
- ensure that there are appropriate regulations for dual PhD awards.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- enhance the participation of students from its collaborative provision in the University's own committee structures for the management of collaborative provision
- develop a more structured approach to encouraging the input of scholarship into teaching in partner institutions
- make systematic use of the range of management information, including statistical information, surveys of learning resources and student feedback, at university level to enhance its management of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision
- share external examiners' reports with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45).

Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision in respect of University Campus Suffolk (UCS)

The audit also considered provision at University Campus Suffolk (UCS), which is validated jointly by the University of Essex and the University of East Anglia. The findings of the audit on the management of the provision at UCS are presented separately at the end of this report (see page 19).

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the joint management of the provision by the University of Essex and the University of East Anglia is that:

- confidence can be placed in the universities' current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards delivered through the collaborative provision at UCS and its Learning Network
- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the universities' current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students at UCS and its Learning Network.

There are no recommendations for action in respect of the provision at UCS and its Learning Network. The audit team identified the following features of good practice in the management of the provision at UCS:

- the role of the Joint Academic Committee in maintaining effective oversight of academic standards and quality at UCS and its Learning Network
- the opportunities and arrangements for staff development offered by the two sponsoring universities, which have led to substantial capacity building in the higher education provision at UCS and its Learning Network.

The audit found that the universities had responded appropriately to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of Practice)* in their management of the collaborative provision at UCS and its Learning Network.

Reference points

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

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

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students in its collaborative provision.

Report

1 An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Essex (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 28 June 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers through collaborative provision and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in relation to collaborative programmes.

2 The audit team comprised Ms S Blake, Mr C Dawson, Dr R Haggarty, Mr M Kitching and Professor D Wright, auditors, and Mr A Evans, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

3 The audit also considered provision at University Campus Suffolk (UCS), which is validated jointly by the University of Essex and the University of East Anglia. UCS is a joint venture and consists of a main campus hub in Ipswich, with a network of five smaller campuses linked to further education colleges in the region. UCS students receive a degree awarded jointly by both universities. The findings of the audit on the management of the provision at UCS are presented separately at the end of this report.

Section 1: Introduction and background

4 The University of Essex received its Royal Charter in 1965 and admitted its first students in October 1964. The main University campus is situated at Wivenhoe Park on the outskirts of Colchester: this campus, covering some 200 acres and landscaped in the eighteenth century, is a mixture of 1960s buildings and more recent additions. The University has two further campuses: a town-centre campus in Southend-on-Sea, which opened in January 2007, and the Loughton Campus, which is home to the East 15 Acting School. Currently, the University employs around 1,750 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and there are around 9,000 (mainly full-time) students studying on the University campuses. Over one-third of the University's students are international.

5 The University's Mission Statement is: 'Our mission is to be a globally competitive, research-intensive, student-focussed University that takes seriously its economic, social and cultural responsibilities to the Eastern region, the UK and the world'. The University's strategic aims and supporting strategies are set out in its Strategic Plan 2009-2014.

6 In support of the commitment represented by its Mission, and in addition to its on-campus provision, the University has established collaborative arrangements in the Eastern region of the UK, focusing on substantial UK partnerships which offer mainly vocational programmes. Within these partnerships, the curriculum focus is different from and complementary to that offered on campus and is aimed at widening participation in higher education. Two of the University's UK partners offer postgraduate research degrees and there is a small number of international partners offering dual awards.

7 Since the previous QAA Audit of collaborative provision there has been considerable growth in the University's collaborative provision, and currently there are 7,489 FTE students studying for University of Essex awards at UK partner institutions, 3,390 of whom are studying on awards validated solely by the University. The remaining 4,099 FTE students are studying for awards at University Campus Suffolk (UCS).

8 The University's collaborative provision was last reviewed as part of the QAA Institutional audit in 2003. The audit report recommended that the University 'exercise caution in the future development of its collaborative arrangements in order to ensure an appropriate experience of HE for all students engaged in its collaborative provision'.

The University has responded appropriately to this advice, and has significantly expanded the operational team that manages collaborative partnerships; formalised its procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision; and developed mechanisms to support partner staff in enhancing the higher education learning experience for students.

9 The University's governing body is the Council, which delegates responsibility for academic quality and standards to the Senate and its various committees, most notably the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Undergraduate and Graduate School Boards. Responsibility for the quality and standards of collaborative provision lies principally with the Academic Partnerships Board, whose membership includes senior members of both the University and partner institutions. Each partner institution also has a partnership management board.

10 The Handbook of Validation and Review Procedures includes clear and comprehensive guidance for the operation of UK-based collaborative provision. The Dean of Academic Partnerships is the principal University office-holder responsible for the quality assurance of collaborative provision. An Academic Partnerships team led by the Head of Academic Partnerships oversees day-to-day management of collaborative provision.

11 New partnerships are established through a comprehensively documented institutional approval process and the resulting relationship is formalised by a legal agreement. The strategic, financial and legal or contractual aspects of the proposal are considered by the Council and the academic and quality assurance aspects of the proposal by the Senate. The partner institution is reviewed at the institutional level, usually every five years.

12 Programmes of study leading to University awards and delivered by a collaborative partner are approved through a process separate to institutional approval. Proposals for new undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes in partner institutions are presented to the Academic Partnerships Board for outline approval, before moving to formal validation. Validated programmes are subject to annual monitoring and a formal periodic review at the programme level is conducted every five or six years.

13 The University does not currently have any validation or franchise arrangements outside the UK; there are a small number of non-guaranteed progression arrangements, the operation of which is governed by the Academic Partnerships International Handbook and overseen by the International Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee of the Academic Partnerships Board.

14 Overall, the University's approach to the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in collaborative provision is characterised by sound arrangements for approval, monitoring and review and clear executive and committee oversight of partnership activity. The University has adopted an appropriate framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision. The framework provides the University with a secure overview of award standards and sound oversight of the quality of the student experience.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

15 The University's framework for the management of academic standards of awards delivered in UK partner institutions is set out in the Handbook of Validation and Review Procedures, which establishes robust policies and procedures.

16 Institutional approval reports demonstrate that University policies and procedures are being followed in the formal consideration of approval of a new partner institution. The process draws on external advice.

17 The University provides advice to its partners on the development of curricula and course proposals at all stages of the process. The University offers internal academic expertise where relevant and also uses external academic experts to provide advice in areas where it does not have internal expertise. A wide range of staff responsible for the programme(s) are involved in the course validation process, including those responsible for delivery, for learning resources and for student support in both institutions. There is also strong evidence of external representation on validation panels, with academics, employers, and professional, statutory and regulatory body representatives routinely present. There are sound procedures for amendments to programmes subsequent to approval, which again draw on external academic expertise as necessary.

18 The annual monitoring of collaborative provision takes place at two levels: at the course level, and at the institutional level for those partners with larger-scale provision. Annual monitoring reports require methodical analysis of feedback from students, external examiners, and employers and industry representatives. Periodic review reports and any actions taken in response to the recommendations made are considered by the Academic Partnerships Board, or the Graduate School Board in the case of postgraduate research provision. Minutes of partnership management boards and Academic Partnerships Board demonstrate that consideration of periodic review reports and institutional and course-level annual monitoring reports is thorough, detailed and evaluative. In addition, partners view the annual monitoring process as a useful and robust procedure.

19 The Handbook of Validation and Review Procedures refers to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* throughout. Partners are required by the University to engage with the *Code of practice* and any revisions to it. Annual monitoring reports, Academic Partnerships Board minutes and audit team discussions with staff of the University and its partners established that the engagement of the University and its partner institutions with the *Code of practice* was thoughtful and not mechanical.

20 Academic standards for the University's awards offered through partner institutions are set at validation through calibration against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The programme specification template requires that the level of the award be determined and that any professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements be noted. Full programme specifications are required for validation and are usually made available on the partner institutions' virtual learning environments; an abbreviated version is provided in course handbooks. The audit found evidence that effective use is made of the FHEQ, the *Code of practice*, and other external reference points in the University's management of academic standards.

21 The University's Rules of Assessment Framework requires that the levels of all University awards, wherever delivered, align with the FHEQ. The number of credits required at each level is also set out in the Assessment Framework and the requirements for progression and award are clearly explained. There are sound arrangements for consideration and approval of variations to the rules of assessment.

22 Responsibility for marking and moderation lies with the partner institution, and therefore there is heavy reliance on external examiners for the assurance of academic standards. The University supports staff at partner institutions by providing workshops on assessment procedures and practices. Course handbooks include information for students on assessment tasks and requirements, including grading criteria.

23 Consistency in the conduct of assessment boards across partners is secured through the Dean or Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships chairing the boards at partner institutions. External examiners attend assessment boards and provide feedback on matters related to academic standards through their annual reports.

24 The external examiner system is deemed by the University to be a 'vital component' in assuring quality and standards in partner institutions. External examiners are nominated by the partner institutions and appointed by the University for a maximum of four years according to standard criteria. Examination papers require the approval of the external examiner, and the examiners also provide annual reports on the courses or modules for which they are responsible. Partner institutions are required to respond directly to the external examiners, detailing any actions taken in response to their reports. All external examiners' reports and partner institutions' responses are reviewed by the Dean or Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships and considered at Academic Partnerships Board. The audit team reviewed a range of external examiners' reports, some of which were quite extensive, and others that were relatively succinct. In all cases, the requirements of the University were being met. The audit confirmed that the University makes scrupulous use of independent external examiners in the summative assessment of students in its collaborative provision.

25 Responsibilities for issuing certificates and transcripts are set out in the formal collaboration documents. The partner institution is responsible for providing students with individual transcripts of results, in accordance with a format agreed with the University. The University issues the certificates to successful students. The nature of the partnership is indicated on the certificates by the inclusion of the formal crests of both institutions.

26 The Academic Partnerships Board draws on a range of statistical information to oversee academic standards and student learning opportunities. The Board routinely receives enrolment, progression and award data to inform strategic planning. National Student Survey data in relation to partner colleges is of limited quality and value, due to the small size of many student cohorts; response rates have improved recently. Overall, there is evidence that statistical data is being used routinely and appropriately in some areas, such as admissions and recruitment. The University is aware of the potential for it to make more effective use of statistical data in the management of academic standards.

27 The University recognises that the policy that awards offered through collaborative arrangements should complement rather than duplicate its internal provision means that there is potential for it not to have sufficient expertise at the subject level to manage the provision effectively. This risk is managed through systematic use of relevant external advice, including that from external examiners, and guidance at all stages of course development, approval and review

28 The audit found that the University's policies and procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review provide a secure and effective framework for the maintenance of academic standards in collaborative provision. The academic, administrative and procedural structures are well thought out and integrated one with the other. The processes and procedures are well managed, and there are clearly defined responsibilities for individuals and committees. The work of the Academic Partnerships team promotes effective institutional stewardship of academic standards in collaborative provision. The coherence of the University's framework for the management of the security of academic standards was deemed by the audit team to be a feature of good practice.

29 There can be confidence in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative provision.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

30 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy highlights the importance to the University of a high-quality, inclusive and student-centred learning experience, supported by committed and well-qualified staff and well-resourced learning environments. The University intends that the Strategy apply to all students studying for its awards, but encourages each partner institution to develop its own learning and teaching strategy that reflects its distinctive characteristics and mission.

31 The University seeks to ensure that there is an appropriate quality of learning opportunities for students studying through collaborative arrangements through a combination of oversight by University and partner institution committees and processes set out in the Handbook of Validation and Review Procedures (the Handbook). In partner institutions, the partnership management boards and subgroups dealing with curriculum and quality matters have an important role in communication and liaison between the University and its partners. They involve University and partner staff and consider quality assurance and learning and teaching matters and, either expressly or implicitly, student support and resources. The audit found that these bodies worked effectively in contributing to the management of learning opportunities in collaborative provision.

32 It is clear that the University makes use of the *Code of practice* in developing and reviewing its policies and procedures for collaborative provision. In particular, it works with partners to create and update detailed charts which map the consideration and application of the advice in the *Code of practice*. Consideration of the implementation of the *Code of practice* is included in annual monitoring. The University also conducts reviews of particular areas across its partner network to support a consistent approach, for example a review of all complaints procedures across partners in 2008. The systematic mapping of the guidance in the *Code of practice* against the operation of provision in partner institutions is identified in the audit as a feature of good practice. Overall, the University makes proper and effective use of the *Code of practice* and other external reference points in its management of learning opportunities in the context of collaborative provision.

33 The vocational nature of a number of the University's programmes offered through collaborative arrangements means that professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements and national occupational standards are relevant to many of the students. The University draws extensively on external advice and involvement in all of its course development, validation and review processes. Reports and outcomes from professional, statutory and regulatory body visits are discussed at relevant committees in partner institutions, are noted in annual monitoring reports, and are reported to Academic Partnerships Board. The extent of the use of external input, including academic experts, practitioners, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, in the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision is a feature of good practice.

34 The University states that external examiners play an important role in providing independent feedback on the quality of learning opportunities for students at partner institutions. There is evidence of concerns about learning opportunities raised in external examiners' reports being brought to the attention of Academic Partnerships Board, resulting in the identification of areas for further development across partners. While the definition of the role and responsibilities of external examiners includes matters such as 'comment on the quality and coherence of the course', the standard reporting form does not include any specific question on learning opportunities or facilities and external examiners do not routinely meet students. The University is planning to review the role of external examiners in the context of the current national debate in this area; as part of that review, the University

may wish to consider making its expectations for reporting by external examiners in relation to learning opportunities more explicit.

35 Institutional and course-level annual monitoring reports compiled by each partner play an important role in the monitoring of the student experience. Reports follow a detailed standard format, which includes internal and national student satisfaction surveys, comments from staff-student liaison committees, the monitoring of feedback on coursework, issues with regard to recruitment and progression statistics, responses to external examiners' reports, and learning resources. There is effective action planning in response to matters identified in the reports. The reports are reviewed by the Dean or Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships and a written response is provided to the partner institution. Annual monitoring reports are discussed at Academic Partnerships Board and relevant committees in partner institutions' partner curriculum groups. Staff in partner institutions confirmed the usefulness and strength of the process. The periodic review process is similarly robust, involving external expertise and input from students. Periodic review reports record recommendations designed to improve the quality of learning opportunities. The outcomes of periodic review are reported to Academic Partnerships Board, and the chair signs off the fulfilment of conditions.

36 The audit team concluded that the procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes in terms of learning opportunities are clearly defined, are implemented effectively and consistently across partners, and make an effective contribution to the experience of students on collaborative programmes. In particular, the comprehensive specification for the annual monitoring process is identified in the audit as an example of good practice in the management of learning opportunities.

37 The University meets students at periodic review, and considers student feedback as part of most approval and review processes, but does not otherwise systematically meet students at partner colleges. There are no direct links between students and University staff, and students do not routinely meet external examiners; there is therefore limited structured direct contact between the University and students at partner colleges. There is a minimum requirement that each department in partner institutions establish at least one staff-student liaison committee (or equivalent), which should meet at least once a year. Student feedback on modules must be obtained at least once every three years. Partner institutions also gather feedback from students through their own internal surveys.

38 In practice, surveys are normally carried out at course or module level each year at each partner. Where appropriate, taught postgraduate students complete the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. Student feedback, staff-student liaison committee minutes and National Student Survey outcomes are discussed with partners through partnership boards and curriculum-level groups. The detail of the outcomes of these feedback mechanisms is not consistently reported at Academic Partnerships Board, and course-level annual monitoring reports from large partnerships do not go to the Board. Students whom the team met were largely familiar with and positive about feedback systems. Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's student feedback mechanisms contribute to assuring the quality of student learning opportunities.

39 All of the University's partners maintain their own student representative systems and include students on internal committees. Structures vary between partners, but all partner institutions have an internal higher education committee or the equivalent, which includes student representatives, and sometimes have representatives at higher levels. The role of students in quality assurance is reviewed as part of institutional validation or review, and there was evidence that recommendations to enhance the role of students in quality assurance were made where this was thought appropriate. At university level, the Academic Partnerships Board includes two student representatives from partner institutions,

and a representative of the University of Essex Students' Union, but attendance by students is irregular. Audit team discussions with staff and students indicated that students were not actively involved and did not feel that they had an effective role at the Board, with the result that the actual participation of students from partner colleges at university level is low.

40 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the institution's arrangements for student involvement in quality management processes, including student feedback mechanisms, are effective at partner level. The team considers that there is potential for the University to make more structured use at university level of feedback gathered and considered at more local levels. It is desirable that the University enhance the participation of students from its collaborative provision in the University's own committee structures for the management of collaborative provision.

41 The University works with partner institutions to promote a culture of scholarly activity and to encourage innovation in the curriculum and in teaching methods. There is a range of good practice at partner institutions, with some partners having strong research profiles and others operating a Research and Scholarly Activity Committee or monitoring scholarly activity through a Higher Education Staff Forum. There was evidence of the University providing support for research and scholarly activity, including encouraging staff in partner institutions to undertake further study, such as a research degree at the University. There were also examples of cross-partnership events, research cooperation, and joint programme development at master's level. The University does not have a specific strategy for supporting the link between research and scholarship and teaching and students' learning opportunities at partner colleges, and research and scholarly activity are not systematically considered as part of institutional or course validation or review. Overall, the audit team concluded that the University offers useful support to its partners in enhancing the links between research and scholarship and students' learning opportunities. There is scope for the University to draw more systematically and strategically on this existing good practice to enhance its approach in this area. The audit team considers it desirable, therefore, that the University develop a more structured approach to encouraging the input of scholarship into teaching in partner institutions.

42 There are examples of e-learning and some blended learning at partner colleges, but this is not a major feature of the University's collaborative provision, except for one partner which delivers courses entirely online. In this instance, the courses are approved and reviewed by the University in line with its normal processes, but special consideration is given to the approval and monitoring of the partner's online environment at institutional and course validation. Where necessary, procedures have been adapted to suit this delivery mode. Partner staff and students studying through this form of delivery were satisfied with the courses offered and the support provided by the University.

43 The University has made a strategic choice to work in partnership to provide a range of work-based learning opportunities. Work placement and work-based learning policies and procedures are specifically considered as part of institutional and course approval and review.

44 Overall, the University's arrangements for other modes of study are effective in maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities, especially as regards online learning.

45 Partner institutions have strategic and operational responsibility for the provision of learning resources, as set out in partnership agreements. The University maintains oversight through a variety of mechanisms including, approval, monitoring and review. There was evidence of appropriate consideration of resourcing, including IT and library resources, in each process, as well as the follow-up of conditions or recommendations.

46 Course approval documents and validation and review processes are designed to allow the University to assess and assure the level and appropriateness of resources within partner institutions. The University also uses a range of informal approaches to monitoring the provision of learning resources, including annual visits to libraries at partner institutions and sector benchmarking. There are also annual surveys conducted by partner institutions with the results being provided to the University librarian.

47 The levels of provision of virtual learning environments, library, IT, and physical resources vary across the partner network. The University's partners all have independent virtual learning environments which are supported internally. Rights of access to University library facilities differ between undergraduate and postgraduate students at partner institutions. All postgraduate students have full borrowing rights, whereas undergraduates are normally limited to reference facilities. There are two partners whose students can access limited borrowing facilities via inter-lending arrangements. The University has supported the development of new building and refurbishment work within some of its partner institutions through the HEFCE Learning and Teaching Capital Fund.

48 While, overall, students at partner institutions are generally satisfied with the learning resources available to them, there is evidence that some students have concerns about the resources at their disposal. Some students questioned the adequacy of resources both in terms of level and access to library resources and the ease of accessing information technology. The University was aware of these concerns in a number of instances and was considering how to remedy matters, but progress in this area appeared to the audit team to be slow. Senior staff of the University whom the team met acknowledged that ultimate responsibility for ensuring the quality of learning opportunities in collaborative arrangements lay with the awarding institution. The lack of systematic integration of formal and more informal mechanisms, such as the annual library visits and surveys, into the University's procedures for appraising and improving the quality of learning opportunities means that there is potential for inadequate provision of resources to persist. Accordingly, the audit team considers it advisable that the University strengthen the reporting and consideration at institutional level of matters related to the provision of learning resources at all partner organisations.

49 Partner institutions are responsible for recruiting, selecting and admitting students in accordance with the collaboration agreements with the University. Admissions criteria are scrutinised at validation and are only deviated from under exceptional circumstances; the University's standard regulations for the accreditation of prior experiential learning apply equally to partners. A positive dialogue exists between partner staff and those in the University Admissions Office, who support a process of cross-referral of enquiries where necessary, as well as events aimed at disseminating information relating to admissions. Admissions for postgraduate research students are dealt with via local arrangements and liaison through the University's Graduate Admissions Office. Partner institutions are required to comply with the University's Higher Degree Regulations and to take due account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* when handling applications.

50 Partner institutions are responsible for providing appropriate student support services in accordance with the collaboration agreements. In general, partner institutions have considerable staff expertise in the provision of student support within their institutions and the University is committed to putting in place additional coordinated mechanisms to develop staff, in order to enhance that support. By way of example, the University has begun to develop practitioner networks across its partner institutions so that staff with expertise in support for disabled students work together to share information, experience and good practice.

51 Staff appointed in partner institutions are recruited using established University criteria for staff teaching in higher education. The University supports staff in partner institutions through a wide variety of opportunities, initiatives and events. The Learning and Teaching Unit is integral to this approach and maintains oversight of participation as well as organising development activity. Opportunities include a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice, discounted fee levels for higher study, including PhDs, and attendance at Learning and Teaching Unit sessions, such as 'Group Assessment and Student Approaches to Learning' and 'Joining the practitioner network at Essex'. The Learning and Teaching Unit also offers a range of online resources for staff in partner institutions, such as the series of University 'Smart Guides', which are University publications that seek to improve staff understanding of key learning and teaching issues by collating best practice from across the institution; topics range from feedback to personal development planning. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee is responsible for formal oversight of staff development and reports thereon to Senate.

52 The University recognises that the extent to which staff across the partner network participate in University-led staff development is variable, often due to the partner institutions delivering effectively their own staff development initiatives. The audit found that the University's structured approach to the support for and provision of staff development in partner institutions was a feature of good practice in its management of learning opportunities.

53 The audit found that the University has a well-defined and structured approach to the assurance of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision. The relevant policies, processes and procedures take account of relevant external guidance and reference points. There can be confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in its collaborative provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

54 Enhancement of learning and teaching is a key part of the University's mission and a major strand of the institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University views the professional development of staff in partner institutions as central to its approach to quality enhancement. It also seeks to use the outcomes of its routine quality assurance processes to support innovations and promote good practice in learning and teaching.

55 As noted above, professional development opportunities for University staff are provided by the University's Learning and Teaching Unit, which actively promotes opportunities to staff in partner institutions. Partner staff have also secured University funding to support learning and teaching developments, and one of the University's annual Excellence in Teaching Awards for excellence in supporting the student's learning experience has been awarded to a team from a partner institution.

56 Research and scholarly activity have been promoted in partner institutions that offer postgraduate research degrees by the provision of jointly organised research conferences and opportunities to attend research conferences hosted by University departments. The University also offers reduced fees for higher degree study, and a number of staff from partner institutions are currently registered for postgraduate research degrees.

57 The University uses the outcomes of institutional and programme-level reviews to facilitate the formation of cross-partner curriculum groups as forums for the sharing of ideas and best practice. The University also organises cross-partner training workshops on various aspects of higher education practice. Common themes identified by the Academic

Partnerships Board from annual monitoring reports and external examiners' reports are routinely used to organise university-led 'sharing good practice' events. Much of the information available in relation to the quality of educational provision in the collaborative network is considered in detail at the local level. As noted above, the audit team is of the view that there are opportunities for the University to derive greater benefit at institutional level from the broad intelligence about the operation of its collaborative provision. It is therefore desirable that the University make systematic use of the range of management information, including statistical information, surveys of learning resources and student feedback at university level, to enhance its management of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision.

58 In summary, the University has focused on the development of staff in partner institutions as a means of enhancing student learning opportunities. The University has also taken deliberate steps to facilitate joint and cross-partner activities to share good practice and enhance those opportunities, drawing on the outcomes of its formal quality assurance processes. Overall, the University's proactive approach to supporting the professional development of partner institution staff and promoting good practice in learning and teaching has enhanced student learning opportunities and strengthened the higher education ethos in partner institutions.

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

59 The University currently has a small number of students on collaborative research degrees, with 60 students registered on Professional Doctorate programmes at one UK partner and 12 students registered on PhD programmes at another. The University also has one student registered on a dual doctorate between one of its departments and a European University. The University has no immediate plans to increase the number of partners offering research degree programmes.

60 The University's Higher Degree Regulations set out the framework for maintaining the academic standards and quality of its postgraduate research programmes, including collaborative research degrees. The University's Code of Practice for Professional Doctorates and for Postgraduate Research Degrees set out the responsibilities of the two UK partners, their staff and students. The Graduate School Board, which oversees collaborative research degrees, includes a representative from both UK partners.

61 The operational arrangements for UK-based collaborative research degrees are described in the Handbook of Validation and Review Procedures (the Handbook). Strategic management of collaborative research degrees is the responsibility of a partnership management board for each partner, each of which has a subgroup concerned with the curriculum and quality. The boards and their subgroups have equal membership from the University and the partner institution.

62 The dual doctoral degree programme, which was approved in 2007, is subject to an agreement that requires compliance by the student with the academic regulations of both institutions. The audit team was informed that the dual degree programme aligned with standard University regulations regarding overseas students jointly supervised by their home institutions and the University. The standard regulations do not fully cover the agreed admission, progression and assessment arrangements for the dual degree. The audit team considers it advisable that the University ensure that there are appropriate regulations for dual PhD awards. Since October 2009, any new dual doctorate arrangements should follow the approval processes outlined in the Academic Partnerships International Handbook.

63 Annual monitoring and review of the University's research degrees, including collaborative degrees, takes place through Research Degree Programme Review. The arrangements for consideration of the Research Degree Programme Review reports ensure that action is taken in respect of matters requiring attention and features of good practice. Collaborative research degree programmes are subject to five-yearly periodic review by a panel which includes student representation and which has appropriate seniority and external input. Recommendations from periodic review panels and responses and action taken are monitored in the annual Research Degree Programme Review process. Monitoring and review reports and the associated minutes and action planning demonstrate that the specification and implementation of the relevant procedures provide for effective institutional overview of collaborative postgraduate research provision.

64 Local arrangements are in place at each partner institution for the selection, admission, supervisory arrangements and induction of research students. The University's approval and review processes confirm that partner arrangements comply with its Higher Degree Regulations and take due account of the relevant guidance in the *Code of practice*. New supervisors are expected to attend relevant training sessions run by the University, and the University's in-house professional development workshops for experienced supervisors are open to supervisors in the partner institutions. Each partner has local arrangements for the development of the research and transferable skills of its research students. The University's induction programme, annual Graduate School skills workshop and transferable skills workshop programmes are also available to and attended by students from the partner institutions.

65 Partner institutions are responsible for establishing a supervisory board for each student and a research students' progress committee, which reports annually on each student to the Dean of the Graduate School. On the dual PhD programme, student progress is monitored through the University department's research students' progress committee. A student's PhD status is normally confirmed during the second year of full-time study, subject to satisfactory progress. For Professional Doctorates, an Examination Board meets annually to decide on student progression and completion, with outcomes reported to the Graduate School. The Graduate School organises the examinations for all research students. The Dean of the Graduate School approves the appointment of internal and external examiners and receives their recommendations following the viva. The University's research student appeals procedures apply to partner students. The audit found that arrangements for the supervision, progression and examination of research students in collaborative provision were sound.

66 Supervisory boards, which report to research students' progress committees, provide opportunities for individual student feedback. One partner institution runs an internal survey for its professional doctorate research students, the outcomes of which feed into the Research Degree Programme Review process. One of the University's partners has participated in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey for the past two years, but response rates have been too low to be meaningful. This latter partner operates an open door policy for research students which was commended in the 2009 periodic review of its provision. The same periodic review of the latter partner recommended that a staff-student liaison committee or equivalent forum for research student feedback be established, to meet at least annually, to complement the more informal mechanisms.

67 The audit found that the University's systems and procedures for the management and operation of the postgraduate research provision at partner institutions are sufficient to ensure that the student experience meets the expectations of the *Code of practice*, *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 6: Published information

68 Formal responsibility for the oversight of published information relating to collaborative provision lies with the Dean of Academic Partnerships. Course teams are required to include details of published information as part of the course approval process for authorisation by the Academic Partnerships Board. All published information must comply with the University's branding criteria. The Academic Partnerships Office routinely checks partner websites for accuracy. A Marketing Practitioners' Forum and the partnership management boards play a key role in monitoring published information and in disseminating important developments across the partner network.

69 The audit team was able to access a variety of resources when analysing published information across collaborative provision. The information reviewed included prospectuses, student handbooks and the University and partner websites, along with the Unistats and UCAS websites. There was evidence that the majority of information provided to students was comprehensive, clear, accurate and reliable.

70 The University makes information publically available, as required by HEFCE, both through partner and external websites. There is no standard approach to the provision of external examiners' reports to students: it is therefore desirable that the University share external examiners' reports with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45).

71 Students whom the audit team met were all aware of the role that the University played within their courses and confirmed that they knew where to find information about appeals and complaints. Some criticism of published information was put forward by students, specifically regarding work-based learning elements of their course, which were not as extensive as specified in prospectuses. International students progressing to study at the University through non-guaranteed progression agreements found the information they were given to be comprehensive and very helpful.

72 The audit found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the coherence of the framework for the management of the security of academic standards in collaborative provision (paragraph 28)
- the systematic mapping of the guidance in the *Code of practice* against the operation of provision in partner institutions (paragraph 32)
- the extent of the use of external input, including academic experts, practitioners, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, in the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision (paragraph 33)
- the comprehensive specification for the annual monitoring process (paragraph 36)
- the structured approach to the support for and provision of staff development in partner institutions (paragraph 52).

Recommendations for action

74 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- strengthen the reporting and consideration at institutional level of matters related to the provision of learning resources at all partner organisations (paragraph 48)
- ensure that there are appropriate regulations for dual PhD awards (paragraph 62).

75 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- enhance the participation of students from its collaborative provision in the University's own committee structures for the management of collaborative provision (paragraph 40)
- develop a more structured approach to encouraging the input of scholarship into teaching in partner institutions (paragraph 41)
- make systematic use of the range of management information, including statistical information, surveys of learning resources and student feedback, at university level to enhance its management of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision (paragraph 57)
- share external examiners' reports with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (paragraph 70).

University Campus Suffolk Report

Section 1: Introduction and background

76 University Campus Suffolk (UCS) was established in August 2007 as a joint venture, UCS Ltd, between the University of Essex and the University of East Anglia and offers awards validated jointly by the two universities. The establishment and development of UCS is a key part of both universities' strategic aims for widening participation in higher education in the Eastern region of England.

77 Student enrolment for the academic year 2009-2010 was 4,099 FTE students. The main campus hub is UCS Ipswich (UCS Ltd), where 70 per cent of the students are based, with Learning Network Centres linked to colleges of further education at Bury St Edmunds, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Otley and Ipswich. There are schools of Arts and Humanities, Health, Science and Social Care, Nursing and Midwifery, and Social Science and Business at UCS Ipswich. A Framework Collaborative Agreement (2008) sets out the arrangements between the universities, UCS Ltd and the Learning Network Centres. Separate agreements between UCS Ltd and each centre are subject to review every five years.

78 UCS delivers full and part-time BA and BSc degrees, most at honours level, and Foundation Degrees and Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), both of which can feed into honours degree study. Part-time MSc, MA and MBA degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates, and continuing professional development courses are also offered. The majority of students are mature and local and almost 40 per cent study on a part-time basis.

79 The Board of UCS Ltd includes the vice chancellors of both universities, the UCS Provost and representatives of the regional community. Oversight of education at UCS is through the Joint Academic Committee (JAC), which reports to the Senate of each university. The Academic Board is the main UCS committee concerned with quality assurance and enhancement and it reports to JAC. Observers from UCS attend committees at both universities involved in collaborative provision. A Partnership Management Team ensures that actions are implemented at UCS and a Policies and Procedures Working Group oversees monitoring and enhancement of policies and procedures; both report to JAC and both have a representative from each university.

80 The provision operates in the context of the UCS Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2009), which was developed in discussion with the universities. The detailed framework for managing academic standards and learning is outlined in the UCS Validation Handbook (the Handbook), which was developed jointly by the universities, with reference to the Academic Infrastructure. The Handbook provides a comprehensive account of the processes for approval, monitoring and review of UCS academic programmes, all of which take account of professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements. The committee structure and academic and administrative procedures provide the universities with clear oversight of the management of academic standards and learning opportunities.

81 The JAC is central to the management of the UCS partnership and provides a valuable forum for the discussion and approval of relevant policies and procedures. The role of the JAC in maintaining effective oversight of academic standards and quality at UCS and its Learning Network is identified in the audit as a feature of good practice.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

82 Proposals for new courses go through an internal planning process at UCS prior to being submitted to the universities for approval. The proposals include programme specifications referenced to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmarks, relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements and national occupational standards. There are sound arrangements for validation, which involve representation from both universities and UCS, and external academic input. At validation events, panel members normally meet students on related courses. Validation reports are submitted to JAC, which makes a formal recommendation to the senates of the universities and monitors the fulfilment of any conditions or recommendations attached to the approval. Institutional and course validation processes are conducted in a thorough manner and in accordance with the stated requirements.

83 Annual monitoring of academic standards and learning opportunities at course and school/centre level is through the Self-Assessment, Review and Evaluation (SARE) process. SARE reports draw on external examiners' reports; student, staff and employer feedback; student performance data; and, where relevant, professional, statutory and regulatory body reports, research or professional development activity, validation or review reports and responses to external reference points. SARE reports are expected to be constructive, reflective and evaluative. SARE reports feed into the school/centre SARE event, involving attendance from the universities, students and at least two 'critical friends' from another part of UCS, another higher education institution, or an employer/service user organisation. A summary of all the SARE reports forms part of the Annual Academic Report by the UCS Head of Quality to JAC, which also receives the individual school/centre SARE reports. UCS and the universities have recognised that 'there is scope for greater use of critical friends at SARE events, particularly outside UCS Ipswich', and are strengthening the SARE process in this respect. Scrutiny of a range of SARE reports confirms the view of the universities that the SARE process is 'an effective mechanism for overseeing academic standards at UCS.'

84 There is quinquennial periodic review at institutional and course level. The institutional review panel has the same membership structure as at validation, with the addition from the academic year 2009-2010 of student representatives. Institutional review includes a self-evaluation report; an evaluation report by the universities; consultation with relevant university staff and with students at the institution; and an institutional event. The review report and action plan are submitted to JAC for approval and JAC makes a formal recommendation to the senates. JAC is responsible for monitoring progress against the action plan. The audit team examined the one institutional review to have taken place to date and found that the process had been comprehensive and thorough.

85 Course revalidation panels have the same membership structure as at validation, with the addition of student representatives. At the course revalidation event the panel meets students currently or previously registered on the course under consideration. Revalidation reports are submitted to JAC, which makes a recommendation to the senates. Responses to any requirements of revalidation are monitored through the UCS Academic Board and reported to JAC. The universities' oversight of the course revalidation process is secured by their involvement in revalidation panels and in their consideration of revalidation reports at JAC.

86 External examiners are nominated by UCS and are approved by the joint chairs of JAC or their nominees, according to criteria approved by the universities. External examiners' reports seen by the audit team were detailed and constructive in their comments. There are well-defined arrangements for consideration of and response to the reports and

for consequent action planning. External examiners' reports are considered by course teams and student representatives at course committee meetings, with action taken outlined in annual SARE reports. The universities have oversight of external examiners' reports through direct scrutiny of all reports and a UCS Annual Academic Report to JAC.

87 The audit found that the universities' approval, monitoring and review processes, including use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, and their oversight of the external examining process, were consistent with the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and made an effective contribution to securing and maintaining academic standards at UCS.

88 JAC approves UCS assessment policies, procedures and regulations on behalf of the universities. The Annual Academic Report to JAC includes an institutional-level evaluation of assessment processes, informed by feedback from external examiners, and from staff and students through SARE and National Student Survey data. The course validation/revalidation process also includes an evaluation of assessment. University staff attend a sample of UCS assessment boards to observe implementation of policies and regulations for report to JAC. These mechanisms combined ensure that the universities have oversight of assessment practices at UCS.

89 SARE reports and the Annual Academic Report provide JAC with a wide range of student data. Qualitative feedback from students, external examiners and course reviews are also considered by JAC. UCS and the universities have identified several areas where there is scope for better use of management information, and there is an action plan to take this work forward. Through JAC, the universities make effective use of management information to help assure the academic standards of programmes and awards.

90 There can be confidence in the soundness of the universities' management of the academic standards of awards made through UCS and its Learning Network.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

91 Learning opportunities are evaluated at institutional and course validation, at review/revalidation and through the annual SARE process, which collectively allow the universities to obtain the views of academic staff, students, employers and other stakeholders. The universities obtain feedback on learning opportunities from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies through accreditation/reaccreditation reports. There is evidence that UCS and the universities draw effectively on the *Code of practice* and other external reference points in the development of policies and procedures that have an effect on the student learning experience.

92 The role of students in quality assurance is embedded in the UCS Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. There is provision for student representation on committees, including JAC, UCS Academic Board and course committees. Quantitative feedback from students is obtained through UCS entrance surveys and the National Student Survey. JAC maintains an overview of student feedback, and there are clear examples of student feedback leading to improvements in the quality of the learning and teaching environment. Overall, the audit found that the universities' policies for students to be actively involved in quality management are effective in practice and contribute to assuring the quality of learning opportunities.

93 The UCS Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy emphasises the need to provide students with a learning environment which is 'pervaded by intellectual and scholarly activity' and in which 'learning, teaching and assessment are informed and enriched by research.' Central to this strategy is the need for ongoing staff development. The

involvement of some university staff in teaching at UCS provides an opportunity to discuss their research and professional expertise with UCS students and staff.

94 The universities have provided some technical support for the development of UCS' virtual learning environment, Wolsey. Students report that Wolsey is well regarded and that an increasing number of course teams are using e-learning to provide students with opportunities for blended learning. A report to JAC in November 2009 highlighted improvements in Wolsey, with increased levels of usage and a wider range of resources available to students.

95 Work-based learning is a feature of many of the courses offered at UCS. A revised UCS Placement Learning Policy, which takes account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* and guidance from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association, was agreed in principle by JAC in March 2010. Overall, the universities have oversight of other modes of study at UCS and the Partnership Management Team and JAC have been actively involved in the development of policy and procedures for work-based learning.

96 The Framework Collaboration Agreement outlines the responsibilities of each institution for the provision of learning resources at UCS. The universities' libraries provide a range of support services, but the responsibility for ensuring that appropriate resources and services are made available for students rests with UCS and its Learning Network Centres. UCS students have access to the libraries at both universities and to e-journals at the University of East Anglia. Details of services available are outlined in the UCS Student Directory and on the universities' library websites. Student feedback indicates that the library provision varies between UCS Learning Network sites, and students reported to the audit team that there could be an imbalance between support for further and higher education courses. Agreements for the reciprocal use of libraries and loan of materials between the UCS Learning Network sites have been established. UCS library expenditure is benchmarked against national statistics from the Society of College, National and University Libraries.

97 National Student Survey results for 2009, while positive overall, showed relatively low levels of satisfaction with the provision of learning resources at UCS. The underlying reasons for this were analysed by the UCS Head of Quality and action was identified in the annual UCS Quality Enhancement Plan to meet students' concerns. The availability of a suitable range of learning resources is evaluated by the universities through the institutional and course validation and review/revalidation processes and annually through SARE events. The Annual Academic Report provides an overview to JAC of learning resources across UCS and enables the universities to monitor action taken by UCS. Overall, the audit team considered that the universities have effective oversight through JAC of the management of learning resources at UCS.

98 UCS is responsible for the admission of students under policies and procedures approved by the universities. SARE reports provide an annual summary of student entry profiles and an entry questionnaire enables the students' experience of the recruitment and admissions process at UCS to be monitored. A summary of outcomes, and action taken in response to any areas of concern, is included in the UCS Annual Academic Report to JAC. The audit team concluded that the universities have effective oversight through JAC of the implementation of admissions policy at UCS.

99 Under the Framework Collaborative Agreement, UCS aims to provide an 'appropriate and consistent level of support for students across the UCS Learning Network', with Wolsey providing a mechanism for publicising information on resources to UCS students. The universities liaise regularly with UCS to discuss changes in relevant legislation and other external reference points, and to facilitate the sharing of good practice. Central

student support services and mechanisms at UCS are overseen by JAC through institutional and course validation and review/revalidation processes. UCS Student Services also produce their own SARE report and an accompanying student support action plan, which is incorporated into the Annual Academic Report. Where areas for improvement are identified, the SARE process and the Annual Academic Report to JAC enable the universities to oversee action taken. There is evidence of high satisfaction rates for student support from internal surveys and the 2009 National Student Survey. Students who met the audit team were particularly complimentary about the personal tutor system. Overall, the team found that the universities had effective oversight through JAC of student support services at UCS and had developed useful links at an operational level for the discussion of policy and procedures and the dissemination of good practice.

100 The universities provide direct support for UCS staff in course development through contributions by their own staff and external academic advisors, and by facilitating links with other partners. The UCS Observation of Learning and Teaching policy approved by JAC provides a framework for staff peer observation activity. The universities have oversight of staff development through JAC. The SARE process enables staff development needs at school/centre level to be identified. Outcomes of staff development activity, including good practice, are collated through an annual report to the Academic Board, and to JAC in the Annual Academic Report. Following a recommendation from the universities' 2008 review of quality management mechanisms, a draft UCS Staff Development Strategy (2010-2015) has been produced for ratification by the UCS Academic Board and the JAC.

101 There is evidence of substantial contributions by the universities to staff development at UCS, including UCS staff participation in university workshops, conferences and other cross-partnership professional development events; such staff participation is actively encouraged. Both universities offer reduced fees for academic staff taking postgraduate degrees. JAC has approved a mechanism for suitably qualified UCS staff to gain experience of supervising PhD students as second supervisors. The audit team concluded that the opportunities and arrangements for staff development offered by the universities, which have led to substantial capacity building in the higher education provision at UCS, including its Learning Network, represented good practice.

102 From the evidence examined and from discussion with staff and students, the audit found that the approval, monitoring and review processes ensured effective oversight by the universities of the management of learning opportunities at UCS. There can be confidence in universities' management of the quality of learning opportunities at UCS and its Learning Network.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

103 The UCS Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy includes a commitment to enhance professional practice in teaching and assessment, and the universities' review of quality management at UCS in 2008 has led to the development of a Quality Enhancement Strategy (2010). The universities consider both student feedback through internal and external surveys and membership of university staff on UCS committees to be important for quality enhancement at course and institutional level. JAC is effective in overseeing student feedback at UCS and uses that feedback in quality enhancement activities.

104 Innovative features and examples of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment are identified through approval, external examining and periodic quality assurance processes, and disseminated across UCS through a number of mechanisms, including Academic Board and JAC, 'good practice events' and other professional development activities. The SARE process provides a further opportunity to identify good

practice, culminating in a Quality Enhancement Plan, which forms part of the Annual Academic Report to JAC.

105 The UCS Academic Strategy (2010) emphasises working closely with the universities through the development of academic communities to provide 'the foundation for scholarly interchange, curriculum development and shared ambition'. The academic communities serve as a vehicle for communication and sharing of good practice where courses are delivered across a number of UCS centres.

106 The audit found that the universities had been active in promoting an ethos at UCS that encourages enhancement of learning opportunities and that there are effective procedures in place for identifying opportunities for enhancement and for the dissemination of good practice.

Section 5: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

107 UCS does not offer provision at postgraduate research level.

Section 6: Published information

108 Marketing and publicity guidelines for the UCS provision are outlined in the Framework Collaborative Agreement and provided in the UCS Validation Handbook. All published materials must comply with the universities' criteria on branding; adherence to this requirement is monitored by each university. At an operational level, UCS is represented on relevant university groups, for example the University of Essex's Marketing Practitioners' Forum, which disseminates common practice across the University's collaborative provision. There are sound processes to check prospectus and web material.

109 The universities have identified a number of areas where action needs to be taken to publish a broader range of information online, work on which is being managed by the Partnership Management Team. All schools and centres were asked to submit updated programme specifications with their 2008-09 SARE reports, so that they could be made publicly available online, and there are plans to ensure that programme specifications are updated at appropriate intervals outside the revalidation cycle.

110 Students who met the audit team commented that prospectus and course information was accurate, if not always user-friendly. Wolsey was highly regarded by students as a source of content and for information exchange. Information on student entitlements to services provided by the universities is available in the UCS Student Directory and on the universities' websites. Students who met the team were aware of the existence of complaints and appeals procedures and where to access them.

111 Overall, the audit team found that the information provided to students was comprehensive and accurate and that the universities had effective mechanisms for maintaining oversight of published information relating to the UCS provision.

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the role of the Joint Academic Committee in maintaining effective oversight of academic standards and quality at UCS and its Learning Network (paragraph 81)

- the opportunities and arrangements for staff development offered by the two sponsoring universities, which have led to substantial capacity building in the higher education provision at UCS and its Learning Network (paragraph 101).

Recommendations for action

113 There are no recommendations for action in respect of the provision at UCS and its Learning Network.

Appendix

The University of Essex's response to the Audit of collaborative provision report

The University welcomes the outcome of the collaborative audit and the judgement of confidence in the soundness of our present and likely future management of both the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students through our collaborative arrangements.

We are pleased to note the highlighting of a number of areas of good practice, in particular the coherence of the University's framework for the management of the security of academic standards in collaborative provision.

The University is encouraged by the strong endorsement of its joint arrangements with the University of East Anglia for the management of University Campus Suffolk (UCS) and is pleased to note that there are no recommendations for action in respect of the provision at UCS.

The University appreciates the professional and courteous manner in which the audit was conducted.

The University considers the audit report a constructive contribution to the ongoing enhancement of its collaborative arrangements. The report will be considered at the University's Academic Partnerships Board and by its senior management team and an action plan will be developed to take forward recommendations.

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