



Audit of collaborative provision

University of Portsmouth

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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 Portsmouth (the University) from 6 to 10 December 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 two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by teleconference equivalent meetings with staff and students from one further overseas partner.

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.

Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Portsmouth 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 audit found that the University has a range of activities in place and under development that constitutes an effective institutional approach to quality enhancement in relation to collaborative provision.

Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The audit found the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative provision are sufficient to ensure that the research environment and the postgraduate research student experience meet 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 the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Features of good practice

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

- the online availability of University staff development materials to collaborative partners
- the effective support and advice provided to partners by University Academic and Administrative Contacts and by staff in the Collaborative Programmes Office.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that there are always effective risk management procedures in place to safeguard appropriate learning opportunities for students on programmes at partner institutions
- review the Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures document to ensure closer alignment and consistency with the policies and procedures in its Programme Monitoring and Review document.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45)
- ensure that both unit and programme/course feedback questionnaires are completed in accordance with the University's expectations.

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 for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- 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 of Portsmouth took account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1 An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Portsmouth was undertaken during the week commencing 6 December 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 Professor Mark Davies, Mrs Brenda Hodgkinson, Mr Howard Smith, Mr Alan Weale, Dr Michael Wing, auditors, and Mr Greg Clark, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Chris Clare, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University was inaugurated in 1992, although its origins can be traced back to the foundation of the Portsmouth and Gosport School of Science and Art in 1869 and degrees were first awarded to college students in 1901. The University's mission, as defined in its Strategic Plan 2007-12, is 'to give an excellent student experience focused on knowledge and skills essential for roles in the global workforce'.

4 The University works with a number of partners to deliver collaborative courses and articulation routes for University of Portsmouth awards. In 2009-10 there were 4,142 students studying towards a University of Portsmouth award through a collaborative partner. Of these, 1,363 students were studying overseas.

5 Current information relating to the University's collaborative partners is publicly available on the University's website, including a list of available courses and active links to partners' websites. A detailed register of UK-based collaborative provision is maintained internally with the University's management information system.

6 Collaborative provision was last audited in 2004, when the team made recommendations relating to the monitoring and management of collaborative provision to ensure parity between home and collaborative provision. The current audit team was satisfied that the University had reflected and acted on the findings of its last Collaborative provision audit and had given careful attention to the action taken in the light of its Institutional audit.

7 The Academic Council of the University assumes overall responsibility for the management of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities within the University, with responsibility delegated to the relevant subcommittees, principally the Quality Assurance Committee. Responsibility for the quality and standards of collaborative provision lies with the relevant home faculty and is monitored at both faculty and institutional level.

8 The Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures includes clear and comprehensive guidance for the operation of collaborative provision and is administered at an operational level by the Collaborative Programmes Office in conjunction with academic colleagues.

9 New partnerships are established through a comprehensively documented four-stage institutional approval process, and the resulting relationship is formalised by a legal agreement (see paragraphs 12 to 14). The strategic, financial and legal or contractual aspects of the proposal are considered through delegation, by the Academic Policy

Committee and Quality Assurance Committee, with final approval made by the Academic Council. The partner institution is reviewed at the institutional level, usually every three years, in addition to annual monitoring through the Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review process. However, the audit team noted that the documentation considered at the four exemplar partner reviews supplied by the University and the respective review panel minutes did not include or cite detailed scrutiny of the current financial state of the partner institution.

10 The University has comprehensive and well-defined procedures in place for defining, reviewing and approving changes and developments in collaborative provision. These can involve the referral of proposals to new panels or the involvement of the Quality Assurance Committee by delegation from the Academic Council. Despite this, during the audit process the audit team was made aware that one of the University's collaborative partners had gone into administration. While endeavours are being made to provide alternative arrangements to allow students to complete their award, not all of these would be awards of the University (see paragraphs 42 and 43).

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11 The requirements for course approval and modifications are specified in the Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision document. The Academic Council is ultimately responsible for the approval of courses leading to awards of the University, but delegates some responsibility to the Academic Policy Committee, Curriculum Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee. Course approval procedures apply to both home and collaborative provision, although those for collaborative provision involve an enhanced assessment of risk.

12 The University has a four-stage process for the approval of new collaborative programmes. In the first stage, resource implications, compatibility with the University's strategic intent, and risks associated with the new programmes and/or partners are considered within the relevant faculty and by the University Curriculum Committee. During stage two, the Academic Registry confirms compliance with University policies and regulations, and any partner-specific arrangements are agreed in principle.

13 During the third stage, a specially convened Collaborative Programmes Approval Committee considers the curriculum and arrangements for delivery and support for the new programme. In the case of new partnerships the partner is also approved. The Collaborative Programmes Approval Committee, which is chaired by a senior member of University staff and includes external assessors, meets a range of University and partner staff. A visit is also made to the partner institution by a small group of members of the University acting on behalf of the Collaborative Programmes Approval Committee.

14 In the fourth and final stage, following confirmation that the Collaborative Programmes Approval Committee's conditions have been met and that contractual arrangements are in place, a recommendation concerning the programme is made to the Quality Assurance Committee, which is responsible for final approval. Once a programme is approved, the Curriculum Committee must approve any significant changes to the programme.

15 The University has an annual monitoring process which involves the production of Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reviews. At programme level a partner academic contact Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review informs the development of a University academic contact Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review. These reports present the partner and University perspective of the delivery of the programme

respectively, and take account of external examiner comments, progression and completion data, and feedback from staff and students.

16 These reports are considered by the relevant boards of studies and also inform the next reporting level of Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reviews, which is the Head of Department's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review, which reports on programmes across an academic department. These Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review reports are considered at faculty level, and in turn inform the University-level Collaborative Partnership and Articulation Arrangement Provision Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review, which is considered by the Quality Assurance Committee, and informs the Pro Vice-Chancellor's annual report to Academic Council and the Board of Governors.

17 Collaborative programme periodic review normally operates on a six-year cycle. The process considers a review of both the programme and the partnership, with clear distinctions made between the two. There are additional reviews of the partnership, such that these occur at three-year intervals. Programme review reappraises the programme's curriculum, and considers the effectiveness of the annual monitoring process at programme level. Periodic review draws largely on existing documentation, supplemented by summaries of important quality assurance reports and data, and on a narrative prepared by the University academic contact. The review panel, which is chaired by a senior member of University staff and includes external assessors, meets with staff and students, makes explicit judgements on the fitness for purpose of the curriculum and on the effectiveness of annual monitoring, and may also make a number of recommendations for action.

18 All members of University staff participating in approval and review panels are trained for their roles, and University and partner institution staff met by the audit team were generally familiar with the University's processes for approval, monitoring and review of awards. The audit team found that detailed procedures were readily available to University and partner staff; the former are trained for their role on approval committees.

19 The audit team scrutinised the procedures for programme approval, modification, monitoring and review, and considered that they met the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. The team also saw a sample of relevant documentation, and were able to confirm that the University's policies and processes were generally followed.

20 The audit team noted, however, that one University requirement was not always met. The requirement was that partner and University academic contacts' Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reviews should be presented to boards of studies and that, furthermore, there were inconsistencies in the description of this requirement as detailed in the Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures and Programme Monitoring and Review documents, which both set out procedures for the management of collaborative programmes (see also paragraphs 48 and 49). Given the role of the boards of studies (and in particular the student membership) in reviewing and commenting on Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reviews, the team suggest that the University should clarify this requirement, and ensure that these reviews are consistently presented to boards of studies, by way of the recommendation in paragraph 49.

21 Notwithstanding this recommendation, the audit team regarded the University's approval, monitoring and periodic review process as generally effective in securing the academic standards of its awards.

22 The University ensures that its awards are consistent with the Academic Infrastructure and with other external reference points related to assuring academic

standards through a process of gap analysis. This alignment with the Academic Infrastructure also ensures alignment with the expectations of the Bologna Agreement.

23 Programmes are designed with specific reference to subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and other relevant reference points such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' requirements, with this alignment confirmed during programme approval and review events. Through an examination of the University's procedures, and of validation and review documentation, the audit team confirmed that the University makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points in securing the academic standards of its collaborative awards.

24 Franchised programmes, and some validated and validated external programmes, follow regulations that are broadly similar to those that apply to the University's in-house provision. These provide for a two-tier examination system in which the first tier, Unit Assessment Boards, confirm grades and the award of credit at unit level, and the second tier, Boards of Examiners, determine the progression or exit awards of students. Unit assessment boards are normally chaired by the University academic contact and require the attendance of the subject external examiners. Similarly, boards of examiners are normally chaired by the University academic contact and require the attendance of the award external examiners.

25 For validated and validated external programmes, where such arrangements may not be entirely appropriate, partner-specific examination and assessment regulations are developed and agreed during the programme approval process. Based on a review of the University's arrangements for assessment and examination, and the University's practices in this area, the audit team came to the conclusion that these make an effective contribution to its management of the academic standards of collaborative provision.

26 The University provides full and clear regulations, procedures, guidance notes and appointment criteria related to external examining. External examiner nominations are first evaluated by the relevant Faculty Associate Dean (Academic) before consideration by the External Examiner Appointments Panel. This panel makes recommendations to the Quality Assurance Committee, which has the authority to approve appointments. The University provides an induction programme for external examiners, which is generally well attended and well received by participants. External examiners are further supported by a dedicated website that includes training materials.

27 External examiners for collaborative provision act as subject external examiners (associated with cognate groups of units, and reporting to the unit assessment board), and may also be award external examiners (associated with named awards, and reporting to the board of examiners). Where home-based programmes are also offered as collaborative programmes, wherever feasible, the University appoints the same external examiner to all versions of the programme.

28 External examiners write their reports to a standard template, and external examiners with responsibility for collaborative programmes are now required to refer to all partnerships in these reports. The Quality Management Division centrally manages the receipt and distribution of, and response to, external examiner reports. External examiner comments are discussed at unit assessment boards and boards of examiners, and also inform the annual and periodic monitoring process.

29 The audit team formed the view that the University's procedures and regulations related to external examining fully met the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining* and that in the main these procedures and regulations were followed. However, from an examination of documentation and discussions with students the team

concluded that, although it is a University requirement, external examiner reports were not always presented to, nor discussed at, boards of studies (see also paragraph 86).

30 As boards of studies are the principal opportunity for students to review and comment on external examiners' reports, the audit team recommends that it is desirable for the University to ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students through these means, so as to accord with the relevant requirements of the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45). Notwithstanding this recommendation, the audit team concluded that the University has effective oversight of the external examining process, and that external examiners make an effective contribution to the security of the academic standards of its awards.

31 The University has a clear policy with respect to certificates (termed 'parchments' by the University) and transcripts. The Academic Registry produces all collaborative programme parchments and the relevant academic department within the University is responsible for producing transcripts of studies for collaborative partner students. The audit team examined the policy and a number of certificates and transcripts, and confirmed that the University is following the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

32 The University's Student Records System holds details of student profile data for all collaborative partnership students, as well as progression and achievement data for students on franchised programmes. Partners are responsible for retaining progression and achievement data for students on validated and validated funded programmes.

33 Programme-level data, including first destination data where available, is analysed as part of the Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review process. Programme-level data is also reviewed at University boards of assessment. The University does not routinely review higher-level student data (for example at university level) in order to identify more generic themes directly from such data, nor analyse the performance of student cohorts entering the University via articulation agreements.

34 The audit team formed the view that, although the Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review process is generally effective in the use of management information, there is some potential for the University to use statistical data to identify collaborative provision quality themes at University level, and to review the performance of student cohorts entering the University through articulation agreements. The team was told of the University's intention to generate more comprehensive student data that could be used for such purposes, and of its intention to standardise progression and achievement data across all collaborative provision. Given consideration of these planned enhancements, the team concluded that the University is making effective use of management information to secure the academic standards of programmes and awards.

35 The overall conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

36 Course approval processes (paragraphs 12 to 14) involve consideration of strategic, resource, financial and policy issues by the University's Curriculum Committee. Approval committees consider teaching and learning strategies, arrangements for academic guidance, student support, and skills development.

37 Through its reading of documentation, the audit team formed the view that the management of the quality of programmes, as evidenced in the procedures for the approval of programmes, was rigorous and effective.

38 The arrangements for annual programme monitoring are set out in the Programme Monitoring and Review: Policy, Procedure and Guidelines document. Key evidence to be considered in monitoring the effectiveness of programmes with regard to learning opportunities is clearly specified.

39 Annual monitoring results in reports at course, departmental, faculty and University level (see paragraphs 15, 16). Learning resources and learning opportunities are considered at each level. In particular, a faculty executive meeting considers learning resource themes, and heads of department's reports are scrutinised by the Quality Assurance Committee with respect to learning resource provision. Changes to learning resources are examined at annual monitoring and may involve a visit by the University to the partner institution to check adequacy. Boards of studies play a role in monitoring the quality of learning opportunities, and the audit team noted that not all course-level reports are presented to these boards, as the University's procedures demand, and came to the view that the University will want to ensure such consistent presentation (see also paragraphs 20, 48, 49).

40 Overall, the audit team regarded the reports produced as providing the degree of criticality necessary to manage and enhance learning opportunities. The team concluded that annual monitoring was effective and encouraged planning for enhancement at programme, department, faculty and University level.

41 The audit team was satisfied that the University's periodic review process for maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities was effective and comprehensive. From a sample of documentation the team was able to verify that the University's procedures had been adhered to and that review events had been conducted in a rigorous manner. The team found that all review panels included external assessors as required, and had carefully considered the evidence base. Reports clearly identified the outcomes, key strengths of the provision, and any recommendations. Recommendations are considered through action planning and the relevant boards of studies. The minutes of the Quality Assurance Committee demonstrated scrutiny of the reports, to the extent that one was referred back for further work.

42 During the audit, the audit team was made aware that one of the University's collaborative partners had gone into administration and that there was no equivalent provision at the University. Although the University had endeavoured to provide alternative arrangements allowing students to complete their programmes of study, not all of these alternative arrangements would result in awards of the University. Although some of the students affected were at an early stage of their programmes, the team nevertheless strongly urges the University to review further its commitment to the progression and completion of its students in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (see also paragraph 10).

43 Consequently, the team considers it advisable for the University to ensure that there are always effective risk management procedures in place to safeguard appropriate learning opportunities for students on programmes at partner institutions, in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 2*. Particular attention should be given in cases where the institution does not have equivalent expertise associated with its home programmes.

44 Notwithstanding the above recommendation, the audit team found the University's arrangements for approval, monitoring and review to be generally effective in assuring the

quality of the student learning opportunities, and to have taken into account the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. These arrangements make an important contribution to the University's management of learning opportunities.

45 Mechanisms for gaining student feedback are itemised in programme specifications, and in its sample of programme specifications the audit team found that boards of studies and unit and course-level questionnaires were the only universal items. The University's student feedback policy indicates that feedback should be collected by survey at unit and course levels, although the University routinely delegates management of surveys to its partners and thus does not have access to the raw data. Nevertheless, digests are presented as part of the annual monitoring process.

46 Students met by the audit team indicated that there was significant variability in surveys in terms of the level at which feedback was collected. At one extreme their experience was in line with the University's student feedback policy, and at the other no feedback was collected at all. In some instances students received feedback on their feedback, but in the majority of cases students were unaware of the use to which data was put. In a small number of cases survey results were not presented, as required, to the Staff-Student Consultative Committee, or equivalent, or to the board of studies. As a result, the audit team considers it desirable for the University to ensure that both unit and programme/course feedback questionnaires are completed in accordance with its expectations.

47 The University indicated to the audit team the importance of the Staff-Student Consultative Committee as the primary forum at which students' views are captured. However, the audit team noted wide variation in the operation of this forum in terms of frequency of meeting and constitution, although the team also acknowledged the effectiveness of individual meetings in raising and addressing the concerns of students. While the University accepted the operational variability, the team concluded that the University may wish to review its mechanisms for eliciting feedback on collaborative programmes through Staff-Student Consultative Committees or their equivalent.

48 The University's Programme Monitoring and Review document and its Framework for Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality specify clearly that boards of studies must have Staff-Student Consultative Committees, although, exceptionally, alternative arrangements may be agreed through the Academic Policy Committee. The documents also stipulate much operational detail about Staff-Student Consultative Committees. Although the team noted variation in the operation of the Staff-Student Consultative Committees, it found few examples where a process for agreeing alternative arrangements to those in the University's policy documents had been followed, and none involving the Academic Policy Committee.

49 In contrast, the Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures document merely indicates that a Staff-Student Consultative Committee or equivalent should exist, referring the reader to the Programme Monitoring and Review document for further information. The audit team was told that the Collaborative Provision Policies and Procedures document took precedence over the Programme Monitoring and Review document, although the team was not able to find this precedence stated in the University's policies and procedures. This led the team to the conclusion that, with respect to Staff-Student Consultative Committees, the University applies more stringent regulations to its home courses than to its collaborative provision, even though the latter involves more risk. As a consequence, the team considers it advisable for the University to review the Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures document to ensure closer alignment and consistency with the policies and procedures in its Programme Monitoring and Review document (see also paragraph 20).

50 The University recently embarked on a pilot scheme to survey online its non HEFCE-funded students at collaborative partners using questions based on the National Student Survey, tailored for collaborative courses. Although the University viewed the response rate as low, it was able to draw general conclusions about the experience of its students on collaborative courses. The University has developed a report and action plan and is likely to conduct the survey annually.

51 The University's primary vehicle for involving students in course management is the board of studies, which occurs at the University for all courses, including those delivered through collaborative partnerships, and may additionally occur at partner institutions. The audit team satisfied itself that this pattern, with student representation, is in operation, although boards of studies vary in frequency between partners and are often known by another name. The team considered that this variation may be because the Collaborative Provision Policies and Procedures document states that a board of studies or equivalent must be in place, and that this document takes precedence over the Programme Monitoring and Review document, which details the operation of boards of studies (see paragraph 49).

52 The audit team saw many examples where students were active in discussing quality assurance matters at boards of studies, although it also saw a minority of cases where boards of studies operated as Staff-Student Consultative Committees such that business concerning course management was minimal.

53 The University indicated that training for student members of boards of studies was provided by the Students' Union. However, the students met by the team indicated varying practice, and the University may wish to standardise the training given to its student representatives.

54 Where boards of studies occur only at the University, students studying at partner institutions must travel to the University to represent their constituents. As a result, representation had not always been as comprehensive as it could have been. The audit team concluded that the University will wish to take further steps to ensure that representation on these boards is appropriate to its cohorts of students.

55 The University explained that, since franchised courses are designed by University staff, the link between learning opportunities and research or scholarly activity is built-in, and that for validated and validated external courses the University expects teaching staff to use their own research or scholarship to inform the curriculum. Many students met by the audit team were able to identify where recent research impacted on the curriculum. The University assesses the capability of partner staff to use their own research or scholarship to inform the curriculum through a scrutiny of curricula vitae as part of the approval and review processes, and by giving specific guidance to approval and review panel members to consider how advances in research and scholarship are reflected in the curriculum. Research links with the University featured prominently in designating one partner institution as an associate college.

56 The audit team concluded that the University was taking effective steps to include partner institutions in its own research agenda, to the benefit of its students, and saw examples of where the research of partner institution staff was used to enhance learning opportunities for students.

57 The University has a clear admissions policy, revised in 2010, supplemented by information specific to each course in the Collaborative Operational Handbook. Any exceptions to the policy are stipulated at approval (stage two) and are listed in the programme specification. The University also has a clear policy on, and operational

requirements for, recognition of prior learning. University and partner staff indicated that the procedures worked well.

58 The audit team viewed a sample of admissions documents and data and concluded that the operational procedures were, in general, robust and aligned with the University's regulatory procedures. However, the team also noted the lack of a standard, systematised analysis of students' qualifications on entry to its courses at partner institutions (see paragraph 34).

59 Learning resources are considered at course and partner approval and review, as part of the annual monitoring process, and when the University academic contact visits the partner institution. The University library offers a range of specific support to partner institutions and one librarian has a specific collaborative provision remit, although the audit team considered that this remit could be better publicised to effect the development of library provision for partner institutions.

60 Since the 2008 Institutional audit, the availability of remote access to the University's intranet has been improved, and all students have access to the University's online learning and support materials. The students met by the audit team found this access extremely valuable.

61 The University expects partner institutions to have their own student support services, and the audit team saw evidence of these. Consequently, services such as induction varied according to circumstances within the partner organisations. All students are supplied with a handbook outlining their studies, and students met by the audit team reported satisfaction with these and with the availability of, and access to, complaints and appeals procedures.

62 The University also expects partner institutions to have comparable support to the personal tutor system that operates for the University's home programmes. However, it was not always clear to the audit team that fully comparable support was available, and the team urges the University to review its arrangements in this respect.

63 Staff who teach on collaborative courses are designated Partner Associate Lecturers and are approved as part of the course approval process, or by the Associate Dean (Academic) during the period of approval. Partner Associate Lecturers can access the University's extensive staff development programme and are encouraged via a dedicated webpage to do so. In 2009 the University hosted a conference for its collaborative partners and intends to run this biennially. Materials from a range of staff development activities, including video presentations, are available online to facilitate development for, in particular, those Partner Associate Lecturers who are too far away to attend in person. The audit team identified this availability as a feature of good practice.

64 The audit team noted the effective communication between University academic contacts and their counterparts at the partner institutions. The team also noted a practice of thorough briefing for these roles and some evidence of supportive teaching staff exchanges. There was evidence of good communication of the aims of each of these roles, and a person specification has been developed setting out the responsibilities. The team found extensive evidence of these relationships working well in practice. There was evidence of staff exchanges and University staff delivering teaching sessions at partner colleges. As a consequence, the team regarded the effective support and advice provided to partners by University Academic and Administrative Contacts and by staff in the Collaborative Programmes Office as a feature of good practice.

65 The overall conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students in relation to collaborative provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

66 The University's overall approach to quality enhancement is achieved through a number of interrelated strands which facilitate enhancements across the University. These apply equally to campus-based programmes and collaborative programmes. The University views the processes that provide assurance about the standards and quality of its provision, such as programme approval, monitoring and periodic review; student feedback; the National Student Survey; and external examining, as opportunities for identifying and promoting the enhancement of student learning.

67 The Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review at programme and department level provides opportunity for the identification of enhancement opportunities and for appropriate actions to be planned. The process culminates in the Pro Vice-Chancellor's report to Academic Council, where the University takes institutional oversight of the steps being taken to enhance learning opportunities. The audit team formed the view that through the academic committee structure the University undertakes rigorous consideration of enhancement activity as it relates to collaborative provision.

68 The Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement is a significant component of the University's approach to enhancement. The Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement's remit incorporates provision through collaborative partnerships and is achieved through a range of activities undertaken by the department. These include provision of advice, guidance and support for staff and the dissemination, promotion and embedding of good practice.

69 The Quality Management Division and the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement provide support for staff in collaborative partner institutions through a programme of annual development events such as the Teaching and Learning Conference. In 2009 the conference focused particularly on provision through collaborative partnerships. The Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement's webpages are accessible by collaborative partner staff and act as a central storage point for conference presentations and for staff development and workshop materials (see paragraph 63). The audit team found that the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement had taken steps to ensure that its developmental activities and resources incorporate a perspective relevant to the delivery of collaborative programmes.

70 The Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement also analyses and reviews data from the National Student Survey and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and develops an enhancement agenda that arises from the findings. In recognition of the fact that National Student Survey data does not exist for non-HEFCE-funded collaborative provision, the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement designed and piloted an online collaborative survey based upon the National Student Survey questions. The University intends to adopt the survey of collaborative students as a regular activity in future (see paragraph 50).

71 The Quality Management Division of the Registry includes a team of nine staff who form the Collaborative Programmes Office. The Collaborative Programmes Office provides central support for the quality assurance of collaborative provision but also has a role in enhancement. It contributes to enhancing the learning experience for students by organising

the annual Staff Collaborative Programme Induction event, the University Contact Forum and the production of a biannual newsletter called 'Oracle'. The University Contact Forum is a well established mechanism for bringing together academic, administrative, library and quality management colleagues from across the University to discuss collaborative partnership matters and to share experience and practice. Meetings were well attended by a range of University staff involved in collaborative provision and the topics covered a wide variety of external and internal matters impacting on the delivery of collaborative programmes. The audit team formed the view that the meetings provided a key opportunity for promoting the enhancement of learning opportunities.

72 The newsletter Oracle is distributed electronically to staff in both partner collaborative institutions and throughout the University. It is designed to update staff on matters that affect the delivery of collaborative programmes. Both collaborative partner and University staff met by the audit team were fully aware of Oracle and cited it as a significant mechanism for sharing and dissemination.

73 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to quality enhancement in relation to collaborative provision is informed by a clear strategic intention, with appropriate mechanisms in place for implementation, monitoring and dissemination.

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

74 The framework for the management of on-campus research degree programmes applies to those delivered collaboratively, with the addition of specific arrangements for approving collaborative partnership arrangements.

75 The University has defined two types of arrangement for the delivery of research degree programmes with partners: collaborative research degree partnerships, and flexible and distributed learning with a partner. The University defines an arrangement as a Collaborative Research Degree Partnership if there is delegation to a partner institution of any or all of the following: admission decisions; first and second supervision; formal research training or the location of the viva voce examination. Where the partner institution support is significant but does not involve the delegation of these processes the University defines this as a flexible and distributed learning arrangement. Both types of arrangement are subject to formal approval processes.

76 Since introducing the procedures in 2008 the University has not had to process any Collaborative Research Degree Partnerships, and so the audit team was not in a position to comment on the effectiveness of the procedures in operation, but formed the view that the procedures as described are robust and fit for purpose. Auditors reviewed documentation relating to the approval of a sample of flexible and distributed learning arrangements and were satisfied that the University pays careful attention to assuring the appropriateness of the partner and the suitability of the collaborative arrangements. In particular, the audit team noted that the University was assiduously assuring itself of the quality of learning opportunities through a partner site visit before approving each new partnership.

77 The regulations, policies and procedures for the support and supervision of collaborative research degree students are those which operate for students undertaking research degrees on campus. They are comprehensively set out in a range of documents made publicly available through the University website. These policies and procedures were found to be secure by the 2008 Institutional audit team. Students informed the audit team that they were very satisfied with the provision of information and guidance for research degree students, which was both comprehensive and helpful.

78 Each student has a supervisory team of at least two supervisors. Normally the first supervisor must be a University of Portsmouth staff member and any proposal for alternative arrangements has to be separately approved. In all other respects the University's mainstream procedures apply. These encompass arrangements for admission, induction, supervision, progress and review, assessment, student feedback, complaints and appeals. No significant differences between the experience of students studying on collaborative programmes and those studying on campus were detected by the audit team.

79 Supervision of research degree students and the annual appraisal may take place using a variety of modes of communication, including Skype links and telephone or videoconferences. It is, however, the policy for the major review meeting and the viva voce examination to take place at the University campus. Research method training is currently faculty based, but, as a result of a review, the University Academic Council has approved the introduction of a new University-wide Researcher Development Programme that is to be more accessible to research degree students studying at a distance. The new programme will be introduced in 2011.

80 The proposals for the new Researcher Development Programme satisfied the audit team that the University was taking steps to ensure that research degree students on collaborative and flexible and distributed learning research degree programmes were being enabled to access appropriate and comparable research training to those students who are campus based.

81 Faculties monitor their research degree programmes through the production of an Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review, which is considered by the Faculty Research Degrees Committee and subsequently by the University Research Degrees Committee. Where faculties have collaborative research degree programmes these are given consideration in a separate and specific section of the Faculty Research Degrees Committee's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review. A sample of Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reviews scrutinised by the audit team demonstrated that the processes for managing collaborative research degree programmes and supporting students were working effectively. The team was also satisfied that the University was effectively monitoring the collaborative provision of its research degree programmes.

82 The audit team found that the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative provision are sufficient to ensure that the research environment and the postgraduate research student experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 6: Published information

83 In meetings with the audit team students confirmed that the publicity material and prospectuses, including the international materials, both printed and on the University and collaborative partner websites, gave an accurate account of the institution that reflected their experience since arrival as students. Responsibility for the oversight of materials produced by collaborative partners that support the University's awards is controlled by the University's Collaborative Programmes Office.

84 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. There was evidence that the majority of information provided to students was comprehensive, clear, accurate and reliable.

85 Students on collaborative programmes met by the audit team were aware of the role that the University played in relation to their courses and confirmed that they knew where to find information about appeals and complaints. International students progressing to study at the University through articulation agreements found the information they were given to be comprehensive and very helpful. Students reported that their handbooks provided a key starting point in finding answers to their queries.

86 Only a small proportion of students met by the audit team stated that they had seen the reports of external examiners. As a result, the team considers it desirable that the University ensure that all external examiner reports are shared with students (see paragraph 30).

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

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the online availability of University staff development materials to collaborative partners (paragraph 63)
- the effective support and advice provided to partners by University Academic and Administrative Contacts and by staff in the Collaborative Programmes Office (paragraph 64).

Recommendations for action

89 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure that there are always effective risk management procedures in place to safeguard appropriate learning opportunities for students on programmes at partner institutions (paragraph 43)
- review the Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedures document to ensure closer alignment and consistency with the policies and procedures in its Programme Monitoring and Review document (paragraph 49).

90 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (paragraph 30, 86)
- ensure that both unit and programme/course feedback questionnaires are completed in accordance with the University's expectations (paragraph 46).

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