Audit of collaborative provision

University of Greenwich

April 2011

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 under review, 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

- 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 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 Greenwich (the University) from 28 March to 1 April 2011 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 equivalent meetings, by videoconference, with staff and students from two further overseas partners.

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 Greenwich 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 team found little evidence of systematic enhancement, but concluded that recent changes to the management of collaborative provision had the potential to strengthen the enhancement of learning opportunities in the University's collaborative provision.

Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The University does not offer postgraduate research programmes through collaborative provision.

Published information

The audit team concluded that, for the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes and permits to

be published about the quality of its collaborative provision and the standards of the collaborative awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the Table of Responsibilities contained within the revised Memorandum of Agreement template, which makes it clear to both the University and its partners where their respective responsibilities lie
- the risk assessment approach to tracking cumulative curriculum changes, in order to prevent curriculum drift
- the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences' collaborations website, which is a source of useful information for staff and students involved in collaborative programmes.

Recommendations for action

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

The team considers it advisable for the University to:

- ensure that, as the University continues to develop its collaborative strategy, its processes and structures are appropriate to the scale and complexity of its collaborative provision
- create and maintain a publicly available and up-to-date list of collaborative partners and programmes
- put in place a consistent and robust approach to the credit rating of external courses
- ensure an appropriately consistent approach to the provision of timely feedback on all student work
- at programme approval, agree with the relevant partner a maximum cohort size that is commensurate with the resources available
- where admissions decisions are being made by partner institutions on applicants without relevant formal qualifications, agree with those partners clear criteria to ensure consistency and equity of treatment of applicants
- consistently make programme specifications available to prospective and current students.

The team considers it desirable for the University to:

- seek to achieve greater consistency in the expectations placed upon its partners in relation to student involvement in quality assurance processes and give greater prominence to feedback from students in the partner's and University's reporting processes
- improve the effectiveness of its procedures for ongoing monitoring of its partner colleges to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate higher education learning environment.

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 (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 of Greenwich 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.

Report

1   An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Greenwich was undertaken during the week commencing 28 March 2011. 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 Mary Carswell, Professor Malcolm Cook, Dr Steve King and Professor Debbie Lockton (auditors), and Mr David Stannard (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Paul Luker, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University of Greenwich describes itself as a 'large and diverse institution' which traces its antecedents to 1890. One of its precursors was Woolwich Polytechnic, the second polytechnic to be established in the UK. The University has three principal campuses: the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich; the Avery Hill Campus at Eltham in south-east London, and Medway, a campus it shares with the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University.

4   The University has nine schools (one being a joint school with the University of Kent), each of which is managed by a Dean (formerly designated a Head of School). The University offers a wide range of programmes across the entire academic spectrum.

5   The University's rationale for collaborative provision is, among other considerations, that it helps to: respond to regional and local demand for higher education; increase, facilitate and widen access to higher education; generate income for all partners; and raise the University's international profile.

6   One of the objectives of the five-year Corporate Plan that was put in place in 2006 was to develop partnerships both in the UK and overseas, with a specific target of increasing the University's non-campus-based overseas students by 30% by 2011. By the time of the audit, this target had already been achieved. The University's strategy for collaborative provision was reviewed and revised in 2010. During the audit, the audit team learned of the University's plans to consolidate its overseas activity at targeted regions.

7   The University has three types of partnership. Firstly, it has local and regional partners, comprising the Partner College Network of nine further education colleges and two Higher Education Funding Council for England -fundable specialist colleges (partner colleges), as well as three other publicly funded colleges outside the Network. The second type of partnership relates to the National Lifelong Learning Sector Network of 24 publicly funded linked colleges across the UK. The third type consists in 65 full-cost partnerships, 56 overseas and nine in the UK.

8   The Briefing Paper stated that in 2009-10 there was a total of over 35,000 students on programmes leading to awards of the University, 22,000 of whom were on campus and around 1,000 on distance-learning programmes. Of the 13,000 on collaborative programmes, 3,000 were in partner colleges, 1,000 in Lifelong Learning Sector Network Colleges, and nearly 9,000 in full-cost partnerships.

9   The 2006 Audit of collaborative provision recommended that the University further develop its collaborative provision strategy and clarify the locus of responsibility for decision

making within the University. The new Collaborative Provision Strategy seeks to consolidate the international collaborative provision portfolio and similarly to strengthen the University's management of this portfolio. During the 2006 audit, the audit team learned of the various and, in the team's view, complicated processes governing collaborative partnerships, and learned of plans to simplify and to harmonise practices. The 2011 team agreed with the University's claim that there is now a clearer distinction between strategic management responsibilities for the three types of partnership. The School of Education manages the Lifelong Learning Sector Network, and there is a new Partnership Division which undertakes strategic management of collaborative provision within the Partner College Network. The establishment of an International Partnership office and the appointment of an International Partnerships Manager is recognition by the University of the need to provide more central oversight of its international activity. There is now a separate Learning and Quality Unit, which is responsible for central quality assurance.

10   Already there is evidence of useful activity, for example, the new collaborative partner report template for all partners and the production of a handbook of international partnerships for University and partner staff involved in international partnership activity.

11   The role of link tutors varies across schools. It is clear that the University is fully aware of this variation and of the various practices undertaken. The team found that link tutors are pivotal agents in the University's support for collaborative provision. They are the communication link between the University and the partner and are involved in checking: the accuracy of a partner's published information, the adequacy of learning resources, and staff development activity in the partner college. They provide an annual report to their home school and the University.

12   Academic Council is responsible for the academic oversight of the University's entire provision. The Academic Collaboration Committee is the committee of Academic Council that monitors all collaborative provision on its behalf. The work of the former Academic Planning Sub-Committee is now shared between two new but smaller committees, the Partner Scrutiny Panel and the Academic Planning Committee.

13   The Partner Scrutiny Panel is responsible for making recommendations to Academic Council about the approval of potential new partners. This panel is relatively new, and it is difficult to tell, at this stage, whether it is working effectively. The Academic Planning Committee is responsible for authorising programmes, both internal and collaborative, to proceed to development and approval, and also for their suspension or discontinuation.

14   The University defines two key principles for the management of its academic quality and standards. The first is that authority for the management of quality and standards is delegated to the academic schools through their delivery of programmes of study, operating within agreed frameworks, principles and protocols. The second is that engagement with external evaluation of University standards and quality management processes is fundamental, and provides an independent and critically supportive view of those standards and processes.

15   The University acknowledges that there has been and still is some variation in practice in the collaborative provision arrangements across the range and claims that this is now being harmonised. The audit team recognised that progress in this direction was being made but also noted that a considerable amount of work needed to be done before full harmony was established. It became apparent to the team during the audit that tensions remained between the views of senior managers in the University as to the degree of central control required to ensure uniformity. The magnitude of collaborative provision at the University has led to considerable stress of the present management structures, and the audit team was not entirely convinced that the present structures were sufficiently robust to

manage the entire varied provision. The team therefore advises the University to ensure that, as it continues to develop its collaborative strategy, its processes and structures are appropriate to the scale and complexity of its collaborative provision.

16   School Learning and Quality Committees oversee each school's collaborative provision. Some have collaboration subcommittees. Academic Council receives many different reports from different bodies. The audit team was not fully convinced how Academic Council could exercise proper oversight of its work, given the multiplicity of committees and boards working at various levels and reporting to it.

17   An improved template for both the Memorandum of Agreement and the Financial Memorandum were put in place very recently. The audit team saw examples of these for the partners that it visited and took the view that they were thorough and fit for purpose. In particular, the team judged the Table of Responsibilities contained within the revised Memorandum of Agreement template, which makes it clear to both the University and its partners where their respective responsibilities lie, to be a feature of good practice.

18   The audit team found that a fully up-to-date register of collaborative provision is not routinely maintained and it could find no evidence of such a register being available as part of the institution's information available to the public. Consequently, the team advises the University to create and maintain a publicly available and up-to-date list of collaborative partners and programmes.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

19   From the start of the academic year 2010-11, the University separated partner and programme approval processes. Partner approval is undertaken by the Partner Scrutiny Panel, which is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), on behalf of Academic Council. Academic Council must endorse the approval of the partner before any programmes can proceed to approval. Recommendations for approval of a partner by the Partner Scrutiny Panel are based on key information including the partner's background, structure and staffing, a due diligence report and an institutional visit report compiled as the result of a visit by senior University managers. On approval, the appointed institutional link manager arranges for the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement, which is done on behalf of the University by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development).

20   Renewal of partner approval is also undertaken by the Partner Scrutiny Panel on the basis of evidence, drawn from a variety of sources, such as progression and achievement statistics, external examiners' reports and student feedback. The Panel can ask for further information and may require an on-site or virtual review event before recommending (or otherwise) re-approval. Should re-approval be refused, the University has discontinuation processes in place. Discontinuation must be approved by Academic Council and be conducted in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement.

21   The University approves three broad approaches to programmes for delivery at partners: franchised programmes, validated programmes, and external validation. It also has articulation agreements and external credit rating (see paragraphs 25-27). The University uses similar frameworks for programme approval in its collaborative partners and its mainstream provision. After initial discussions, proposals are submitted to the Academic Planning Committee along with the required documentation. The Academic Planning Committee then authorises the programme for development or requests further information or refuses authorisation.

22   Once authorisation to proceed has been granted, the school identifies a link tutor who then works with the partner to prepare for the approval event. The Quality Assurance Handbook lists the minimum documentation required for an approval event. There must be explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure.

23   The approval event is normally organised by the school. The criteria for the composition of panels, which must have external members, are clearly set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. For a newly approved partner, the event involves a face-to-face meeting at the partner which includes a senior member of University staff and the link tutor.

24   Approval decisions and the meeting of any conditions are signed off by the panel chair on a pro forma and reported to the School Learning and Quality Committees and noted in School Boards. The reports of such events are passed to the Learning and Quality Unit and reported to the Academic Collaboration Committee and the Learning and Quality Committee. A scrutiny group, on behalf of the Academic Collaboration Committee, monitors the composition, conduct and findings of panels. The reports seen by the team included detailed recommendations for the University that are appropriately followed up.

25   All new articulation agreements are subject to approval by the Academic Planning Committee. The audit team was told that the University expected such articulation to include a mapping of the partner provision against relevant University provision and would expect the partner provision to go through a local quality regulatory regime. The University specifies a process for articulation from postgraduate diplomas to University of Greenwich master's provision, which imposes requirements on the nature of the body awarding the diploma. However, the relevant form for programme teams does not make explicit either these requirements, or the requirement to map partner provision against that of the University. The team would encourage the University to clarify its expectations in this area to programme teams.

26   The University has an external credit rating process by which a judgment is made about the volume and level of academic credit that can be awarded for courses offered by other providers and then be used for admission with advanced standing to University awards. This process is undertaken within schools. The audit team found a significant difference in practice between the two main schools that carry out this activity. The School of Health and Social Care has a well-documented and thorough approach, whereas the School of Education has a far less robust approach, with no involvement of external input. The University did recognise in June 2009 that guidance on credit rating needed to be improved, and a revision to the Quality Assurance Handbook on external credit rating was considered by the Learning and Quality Committee. The draft minute seen by the team referred to the importance of external examiners. The audit team felt this action needed to be completed promptly and therefore advises the University to put in place a consistent and robust approach to the credit rating of external courses.

27   The University has introduced a risk-based process for changes made to existing programmes. Any changes must be submitted to the School Learning and Quality Committee on a pro forma that notes the impact and significance of the proposed changes and scores amendments to the programmes, resulting in a total risk score. An appendix records the running total of all changes and their risk scores. Where the total risk score is 10 or more, either the periodic review of the programme will be brought forward or a replacement programme will be proposed for authorisation by the Academic Planning Committee. Once approved the changes are monitored by the Learning and Quality Unit. While the process was only introduced for the academic year 2010-11, the audit team felt that it would allow the University appropriate oversight and would prove to be an effective method by which the University could assure itself that programme outcomes continued to

be met. The team regarded the risk assessment approach to tracking cumulative curriculum changes, in order to prevent curriculum drift, to be a feature of good practice.

28   All collaborative programmes are required to have a programme monitoring report, which is completed by the collaborative partner. The audit team was told that such reports would be considered by programme committees in the partners; however it was also told that the University does not have a policy on the convening of such committees and that there are no set agendas for such. This latter position was confirmed by the staff the team met. In some partners, programme committees have been established for a considerable time, however in others programme committees are relatively new. In the documentation seen by the team, it was clear that monitoring reports are considered by School Learning and Quality Committees.

29   Programme monitoring reports feed into the School Monitoring and Reporting Document, which was introduced in 2009-10 for on-campus provision. The document, which focuses on risk-based action using key performance indicators, was being rolled out for collaborative provision in 2010-11. The reports encourage a focused approach on issues and actions. Where there is collaborative provision, the relevant link tutor completes a report, which feeds into school monitoring processes. The School Monitoring and Reporting Document is considered by School Boards, before a scrutiny group considers the quality and standards sections of all school reports. The scrutiny group reports on quality and standards issues to the Learning and Quality Committee and to the Academic Collaboration Committee in relation to collaborative provision. The School Monitoring and Reporting Documents include appendices that map programme progression, course achievement and National Student Survey results against University key performance indicators along with actions to be taken and an appendix listing actions in respect of points raised by external examiners. It was clear to the audit team that the detailed monitoring through the School Monitoring and Reporting Documents provided the University with appropriate oversight of partner college issues with respect to academic standards. The team also felt that the report of the scrutiny group provided a further useful source of information for the University. However, while there is a specific section in the reports for comment on collaborative partners, the team noticed that aspects of collaboration occurred in other sections of the document and felt that pulling together all aspects of collaboration into one section of the report might make the task of the scrutiny group easier.

30   Members of the Partner College Network and partners who deal with more than one school must produce an Annual Institutional Report, which is circulated to the Regional Academic Partnerships Unit, the Learning and Quality Unit and the schools' Directors of Learning and Quality. The Learning and Quality Unit produces an overview report for the Academic Collaboration Committee for partner reports and a scrutiny group (different from that referred to immediately above) produces a report on international multi-disciplinary Annual Institutional Reports. The team felt that such reports were a useful addition to the information received by the University as part of its oversight of partners and also noted that it was the only document where a partner could comment on the institutional relationship with the University.

31   The University strengthened the periodic review process after a recommendation made by the 2009 QAA Institutional audit. Periodic review, which covers collaborative provision, now occurs every five years, unless there is a concern. The review process consists of a critical appraisal and meetings with senior managers, teaching staff and students. In addition, where there is significant learning in the workplace, the panel may meet employers. The composition of the panel is laid down in the Quality Assurance Handbook and includes external panel member(s). The panel chair confirms that conditions arising from the review have been met in the same way as confirmation that conditions have

been met in programme approval. The composition, conduct and findings of panels are received by the Academic Collaboration Committee in the same way as approval reports.

32   The audit team found that the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are routinely discussed in University and school committees. The design of any new programme is required to conform with the key aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. Schools and offices are expected to align with the QAA *Code of practice*. Advance notice of revisions in the Academic Infrastructure is sent to schools. Any revisions to section 2 of the *Code of practice* are considered by the Partner Scrutiny Panel, the Learning and Quality Unit and the Academic Collaboration Committee.

33   The Briefing Paper stated that it was unusual for professional, statutory or regulatory bodies to accredit provision delivered through partner institutions, although this has happened with a few programmes. The audit team's examination of an accreditation of a programme at a partner college showed that there was a clear information flow between school and University committees.

34   The University gives support for partners during Integrated quality and enhancement review, which includes attendance at Developmental engagements and Summative reviews. The Academic Collaboration Committee receives the reports and schools' Learning and Quality Committees monitor responses.

35   The management of assessment processes relating to collaborative provision takes place within the framework provided by the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Awards. The regulations give clear guidance on: the information to be given to students; the responsibilities of students; and the definitions of compensation, condonation, and re-assessment - in addition to defining the academic standards of the awards and defining grade descriptors.

36   Schools have their own Assessment Policies, which are approved by the Learning and Quality Committee. Of interest to the audit team was the time taken to return assessed work to students. The Greenwich University Charter specifies three weeks, which was confirmed to the team by the University. However, the team was also told that schools could deviate from this norm in exceptional circumstances. The team saw the assessment policies of all schools. Of these, two gave the return time as three weeks, another stated that the time was six weeks, while others did not specify a return time. The students met by the team felt that the feedback they received was timely and that they knew what they had to do to achieve particular grades. In addition they told the team that submission dates were made clear to them. At the time of the audit, the University had begun work on a University Assessment Policy, the draft of which was to be considered by the University in May 2011. The team felt that the matter needed to be resolved for collaborative provision and therefore advises the University to ensure an appropriately consistent approach to the provision of timely feedback on all student work.

37   In one of the University's collaborations, students gain a dual award, one from the University and one from the partner. The University Academic Regulations allow for this. The team was unable to find any discussion within a University committee of the potential consequences of allowing dual awards. The University might find precept A13 of section 2 of the *Code of practice* to be a useful point of reference. The team also found that staff were not aware of these potential consequences, such as ensuring that all assessments fall under the University's own regulations.

38   For all its provision, the University operates a two-tier examination board structure consisting of Subject Assessment Panels and the Progression and Awards Board. The composition and powers of each are stated in the Academic Regulations and are

appropriate. The wide discretion that was allowed to Progression and Awards Boards at the time of the last Institutional audit, and which was the subject of a recommendation in the report, has now been removed.

39   Nominations for appointment as external examiner come from departments and are approved by schools before being sent to the Learning and Quality Committee for ratification on behalf of Academic Council. The Academic Regulations specify clear criteria for the appointment, induction, and duties of external examiners in addition to the process for responding to their reports. Where possible, external examiners visit partner institutions, although the University acknowledges that this practice is almost entirely confined to UK partners.

40   External examiners send their reports electronically on a University template and are encouraged to comment on individual centres. The Briefing Paper acknowledged that this is proving challenging. Work is underway to ensure that this coverage occurs. Reports are distributed to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), Learning and Quality Unit, and senior school representatives. Schools are responsible for the distribution to partners and are expected to respond to any issues, which they do as part of annual monitoring.

41   The audit team was told that it is not University policy to make external examiners' reports available to all students but that such reports would be discussed at programme committees which would include student representatives. All of the students met by the team stated that they had not seen an external examiner's report, although some had met external examiners.

42   The Memorandum of Agreement state that the responsibility for the issuing of certificates and transcripts lies with the University. The Academic Regulations mandate that the location and language of instruction be listed on the transcript, but this is not reflected in the Memoranda of Agreement. The audit team saw an example of a certificate and transcript from a University in the Netherlands, for which the transcript clearly stated the location of the teaching and that the language of instruction was Dutch. External examiners for such provision are required to understand higher education in the UK.

43   The Briefing Paper stated that statistical data similar to that provided for the University's internal provision is also provided for review of collaborative provision, and as such the University's database can be interrogated to provide data for programmes at each partner. The Briefing Paper also stated that partner colleges have been given direct access to the database so that they may use this in annual reporting and that the feasibility of extending this to full-cost partners is being considered. However, the programme monitoring reports submitted by partners and seen by the team were variable in their use of data.

44   On the evidence seen by the audit team, it was clear that data from collaborative provision was discussed within the University. The Academic Collaboration Committee receives reports on student recruitment and progression, as does Academic Council. On the other hand, at school level, the team found the level of discussion to be more variable.

45   The audit team recognised that the University had undertaken a review of its processes and procedures in relation to its collaborative provision and that it had acknowledged that there are still areas it has to address - and what those areas are. The team agreed that the University was moving in the right direction but felt that greater urgency was required. Notwithstanding the need for more rapid progress, from the evidence provided to it, the team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

46   The University regards student representation and feedback as essential to the assurance and enhancement of its academic provision. The Partnership Agreement, which replaces the Memorandum of Agreement for partner colleges, states that University quality assurance arrangements apply. Other partner institutions are required, under the terms of their agreements, to gather feedback from students. The University states that the exact means for this are agreed as part of the approval and review process, although such agreement was not always evident in approval and review reports.

47   Questionnaires include the National Student Survey and the University's own student survey; but response rates from students in collaborative provision have been lower than for on-campus students. There was evidence that the National Student Survey results in partner colleges were considered by the University and dealt with appropriately.

48   Partners are required to have a student representation system in place to enable feedback on areas of concern to be raised and actions reported upon. Most partners hold programme committees, which consider feedback from student representatives together with survey results. Some partner colleges also have 'student voice' schemes and student representation on college committees. Although students reported that actions did ensue and were communicated to them, programme committee minutes were not always sufficiently clear, and actions to address concerns were not identified or followed through. The University states that feedback from students is reported through annual monitoring, but this was not always evident in programme monitoring reports and link tutors' annual reports; neither did it necessarily result in actions and follow up. (See paragraph 52.)

49   The link tutor plays a key role in monitoring the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and in ensuring that the information obtained is used appropriately. The audit team found wide variation in terms of the involvement of link tutors in programme committees and in their meetings with students. The University states that 'whenever possible, link tutors are also required to have direct, private discussions with partner students' but the team heard of instances where this does not happen. Given the heavy reliance on link tutors as a source of feedback from students, the University might consider how to make private meetings of link tutors with students a more common occurrence, and how to provide clearer guidance on link tutor involvement in programme committees.

50   There appeared to be inconsistent practice in relation to the consideration of programme monitoring reports and external examiners' reports by partners' programme committees, which therefore affected the ability of student representatives to contribute to this aspect of the quality assurance process. Although the reports were seen and approved by some programme committees, there was insufficient evidence that this was always the case.

51   There is no consistent approach to training for student representatives in partner institutions, but greater guidance on the role of student representatives had recently been developed. The University is encouraged to continue to develop training for student representatives to ensure they are well-prepared for and supported in their role. The University does not include student representatives on review or approval panels, although panels do meet with students. Non-collaborative students are represented throughout the University's committee structure, but it was difficult to judge the extent to which the views of collaborative partner students are represented at an institutional level.

52   The audit team concluded that although there was evidence from students that student feedback was, in the main, acted upon at a local level by the partners, the degree of

variability and the lack of prominence in reporting that is given to feedback from collaborative provision students meant that it was unclear how the University assured itself that this was the case. The team therefore recommends that the University seek to achieve greater consistency in the expectations placed upon its partners in relation to student involvement in quality assurance processes and give greater prominence to feedback from students in the partner's and University's reporting processes.

53   The University aims to be 'research-informed' and its Learning and Teaching Strategy includes objectives to link teaching to research, scholarship and advanced professional practice. For its own provision, the University requires teaching teams delivering at level 6 and above to include active researchers and/or staff engaged in advanced professional practice and consultancy. It states that it expects the same level of expertise in its partners. Evidence was heard during the partner visits of how the relationship with the University, including scholarly exchange and joint research, had enhanced the quality and experience of partner staff. However, there was little evidence in programme approval and review reports that linking teaching to research, scholarship and advanced professional practice was seen as a key issue.

54   The audit team concluded that the University recognised the need to support partners in developing research and scholarship to enhance learning opportunities but found that practice and its effectiveness was varied. The University is therefore encouraged to continue to pursue the inclusion of partner staff in such developments.

55   Only a limited number of collaborative programmes are delivered through other modes of study, although e-learning forms an integral part of almost all provision and work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees. In response to recommendations in the Integrated quality and enhancement reviews of some partner colleges, self-assessments of work-based learning for Foundation Degrees have been conducted and good practice has been disseminated. The audit team concluded that where other modes of study were used they were subject to appropriate approval and that ongoing support contributed to the quality of the student learning experience.

56   The University is making an increasing range of academic facilities available to collaborative partner students through the use of internet-based technology which includes the electronic library and the use of the virtual learning environment to distribute support materials. Significant effort has been made to maximise the availability of online resources, and this was valued by partner staff and students. There have been some delays in students being able to access the student portal linked to their registration; however, latterly this appears to have improved markedly, and students did not report it as a concern for the current academic year. The Off-Campus Services Contact and Remote Support team provides support for all remote users, including collaborative provision staff and students. It does this through: 'self-help' materials; email, interactive and telephone help facilities; and through regular liaison with schools and their collaborative partners. The audit team felt the services provided by this team, and by Information and Library Services (of which it is a part), make a valuable contribution to the learning opportunities of collaborative partner students.

57   For partner colleges, the Partnership Agreement states that 'a higher education learning environment will exist and be maintained in the College' and that 'an HE common room will normally be provided by the College'. However, the audit team found several instances where repeated concerns had been raised about inadequate provision by colleges but had not been resolved by the University. The audit team therefore recommends that the University improve the effectiveness of its procedures for ongoing monitoring of its partner colleges to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate higher education learning environment.

58   Although learning resources are assessed at the point of partner and programme approval, these are not then tied in any way to maximum student numbers on each course. There is therefore no formal mechanism in place to ensure that the learning resources are still sufficient for increased student numbers, other than retrospectively through the link tutor and programme monitoring reports. The audit team felt that the University needs to be assured that the learning resources available match the number of students on each programme. The team therefore advises that, at programme approval, the University agree with the relevant partner a maximum cohort size that is commensurate with the resources available. Notwithstanding these recommendations, the audit team concluded that the University's processes for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were in the main effective.

59   The University sees its work with partner colleges as making an important contribution to access and widening participation. It encourages the accreditation of prior learning, where it can appropriately contribute to study on programmes, and ensures that the accreditation process is dealt with by the host schools rather than the partner. The University states that the majority of admissions decisions are taken by the partner in accordance with set guidelines and criteria agreed with the host school, but the audit team saw no evidence of these guidelines or criteria in the approval and review reports provided. Decisions relating to applicants without relevant formal qualifications are normally referred to the host school for a decision, but the audit team found that in one partner these decisions were made locally. The audit team therefore recommends that where admissions decisions are being made by partner colleges on applicants without relevant formal qualifications, the University agree with those partners clear criteria to ensure consistency and equity of treatment of applicants.

60   The audit team saw little documentary evidence in programme reviews and programme monitoring reports concerning either the admissions criteria or their application. Given the example in the preceding paragraph, the University may wish to consider how its monitoring processes could make more explicit some reflection on the appropriateness of the admissions criteria and their application in its partners.

61   Responsibility for student support is placed by the University with the collaborative partners and is considered as part of the partner and programme approval and review processes, although such consideration was often not explicit or evident in the reports of these processes. Students are informed of the support available through a number of means. Students seen by the audit team felt well-informed as to the support available and, in the main, considered that it met their needs.

62   Partner college students are eligible to become Associate Members of the University Students' Union, and the University is now working with the Students' Union to develop ways of engaging with partner college students to a greater extent and of developing their sense of identity as Greenwich students. The University has developed guidelines for staff on supporting the transition of new students into higher education, and the team encourages the University to disseminate this practice more widely among partners. The audit team found strong employer links in some of the partners, which were felt to be important in supporting students in terms of employability. The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for student support were effective and were continuing to develop and improve.

63   The University expects its partners to have an appropriate system of staff support and development in place. The University provides access to a range of development opportunities for partner staff, including reduced tuition fees for programmes leading to awards of the University and targeted staff development events. Support for partner staff is also provided through less formal routes, during link tutor and other staff visits. Some partner

staff have spent more extended periods of time at the University, which appeared to be strongly valued by those involved.

64   The University's Educational Development Unit is increasingly proactive in identifying and meeting staff development needs of partners and has started to visit partners to explore this issue. The University recognises that it can also benefit from the experience and expertise of its partner staff, and the team encourages it to draw on this experience.

65   Considering the importance of the link tutor role, the audit team felt that greater attention should be paid to training and development for link tutors. The team would therefore encourage the University to formalise some of the existing support and to develop shared learning resources and approaches to induction, based on best practice from across the University. Apart from that, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for staff support and development were, in the main, effective.

66   The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students through its collaborative provision arrangements.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

67   The University's stated view of quality enhancement follows that of QAA and thus is concerned with 'deliberate institutional steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students'. The 2009 Institutional audit noted that the University 'has traditionally adopted a relatively "light touch" for centralised enhancement initiatives', and the audit team saw evidence that this approach to centralised initiatives was still prevalent.

68   At institutional level, the University has several strategies that are important for quality enhancement: the Corporate Plan, which includes the aims of providing innovative programmes, and of providing a high-quality learning environment; the Learning and Teaching Strategy; and the e-Learning Strategy. The six key aims of the Learning and Teaching Strategy have supporting objectives and activities, many of which have the potential for enhancing quality; however, few were mentioned by staff when questioned about enhancement.

69   In the various reports that are compiled for programme monitoring and review the team saw evidence that staff were asked to reflect and identify elements of good practice. However, it was less clear how those aspects identified were taken forward or disseminated more widely in any systematic way.

70   Among the areas where the audit team did note institutional steps to improve quality of learning opportunities in collaborative provision were:

- multi-school partnership meetings
- the work of the Partnership Development Group
- the introduction of key performance indicators to the School Monitoring and Reviewing Document
- the increased investment in the Educational Development Unit.

71   Multi-school partnership meetings were introduced in autumn 2010 and are intended to provide an opportunity for University staff to focus on a particular partner institution. There is a meeting for each partner that interacts with more than one school, and representatives from the schools attend along with central administrative staff. Although it is

too early for the team to give a firm judgement, meetings in the initial round have been welcomed by those involved. The team found clear potential for enhancement here.

72   The Partnership Development Group works specifically with the Partner College Network. Its original purpose was to enable partner colleges to share and exchange information about their programme planning and development. However, it has also acted as a forum for sharing good practice and has identified staff development needs in the colleges and organised events to meet those needs.

73   The introduction of School Monitoring and Reporting Documents has allowed the University to require schools to consider risk-based action planning against a set of Key Performance Indicators. While the audit team recognised that these are large documents, which cover a wide range of both mainstream and collaborative provision, the use of key performance indicators seems to be a useful way to track performance across different centres. Any performance outside the agreed range for particular indicators triggers a requirement for comment and associated action. An overview report, which identifies good practice and recommendations for the University, is produced by the Learning and Quality Unit for the Learning and Quality Committee and Academic Council.

74   The importance of the Educational Development Unit in delivering aspects of the institutional enhancement initiatives has been acknowledged recently by the University's increased investment in staff resources. The audit team heard that the unit was responsible for the annual Learning and Teaching and the e-Learning Conferences, which some staff at partner institutions had attended. Plans were also mentioned for the unit to work with the International Partnerships Manager on the development of training materials for new link tutors. The audit team affirms the unit's work to support collaborative provision.

75   The audit team saw several examples of good practice in individual schools that are worthy of dissemination for wider adoption. Current reports and procedures seem to be effective at identifying good practice, but there is more work to be done in transforming such practices into institutional initiatives in a structured way. Although the audit team found little evidence of systematic enhancement, it concluded that recent changes to the management of collaborative provision had the potential to strengthen the enhancement of learning opportunities in the University's collaborative provision.

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

76   The University does not offer postgraduate research programmes through collaborative provision.

Section 6: Published information

77   In its meetings with students, both on partner link visits and during the audit visit itself, the audit team heard no concerns at all from students about the accuracy of the information provided to them, either before or during their study.

78   The Quality Assurance Handbook lists the information regarded as essential to be provided to students. This requirement covers information about the specific programme as well as more general information about access to support, links to important University policies and additional information for students at partner institutions, such as the name and contact details for the link tutor, and facilities available at the partner.

79   The student handbooks seen by the audit team were of variable quality. Some were clearly based on a template from the host school, while others were not. However, even the better handbooks did not include all the essential information mentioned above: in particular, the programme specification was not explicitly included in any of the examples seen. Programme specifications are part of the required information at programme approval and review, but they do not seem to be routinely made available to current students, although selected information from the programme specification can be found in handbooks (and some schools put specifications online). Students met by the team evinced little, if any, knowledge of programme specifications. The audit team was encouraged to hear that the recent requirement to supply all essential information to students was being rolled out to all partner institutions, for existing as well as new programmes. Nonetheless, the team advises that programme specifications should be made consistently available to prospective and current students.

80   Partners deal initially with all student complaints, but, where relevant, a student has a right of recourse to the University's procedures. The audit team found, however, that information in handbooks on complaints was inconsistent and potentially confusing. The University should consider reflecting the rights of students in respect of complaints in the Memoranda of Agreement and ensuring information provided in the student handbooks on complaints also reflects accurately and clearly students' rights. The Memoranda of Agreement specify that appeals about academic procedures are dealt with under the University's regulations, and the team was satisfied that this had been communicated to students at partner institutions.

81   In the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences a collaborations website is used to provide information for both staff and students involved in collaborative programmes. This is an effective mechanism for communicating a consistent message to a large number of collaborative partners, and it also provides a vehicle for communication between staff at different partners who teach the same programme, thereby reducing the load on link tutors, programme leaders and the University's International Collaborations Director. The team regarded the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences' collaborations website, which is a source of useful information for staff and students involved in collaborative programmes, as a feature of good practice.

82   Several mechanisms are used to check the accuracy and completeness of information published by partner organisations. Constraints on the use of publicity and marketing materials are recorded in the templates for Memoranda of Agreement for international partnerships and for local partner colleges. Collaborative partners are expected to obtain permission to use the University's name and logo. Link tutors are expected to monitor published materials, both on paper and on the web. In visit reports, they are asked to comment on the accuracy of publicity material and websites. In addition to checks by link tutors, the Marketing Office conducts sample checks of websites, and, during overseas visits, local material is checked by International Office staff. A more systematic review of partner websites is also carried out by the Partnerships Office.

83   The recently introduced multi-school partnership meetings include a discussion on publicity and marketing as part of their standard agenda for a meeting about a particular partner. This allows interchange of views between staff in different schools on this subject.

84   While these mechanisms for the checking of public information are appropriate, the audit team found some lack of consistency in their application. The team saw several examples where published information was not accurate, either on websites or in printed publications.

85   However, on the basis of the evidence seen, the audit team concluded that, for the most part, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes and permits to be published about the quality of its collaborative provision and the standards of the collaborative awards. The University is encouraged to continue to ensure that the existing procedures for checking the information published by collaborative partners are followed in all cases.

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

86   The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the Table of Responsibilities contained within the revised Memorandum of Agreement template, which makes it clear to both the University and its partners where their respective responsibilities lie (paragraph 17)
- the risk assessment approach to tracking cumulative curriculum changes, in order to prevent curriculum drift (paragraph 27)
- the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences' collaborations website, which is a source of useful information for staff and students involved in collaborative programmes (paragraph 81).

Recommendations for action

87   The team considers it advisable for the University to:

- ensure that, as the University continues to develop its collaborative strategy, its processes and structures are appropriate to the scale and complexity of its collaborative provision (paragraph 15)
- create and maintain a publicly available and up-to-date list of collaborative partners and programmes (paragraph 18)
- put in place a consistent and robust approach to the credit rating of external courses (paragraph 26)
- ensure an appropriately consistent approach to the provision of timely feedback on all student work (paragraph 36)
- at programme approval, agree with the relevant partner a maximum cohort size that is commensurate with the resources available (paragraph 58)
- where admissions decisions are being made by partner institutions on applicants without relevant formal qualifications, agree with those partners clear criteria to ensure consistency and equity of treatment of applicants (paragraph 59)
- consistently make programme specifications available to prospective and current students (paragraph 79).

88   The team considers it desirable for the University to:

- seek to achieve greater consistency in the expectations placed upon its partners in relation to student involvement in quality assurance processes and give greater prominence to feedback from students in the partner's and University's reporting processes (paragraph 48-52)
- improve the effectiveness of its procedures for ongoing monitoring of its partner colleges to ensure the continued provision of an appropriate higher education learning environment (paragraph 57).

Appendix

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

The University of Greenwich welcomes this positive Audit of collaborative provision and the judgements 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. The outcome of the audit reflects the commitment and hard work of staff and students at the University and our collaborative partners in the UK and overseas, in providing an excellent experience for students studying for University of Greenwich awards at our collaborative partners.

Over the last two years the University has started a process of procedural reorganisation to improve the management of quality assurance and enhancement in our collaborative provision. It is reassuring that these approaches have been endorsed through the audit scrutiny and identified as examples of good practice.

The University appreciates the professional and courteous approach taken by the audit team throughout the audit visits. We have found the team's recommendations to be appropriate, reasonable and helpful in drawing up an action plan to further enhance our processes. Work is already underway and will be monitored by the Learning and Quality Committee and Academic Council.