

University of Hull

MAY 2006

Preface

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

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

The purpose of collaborative provision audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of collaborative provision audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Hull (the University) from 8 to 12 May 2006 to carry out an audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff of the University, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its collaborative provision. As part of the audit process, the team visited three of the University's collaborative partners where it spoke to students on the University's collaborative programmes and to members of staff of the partner institution.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

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

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

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

Outcome of the collaborative provision audit

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

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements, and that
- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

Features of good practice

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

- the clarity of the University's strategy for the development of higher education to meet the economic and social needs of the region
- the University's commitment to staff development at partner colleges including the identification of staff needs and the opportunities provided for colleagues to share experience
- the moderation of assessment conducted at partner institutions by staff of the University
- the process by which the University managed the withdrawal from a partnership arrangement that no longer matched its regional strategy
- the process for ensuring that external examiner reports are effectively considered and acted upon, and

- the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and the consultation between the University and its partner institutions on the schedule for replacing the existing VLE platform.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises that the University:

- ensures that an appropriate level of academic and administrative staff resource provision underpins its expanding collaborative activity to enable it to assure itself of the quality and standards of such activity
- stipulates the period of programme approval at validation so that it is clear when a programme should be revalidated to ensure its continued currency and relevance
- clarifies, for the benefit of those involved in collaborative provision leading to its awards, the relationship between the revalidation of programmes at partner institutions and the system of periodic review of subjects
- keeps under review the implementation of the new code of practice as it relates to the use of academic consultants appointed to provide specialist curriculum advice to partners offering non-comparable provision, and
- satisfies itself that new programme approvals take account of external advice and that conditions and recommendations set at the time of approval are followed up expeditiously and clearly documented.

The team considers that it would be desirable for the University to:

- introduce a more systematic approach to site visits in the partner and programme approval process

- develop a common student information system which allows comparative analysis of student progression and achievement across on-campus and collaborative partner provision
- strengthen its procedures for granting Recognised Teacher Status (RTS) to ensure that all partner staff teaching on collaborative programmes are RTS-approved in a timely manner and at the appropriate level of teaching, and
- ensure that the currency of relevant entries on partner institutions' websites is maintained.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University has responded appropriately to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications, and the *Code of practice*, all published by QAA.

In due course, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the teaching quality information published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The audit team was satisfied that the University is taking appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it publishes (or authorises to be published) about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards, and about the standards of those awards.

Main report

Main report

1 An audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University of Hull (the University) was undertaken during the period 8 to 12 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

3 The collaborative provision audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards through collaborative arrangements; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study offered through collaborative arrangements that lead to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its collaborative provision; and for the discharge of its responsibility as an awarding body. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited three of the University's collaborative partners.

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

4 Founded in 1927 as a University College offering University of London degrees, the University received its Royal Charter in 1954. Although the University has been involved in collaborative provision for more than 15 years, it has focused on collaborative provision in the United Kingdom (UK) over the last five years and, more recently, on its sub-regions, namely the Humber and North Yorkshire in addition to Doncaster. The University leads a network of seven further education and six sixth form colleges in a regional Associate Colleges Network (ACN) which is committed to widening participation. The University and its Associate Colleges meet regularly as the Associate Colleges Board (ACB), established in 1995.

5 The University merged with the former Humberside College of Health and with University College Scarborough in 1996 and 2000 respectively. In 2003, it acquired the campus of the neighbouring University of Lincoln. That same year, the University established the Hull York Medical School in conjunction with the University of York. The University has two campuses, one in Hull and one in Scarborough. The University's on-campus student population is in the order of 15,500 students of which 1,450 are based at Scarborough. The total number of students following programmes of study leading to its awards at partner institutions (both validated and franchised provision) was 2,882 in 2004-05 with approximately two-thirds of the student population studying on a full-time basis and one-third on a part-time basis. Four of the University's partner institutions deliver taught postgraduate programmes.

6 The University's academic provision is based within four faculties (Applied Science and Technology; Arts and Social Sciences; Health and Social Care; and Science and the Environment), two schools (the Business School and the Hull York Medical School); and two

institutes (the Institute for Learning and the Postgraduate Medical Institute). From August 2006, the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology and the Faculty of Science and the Environment are to merge. The Business School has the largest and longest established collaborative provision.

7 The University's collaborative provision includes validated and franchised programmes with 12 partners, progression agreements with 11 partners, a dual award arrangement with one partner, flexible and distributed learning involving on-line provision leading to predominantly postgraduate level awards in Information and Communication Technology for the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages, eLearning, Legislative Studies, Language Learning and Technology, Advising for Language Learning in addition to modular part-time study, and distance taught provision involving four partners.

8 The University's Corporate Plan emphasises the University's regional role and the University is committed to developing partnerships with local further education providers with a view to widening participation in, and access to, higher education(HE); broadening the range of learner opportunities; providing progression routes, including those for vocationally qualified applicants; and raising aspiration.

Background information

9 The published information available for this collaborative provision audit included:

- statistical data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO) and the University
- the information available on the University's website
- the report of the institutional audit undertaken by QAA in November 2004 (the 2004 audit report)

- the report of the quality audit undertaken by QAA in May 2000, published in January 2001
- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level in the five years prior to the collaborative provision audit
- the major review report of healthcare programmes conducted by QAA in 2003-04 (published in February 2004), and
- the report of a review by QAA of the University's collaborative link with an overseas partner, published in February 2000.

10 The University and its partners provided QAA with:

- an institutional collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) and a collaborative provision register
- documentation associated with each of the three partners visited as part of the audit, and
- documentation associated with the four desk-based studies which were part of the audit.

11 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team had access to a range of the University's documents in hard copy and in electronic form. The Students' Union (SU) also provided the team with a statement giving the SU perspective on the University's collaborative provision. The team was able to explore the detail of this statement further in the course of the briefing visit and, subsequently, in the course of visits made to collaborative partners. The team was grateful to the SU for its contribution.

The collaborative provision audit process

12 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in July 2005, QAA confirmed that three partner visits would be conducted between the briefing and audit visits. The University provided its CPSED in January 2006. On the basis of this and other published information, the audit team confirmed the

three partner institutions that it would visit. The University provided QAA with briefing documentation in March 2006 for each of these partner institutions.

13 The audit team visited the University from 14 to 16 March 2006 for the purposes of exploring with senior members of staff of the University, members of staff actively involved in collaborative partnerships, student representatives and representatives from partner institutions, matters relating to the management of quality and academic standards in collaborative provision raised by the University's CPSED and other documentation, and ensuring that the team had a clear understanding of the University's approach to collaborative arrangements. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit was agreed with the University. It was also agreed that, in addition to the three partner visits, four desk-based studies would be undertaken.

14 Visits to partner institutions followed the briefing visit and took place in the period 28 April to 4 May 2006. During these visits members of the audit team met senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives of those partner institutions. The team is grateful to the staff and students of the partner institutions for helping it to gain an understanding of the University's arrangements for managing its collaborative links.

15 The audit visit took place at the University from 8 to 12 May 2006, and included further meetings with staff of the University. The audit team is grateful to all those staff who participated in meetings.

16 The audit team comprised Dr E Briggs, Professor W Chambers, Dr R Gadsden, Mr D Noon, auditors, and Miss S Finnemore, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr I Ainsworth, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

17 The previous institutional audit took place in November 2004. The report of the audit noted as features of good practice the

accessibility of information to staff and students; the approach to the establishment of the Hull York Medical School; the implementation of periodic review; the strategy for student representation on committees; the targeted support to particular categories of students; and the capacity of the 'Marketing Toolkit' to support consistency in external publications.

18 The 2004 audit report also identified a number of points for further consideration, including the development of an institutional-level strategy for the management of joint and 'with' degree programmes; clarification of the University's expectations and requirements of the role of external examiners; and consistent application of assessment criteria at programme level. In addition, the report indicated that it would be desirable for the University to consider the consistent implementation of its staff appraisal process and its peer observation of teaching process; and a more explicit statement of expected student contact with their personal supervisor.

19 While none of the features of good practice or points for further consideration refers explicitly to collaborative provision, the observations relating to the role of external examiners and the need for more effective monitoring of equity across the student experience, do have implications for collaborative provision and are addressed later in this report.

20 The audit team considered that progress was being made on a number of action points arising from the 2004 audit report, including further development of the Quality Handbook to make explicit its application to collaborative provision; periodic review of subjects at collaborative partners; and working with the SU to help collaborative partners to strengthen their student representation arrangements. In addition, the team noted the establishment of a working group to clarify the role of external examiners; and the role of the University's Assessment Committee, a sub-committee of the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC), in addressing the matter of the consistent application of assessment criteria.

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

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

21 The University currently classifies its collaborative provision as either franchised or validated provision. Students on the former have full rights of access to the University's facilities whereas partner institutions are primarily responsible for providing students on validated provision with the necessary learning resources and facilities. However, recognising the potential for confusion and the amount of joint programme development involving the University and its partners, the CPSED acknowledged that 'the distinction between franchised and validated programmes is increasingly untenable'. The University is the 'preferred partner' of the Associate Colleges in relation to validation and is 'moving towards becoming the sole validating body' for some of its partner institutions.

22 The CPSED indicated that, within the UK, the University's collaborative strategy is based on developing a federation of independent institutions delivering University of Hull awards, based on a compact between the partner institutions. The University convenes the Foundation Degree Federation (FDF) which developed from the ACN in 2003 and comprises ACN members with HE provision.

23 The CPSED referred to the benefits of the federal approach and gave, as examples, the joint development of provision and related staff development and training involving the University and partner institutions. The University also considered that federal arrangements brought advantages in the form of simplified quality assurance, funding and regulatory frameworks with the added benefit of providing a single gateway to HE in the region. The ACN was also involved in a successful bid for funding as part of HEFCE's

Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) initiative, proposing the establishment of a new network, with the title of the Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network (YHELLN). Although focused on vocational provision, YHELLN is expected to accelerate and strengthen the University's collaborative links with its partners. The University established one University Centre in 2004 and the establishment of further centres is being considered.

24 The University has taken steps to terminate collaborative links with partners falling outside the scope of its regional strategy within the UK. In addition, internationally, overseas collaborative provision is now focused on a limited number of well established partners, largely through the Business School which has taken a strategic decision to become a 'premier league business school' with external recognition by bodies such as the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and with research acknowledged to be excellent.

25 The University maintains a central register of collaborative provision and has written agreements with each partner institution. Its collaborative provision is underpinned by the quality framework which takes the form of regulations, policies and a comprehensive, and growing, set of codes of practice that apply to both its on-campus and collaborative provision. Key elements of the framework are mandatory for partner institutions and the framework enables the University to discharge its responsibilities for the quality and standards of University awards delivered collaboratively. The CPSED stated that the University's regulations governing the eligibility of candidates for its awards and the application of a common set of regulations ensured consistency across the range of provision leading to University awards. In addition, the Collaborative Handbook was said to give specific guidance to partner institutions on assessment processes, use of the University's assessment tariff and examination arrangements.

26 The University has developed, and started to implement, a framework intended to strengthen its ability to assure the quality and the maintenance and standards of provision which it does not itself deliver and which it terms 'non-comparable' provision. This involves the engagement of external academic staff with experience in the particular subject/discipline. An evaluation of this recent innovation which is being piloted in two of the University's partner institutions at present, is planned for 2006-07.

27 The CPSED highlighted the University's commitment to the continuous improvement of the quality framework, involving consultation with its partner institutions through correspondence; the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC); and the Quality Enhancement Forum (QEF) (see paragraph 30 below) in addition to involvement in other working groups of an ad hoc nature. The audit team considered the University's strategy for the development of HE to meet the economic and social needs of the region to be a feature of good practice.

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

28 The University reviewed its committee structure in 2004 and believes that the new structure 'contributes to the integration of collaborative issues so that they are not perceived or treated in isolation'. Management and committee structures are linked through membership of relevant University officers. As Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor is responsible for learning, teaching and assessment on both on-campus and collaborative programmes and chairs the ULTAC, and the Academic Board which reports to Senate. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) chairs the University's Reach Out and Educational Partnerships Committee (ROEPC) which reports to the Academic Board and is responsible for approving new educational partnerships.

29 Established in 2003, the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) is responsible for the oversight of quality assurance and enhancement, quality systems and academic standards processes relating to its provision, whether delivered collaboratively or on-campus. The Academic Approvals Committee (AAC) is responsible for collaborative programme approvals, amendments and withdrawals. Joint Boards of Studies (JBoSs) oversee such provision at the discipline level and review programmes, reporting to the relevant Joint Development Board (JDB) and Faculty Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (FLTAC) to ensure scrutiny of collaborative provision alongside on-campus provision.

30 Established in 2004, the CPC (see paragraph 27 above) enables discussion of the processes to be applied in assuring quality, maintaining standards and contributing to the enhancement of collaborative provision. The CPC reports to the QSC and includes membership of University staff and representation from two partner institutions. The QEF (see paragraph 27 above) provides an informal forum for discussion of quality-related matters in collaborative provision and facilitates the sharing of good practice and experience and deliberations. All partner institutions are members of the QEF and thereby contribute to discussion within the CPC.

31 The ACB, JDBs and JBoSs are joint boards of the University and its partner institutions. Chaired by the University Advisor on Educational Partnerships (UAEP), the ACB discusses strategies and shares good practice. It reports to the ROEPC and has partner institution and faculty membership. There is a JDB for each partner institution, chaired by the UAEP, providing strategic oversight of the relationship between the University and the relevant partner, including new programme development consent. In the case of non-comparable provision, the University has redesignated one JDB as the Joint Academic Board (JAB) to reflect 'an increased emphasis on its academic role and relationships'. The JAB includes faculty representatives; from 2006-07 it will also include an external academic

consultant who reports to senior college and University managers.

32 The quality framework is published in the University Quality Handbook which incorporates the University's Collaborative Handbook: Validated Provision. Developed in its current format in 2005, the Collaborative Handbook brings together and makes explicit the procedures relating to collaborative provision, indicating the responsibilities and duties of the parties involved. It currently focuses upon validated provision, reflecting the extent of this type of collaborative provision, but is expected to be revised in 2006-07 to encompass other collaborative arrangements.

33 The *Code of practice, Section 2*, was said to have informed additions and modifications to the University's quality framework in the form of, for example, University codes of practice (UCoPs) on the approval of collaborative provision, admissions devolution, and the requirement for Recognised Teacher Status (RTS). Consultation with partner institutions had suggested a lack of clarity, however, about the applicability of UCoPs to collaborative provision. In response to this, the CPSED indicated that, from 2005-06, the authors and QSC would establish the applicability of each new or revised UCoP to collaborative provision.

34 The CPSED indicated that senior staff at partner institutions are responsible for ensuring that an appropriate infrastructure is in place to enable delivery of collaborative provision and to implement the University's quality framework. Such staff are ex officio members of the JDBs. HE managers, or their equivalent, manage HE provision and coordinate University-related activity. They are involved in the QEF, JBoSs and JDBs.

35 The UAEP advises the University's senior management team on strategic and operational matters relating to links between the University and further education partners. The UAEP also 'champions educational partnership issues' at Senate, ROEPC and the QSC which is chaired by the Quality Director, University Registrar and Secretary (QDURS). Reporting to the QSC, the

QDURS and staff within the University's Quality Office work with staff in partner institutions to ensure an appropriate level of collaboration. The Quality Office has been strengthened by the appointment of a quality officer with specific responsibility for collaborative provision and the Quality Office website went live in March 2006.

36 Discipline level interactions between the University and its partners involve designated 'coordinators' who are academic staff at departmental or faculty level. Coordinators oversee the management of programmes in their discipline and represent the University at partner institutions through attending module and programme boards of examiners and JBoSs. Where non-comparable programme and module provision exist, the University designates an academic member of staff to provide leadership and management expertise. Subject-specific advice in relation to non-comparable provision is provided by an external academic consultant, approved and appointed by the relevant faculty dean on behalf of the University.

37 Informal arrangements complement the formal committee structure and include interactions between the Vice-Chancellor and senior staff of the University and the principals of collaborative partner institutions and their senior management teams. The QEF (see paragraph 30 above), chaired by the UAEP, also enables staff of the University and its partner institutions to discuss quality and collaborative provision and share good practice and experience.

38 The annual monitoring process is the key mechanism for monitoring the quality of the students' experience and operates at department, faculty and University levels consistent with the University's arrangements for on-campus programmes. Academic staff at the University, as well as external examiners, approve assessment tasks and moderate completed assessed work from collaborative partners to ensure that assessment is consistent and fair; there is parity of standards; the level of achievement reflects the required standards;

and the examination process is equivalent to, and as effective as, the process for the University's on-campus provision. The University and its partners have devised joint staff development to facilitate moderation, including dissertation marking and the articulation of learning outcomes and assessment.

39 The audit team learnt of considerable progress being made on the moderation of assessments where faculty staff engage, both in the approval of assessment tasks, and in the review of the subsequent output following internal collaborative partner moderation. The team formed the view that this involvement by University staff in the moderation of assessment at its collaborative partners constitutes a feature of good practice. A recent UCoP, aligning moderation within on-campus and collaborative provision, is expected to be completely implemented next session.

40 In meetings with students and staff and, from its reading of documentation provided, the audit team came to the view that staff understood their roles and responsibilities in the management of the quality of the students' experience and academic standards. The team also found that, although the committee structure appeared to be complex, it was effective, fit for purpose and committee roles and responsibilities were clear. Informal communications further served to cement relationships between the University and its collaborative partners.

41 The audit team considered that the developments currently taking place within the context of the University's collaborative provision would inevitably make more demands on administrative and academic staff, particularly in the University's Quality Office and the faculties, during a time of planned expansion of collaborative partner programmes. The team therefore considered it advisable that the University ensures that the provision of administrative and academic staff is appropriate to assure itself of the quality and standards of its collaborative programmes (see also paragraphs 54 and 123 below)

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

42 The CPSED indicated that the University is moving towards a federal network of HE providers in a predominantly regional context, recognising the benefits of such an arrangement in managing the academic quality and standards of its collaborative provision. As indicated in paragraph 23 above, the University has identified a number of benefits from its approach to collaborative working including 'greater consistency of quality assurance mechanisms, sustainable communities of practice at academic and administrative levels, cross-institutional communities of students, easier sharing of good practice, more efficient professional development of staff...and a more strategic approach to quality enhancement themes'. It has established a number of priorities for the next three years to achieve these benefits, including the need to fully embed the audit of partner institutions and revised programme approval procedures; develop and implement subject review at partner institutions; further develop the Collaborative Handbook; and to minimise differences in access rights to the University's facilities and learning resources for students on collaborative programmes.

43 The CPSED indicated that partner approval, quality audit and periodic review of subjects had yet to be embedded. Early indications from the University's audits of partner institutions suggested, however, that the audit process developed by the University was proving to be effective in assuring quality. From its consideration of documentation, and from discussions with University and partner institution staff, the audit team agreed with this view. The team noted that the January 2006 meeting of the CPC, had supported the principle of partner institutions producing quality enhancement reports (QERs) for collaborative provision leading to awards of the University, and considered that the production of such reports should enable the University to retain appropriate oversight of its provision, wherever it is delivered.

44 The audit team noted that, at the time of the audit, a number of UCoP had recently been approved while others were at an earlier stage of development. The team saw amendments within the Collaborative Handbook in line with new UCoP and would encourage the University to develop further its guidance on the implementation of these codes. The University considers that improvements envisaged in the annual monitoring of programmes and QERs will facilitate greater comparability of student experience and increased transparency in relation to quality and standards issues across its network of internal and collaborative providers.

45 With JDBs continuing to provide the main means of oversight of quality and standards, the UAEP chairing all JDBs, and the University Quality Officer (Collaborative Provision) servicing and supporting JDBs, the University envisages greater convergence and consistency of both policy and practice for its collaborative provision. The audit team shared this perception and came to the view that the ambitious proposals and priorities the University has set itself are broadly appropriate and timely for enhancing the management of the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

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

Partner and programme approval

46 The University distinguishes between partner and programme approval. The Collaborative Handbook indicated that the University should satisfy itself that the standing and capacity of a potential partner to fulfil its role in a collaborative arrangement are appropriate, and that the educational objectives of prospective partners are compatible with those of the University. The University's senior management team considers the potential for collaboration in the first instance, in consultation with the relevant faculty, taking into account strategic match; avoidance of duplication and/or contradiction; and resources.

47 Following in principle support, proposals are considered by the ROEPC, and through the work of a newly established Educational Partnerships Approval Panel reporting to the ROEPC. Committee members visit prospective partners initially to consider the institutional environment and student support and their recommendation is reported to Council through the Academic Board and Senate. Once approved, a memorandum of understanding is signed. The University also agrees the type of programmes to be developed as part of the initial approval process and these are considered in accordance with the UCoP for approving collaborative programmes. The University is strengthening the process for the approval of new partnerships through the development of a new UCoP which is expected to be approved in summer 2006. New programmes are developed using the University programme and module specifications.

48 The CPSED noted that the approval process is changing towards a three-stage process involving development consent, permitting a partner institution to develop an application for planning permission in consultation with the relevant academic department; planning permission, permitting the partner institution to advertise the proposed programme 'subject to approval', and to develop a full proposal, in consultation with the relevant academic department; and full approval, permitting the partner institution to make formal offers to applicants and to commence delivery on agreed dates.

49 Deadlines are provided at each stage to facilitate a realistic timescale which meets the needs of partner institutions and the University's quality assurance processes. The process is expedited and enhanced by combining faculty and University decision-making and by conducting approval panels at partner institutions with programme teams and HE managers. Approval panels usually include two members of the AAC. Independent scrutiny is achieved by obtaining the written views of an external academic who comments on the quality

and standards of the new programme using a standard pro forma. In the case of vocationally orientated degrees, opinion is elicited from both an external academic and an external stakeholder. Approvals panels make their recommendations to the AAC which decides whether to approve the provision and, if so, what conditions or recommendations, if any, should be attached to approval.

50 The audit team noted examples of programme approval being given after programmes had commenced; conditions needing to be satisfied within a very limited time frame; and an approval event being held before receipt of an external report. In addition, from its consideration of the documentation available, the team found that it was not always possible to track the fulfilment of conditions stipulated at approval; and approval events were often constrained within a short timescale. The team noted an example of five programmes being approved in one day by a panel consisting of two staff members while another event involved a full week of validations in which teams of staff from the University considered eight new programme proposals and 16 programmes that were being re-written to conform to a new credit system. One week later, the AAC approved 21 programmes.

51 The audit team also considered the approval process for collaborative provision at an overseas institution by means of a desk-based study and noted that, in the case considered, the site visit was carried out by a member of staff who reported on issues on which the individual concerned felt 'competent to comment'. Subsequent visits were undertaken by staff from the International Office, the Business School and a member of the University's senior management team.

52 The University is aware of the issues surrounding the timescale of proposals and approvals. In its quality enhancement report of 2004-05, the Business School noted the need to consider proposals emerging from collaborative partners at a late stage and its impact on administrative and academic staff. This was considered at QSC where actions were delegated to both the School and to the Committee.

53 The audit team found that there was a lack of clarity on the part of staff it met about the duration of programme approvals and it considered that this merited further attention. The team considered that the University should be advised to stipulate the period of programme approval at the time of validation so that it is clear when a programme should be revalidated to ensure its continued currency and relevance.

54 The CPSED referred to the recent establishment of 'mechanisms such as audit of partner institutions and recently revised mechanisms such as programme approval', and signalled that it was the University's intention 'to fully embed' these mechanisms as one of its priorities for the next three years. There was recognition, too, that both processes are operating at, or near, the capacity of the University organisational structures to act effectively. From the documentation available to it, and its meetings with staff and students involved in the University's collaborative provision, the audit team identified a number of matters to be addressed by the University relating to its implementation of partner and programme approval processes. These included the timing and scale of the introduction, formalisation, and modification of partnerships and programmes. The team found that the principles underpinning partner selection and programme approval in relation to collaborative provision within the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, were well understood and generally, but unevenly, observed. In the team's view, it would be desirable for the University to introduce a more systematic approach to site visits in the partner and programme approval process. Such an approach should encompass the University's documentation and reporting requirements with a view to ensuring that approval decisions are not made on the basis of incomplete information.

Annual monitoring

55 Annual monitoring is consistent with the University's arrangements for on-campus programmes. Programme teams at partner institutions review their programmes taking account of feedback received and use the same

pro forma as University departments. This is submitted to the relevant University department which completes an additional section addressing specific collaborative issues. Annual monitoring reports for collaborative provision are presented to the relevant JBoS where good practice and any matters requiring further consideration are noted, and actions monitored accordingly. Issues relating to collaborative arrangements are referred to the appropriate JDB.

56 Faculty reflections on annual monitoring reports relating to collaborative provision are incorporated in QERs. Partner institutions with non-comparable provision which is not related to a specific faculty produce their own QERs following the standard UCoP. Consideration is being given to extending the production of partner-specific QERs to all institutions. The QER is reviewed by a team established by the QSC and independent of the faculty. In addition to these processes, the ACB produces an annual report to the ROEPC describing the full range of partnership activities, extending beyond consideration of validated and franchised programmes, which take place each year.

57 From the documentation available to it, and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team came to the view that annual monitoring is mature, well understood and is embedded in the quality assurance processes for collaborative provision. It noted, too, that the University and its partners are actively engaged in seeking to establish the optimum balance between centralised and devolved structures while, at the same time, accommodating the distinctive features of the range of collaborative provision involving the University.

Periodic review

58 In 2004, a review of collaborative provision considered the existing quality framework for collaborative provision against the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. It recommended the development of wider dissemination of the collaborative provision strategy across the University; the production

of a collaborative handbook; and the establishment of a central register for collaborative provision.

59 The University conducted quality audits of collaborative partners during 2005-06 as the first round of a regular (approximately five-year) process. They are designed to be supportive, while ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards. A pilot of the UCoP for the audit of partner institutions took place at one of the partners in July 2005. This was followed by a report and action plan which were considered by the QSC in November 2005, and again in January 2006. Audits of four other partner institutions were carried out between November 2005 and January 2006 and others are due to follow. The audit team noted the rigour of the review process undertaken by the University relating to a collaborative link within the UK that was in the process of being phasing out.

60 The University's five-yearly review of programmes and subjects was identified as a feature of good practice in the 2004 audit report but many collaborative arrangements have not been in place long enough for this process to apply to them. The University has decided to extend the periodic review process to subjects at partner institutions and intends that periodic subject review should encompass all forms and locations of subject delivery, leading to a report which reflects the full range of delivery.

61 From its meetings with staff and students, and its reading of documentary sources, the audit team found the CPSED to be accurate. Procedures are evolving and are being implemented. The team welcomed the quality audit of collaborative partners, the periodic review of collaborative provision, and the use of pilot projects before finalising the collaborative partner audit process. There is a strong and improving degree of consistency across the University's collaborative partners but this is tempered by a recognition of the distinctiveness of programmes and institutional contexts. While supporting a comprehensive and consistent approach to the review of on-campus and

collaborative provision, the team considered that care is needed to ensure that the requirements for periodic review of subjects and for revalidation of programmes are clearly understood by all parties involved in collaborative provision leading to awards of the University.

62 Overall, the audit team formed the view that, despite the shortcomings identified in the documented approval processes available to it, the development of the Collaborative Handbook and UCoPs, allied to the increasingly centralised management of quality assurance and enhancement, have contributed to greater consistency in the operation of the University's approval and monitoring processes. The team noted a lack of clarity amongst partner institutions about the timing of periodic reviews but was aware that the University is addressing this matter through the introduction of a rolling five-year review schedule. The rigorous process by which the University managed its withdrawal from a partnership arrangement that no longer matched its regional strategy was considered a feature of good practice.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

63 The University stated that it used a range of mechanisms to provide external input, both academic and other stakeholder comment, such as employer feedback, in the programme approval process for new collaborative provision. The Quality Handbook also made it clear that the views of current and recent external examiners may be sought during the early part of the development process and that these views are taken into account at the planning consent stage. Subsequently, external examiners remain outside the new programme approval process. The existence of non-comparable provision in a number of partner institutions presents a particular set of challenges to which the University has responded by providing academic support and guidance through the appointment of academic consultants who work closely with programme teams, attending key meetings, including the JBoSs, as appropriate.

64 Staff involved in collaborative provision confirmed that these appointments were equivalent to the support given by University staff for comparable provision in the development of new programmes and that such externals played an important role. The University informed the audit team that its new UCoP for the nomination and appointment of academic consultants makes it clear that an academic consultant, initially and solely appointed in a developmental role, could also act as an external adviser at the approval stage of the developed programme. The University ensured that this was clearly expressed in the UCoP to avoid confusion. The team noted that external input in new programme approval has not always been consistently applied and transparently recorded. For example, the report of a June 2004 validation event, involving consideration of 11 programmes in two days noted that 'externality has not been consistently provided with the new programme proposals' as required by the University. The team also observed the absence of external input for a programme at another partner institution and noted that it was not always clear how external views had been taken into account in the approval process. For example, in one instance, an external adviser had identified an issue that had not been addressed and which had subsequently impacted negatively on the student experience.

65 Recognising that externality at the programme approval level has not operated consistently in the past, the University has sought to clarify the position through the development of a new UCoP which was being promulgated at the time of the audit. The University now formally requires that new programme proposals are informed by external opinion, including an academic experienced in the discipline; and a person with academic experience or, where appropriate, a stakeholder. The externals must not be current nor recent external examiners (in the last three years) nor a current or recent employee of the University. The new UCoP states that externals will be invited to attend the meeting of the approval panel or submit a report. Such

approval meetings provide an important opportunity for face-to-face dialogue between the University and partner college staff and, in this process, the input from an independent external person can be most valuable.

66 The 2004 audit report commented favourably on the use of external input to the periodic review process and the audit team noted that this good practice had been carried forward into the management of the University's collaborative provision. Despite the University's decision to withdraw from a partnership arrangement, as part of its alignment to a stronger regional strategy, the team found the periodic review process for this programme to be rigorous. The process had benefited from significant external input and had resulted in enhancement to the provision even though it was being phased out. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

67 The audit team considered that the University should be advised to keep under review the implementation of its new UCoP relating to the use of academic consultants in the provision of specialist advice to partners offering non-comparable provision. The team also formed the view that it would be advisable for the University to be assured that new programme approvals take due account of external advice, and that any conditions and recommendations set at the time of approval, are followed up expeditiously and are clearly documented for the benefit of all parties involved.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

68 External examining for collaborative provision operates through the same processes and guidelines as for on-campus provision with the University being responsible for all appointments and contractual arrangements. Partner institutions formally propose external examiners using the University's nomination form. The AAC, acting on behalf of Senate, oversees the appointment process and formally confirms the appointment. Examiners are

appointed for a period of three years in the first instance with the option of extending for a further year. The CPSED indicated that the University is evaluating the effectiveness of the induction information for external examiners for its collaborative partners to clarify responsibilities between the University and its partners.

69 Collaborative partner staff who met the audit team were fully aware of the appointment process and the respective roles of the University and its partners. They were also clear about the purpose and role of external examiners and regarded their input as a key element in assuring quality and standards. They confirmed that external examiners were involved in approving assessment tasks, confirming marking standards; attended module and programme examination boards; and contributed to the programme review process. The audit team was told that, in some instances, external examiners met students and attended presentations, for example, in art and design. The team noted that engagement of external examiners with partner institutions is a strong feature of the quality assurance process in many programmes, often with continued contact with programme teams throughout the academic year.

70 The 2004 audit report highlighted differences in the way external examiners were fulfilling their role, with some acting as markers and others acting as moderators. The audit team found the role of external examiners in the assessment process for collaborative provision to be clear and operating consistently, while noting that the University is reviewing its UCoP in the light of the 2004 audit report observation.

71 External examiners for collaborative provision produce the same annual reports as those for on-campus programmes and these are subject to the same scrutiny and monitoring processes. The annual report pro forma invites comment on standards and the assessment process. External examiners' reports are received by the University and forwarded to the partner institution to respond to any issues

raised. The Vice-Chancellor takes a strong interest in the feedback provided through external examiners' reports, reading them personally. The University follows up any issues raised and these are also discussed at the JBoSs where partner institutions are well represented. Annual programme monitoring reports address any concerns raised by external examiners in the light of other information, such as performance and achievement data and feedback from students, and these are incorporated into action plans.

72 Summaries of key issues raised by external examiners are compiled at departmental level and incorporated into faculty annual QERs. These reports take an overview of external examiner feedback, drawing out any generic issues, including those identified at partner institutions and the responses made. Faculty QERs also monitor progress against issues raised in the previous year's reports. The University recognises that there is a danger of issues relating to collaborative provision being diluted at present and the audit team would endorse the University's proposal for partner institutions to produce individual QER reports for their provision.

73 The University's Quality Office produces a University-level overview report identifying any areas of serious concern arising from external examiners' comments, including collaborative provision, and this is considered by the QSC. Where significant issues have been identified, recommendations for action are presented to the QSC with timescales identified.

74 The audit team noted that the MBA programme, including the distance taught MBA, operated by the Business School, has cohorts of students at a number of overseas centres, in addition to on-campus. The team of external examiners for this provision consider delivery at all locations, attend a series of linked examination boards, held on the same day, and produce an annual report for the MBA as a whole. The team considered that these arrangements worked well and enabled external examiners to make comparisons of performance at different study centres with on-campus students.

75 The audit team had access to a large number of external examiners' reports and found that the feedback was generally favourable. The team also noted that the system of annual reporting by external examiners had been in operation for a number of years and was well embedded across the University's collaborative provision. External examiners expressed satisfaction with the internal moderation process, the samples of work made available to them and the standard of awards in comparison with similar provision. There were also examples of external examiner comment leading to curriculum enhancements and to changes in the approach to assessment, developments which were tracked through annual monitoring.

76 The audit team found that the process for considering external examiners' reports operates consistently across the University's collaborative provision and it considered that the University makes effective use of external examiners in the management of academic standards for collaborative provision, with an appropriate level of involvement in the setting of assessments and the confirmation of marking standards. External examiners are appropriately involved in examination boards and report annually to the University. External examiners' reports are integrated into the University's quality monitoring processes in order to enhance the quality of the student experience. The team noted the rigour of the University's process for ensuring that external examiners' reports are effectively considered and acted upon and found this to be a feature of good practice.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

77 The CPSED stated that the *Code of practice*, particularly Section 2, has assisted the University in considering issues relevant to the assurance of quality and the maintenance of academic standards for collaborative provision. The University regards *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements as being fundamental in setting

academic standards. The QSC is responsible for ensuring that the quality framework appropriately reflects the Academic Infrastructure, including the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

78 The University's Quality Handbook and the Collaborative Provision Handbook bring together guidance and procedures and aspects of the *Code of practice* have been mapped against University policies and guidelines. At the time of the audit, however, the audit team noted that significant components of the Quality Handbook, particularly that relating to collaborative provision, were in the process of development or had only recently been approved. The team also found difficulty in identifying the timescale for the implementation of new guidance in view of the number of new policy documents being promulgated at the time of the audit.

79 The CPSED highlighted the way in which the *Code of practice* has been used to inform written agreements with partners which make explicit the roles and responsibilities of partner institutions and the University in areas such as student advice and guidance, financial accountability, administration and quality management. The audit team was able to confirm the clarity of obligations and responsibilities set out in these validation agreements. It also noted that the University's use of standard agreements ensures that the respective responsibilities of the parties involved are clearly stated, notwithstanding differences between partner institutions.

80 The CPSED indicated that the University requires programme specifications to be produced for all collaborative provision, in common with on-campus provision. The audit team was told that programme specifications were drafted as part of the programme development process and formed the basis for programme approval and review. The team noted that external experts are invited to comment on the extent to which a new programme accurately reflects the Academic Infrastructure.

81 FDs form a significant element of the University's collaborative provision and have been one of the major areas of expansion for the University's regional partners. Programme designers have taken account of FD benchmark statements, for example, the work-based learning component and this development has been supported by the University Framework for FDs with the QSC approving a pro forma to assist programme designers. The CPSED stated that particular attention is paid to potential articulation routes to honours level provision as evidenced by a number of top-up programmes for delivery at partner institutions. However, progression routes are not always available locally and some students expressed concern that the geographical distance to travel to take up the opportunity to progress to the next stage was a barrier. The audit team also heard that work placements were not always operating effectively on FDs and it heard that students were allegedly given false expectations with regard to placements on one programme. The team noted that the respective roles of partner institutions, employers and individual students in securing work placements, and in providing support in the workplace, were not always clearly specified.

82 The audit team noted, from the minutes of JDBs and the CPC, that they provide important forums for updating partner institutions on new developments relating to QAA guidance, receiving feedback on revisions to the University's Collaborative Handbook, and disseminating information. These committees are supported by the work of the University's Quality Office which continuously monitors new QAA guidance and disseminates information to partner institutions, including through its website.

83 Collaborative partner staff who met the audit team were clearly aware of the Academic Infrastructure and were positive about the effectiveness of communication channels. The team noted that the University has also been proactive in offering training events on aspects of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. In the team's view, programme specifications have

been used effectively by the University in the management of its collaborative provision. In view of the students' comments relating to their FD experience, the team formed the view that the University should keep student experience in respect of top-up arrangements and work placement opportunities for FDs under review, and ensure that programme specifications provide clear information on this matter to avoid any potential for misunderstanding.

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

84 Partner institutions are now required to advise the University Quality Officer (Collaborative Provision) of any academic audit or review carried out by an external body, for example, QAA or professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reviews, and the University has incorporated external reviews at partner institutions into the work of the QSC. During 2005-06, the University has introduced a requirement for all subject review reports, published by QAA, involving collaborative provision to be submitted to the QSC, bringing this process into line with on-campus provision. This ensures a University overview and a more systematic monitoring of action plans arising from such reports.

85 During the past two years there have been five QAA subject-based reviews and two FD reviews at four partner institutions involving programmes leading to the University's awards. The University has supported partner colleges in preparing for these events and partners have been involved in the audit process through meetings with review teams. An emerging theme from a number of academic reviews in partner colleges has been the need to ensure a consistent relationship between intended learning outcomes; assessment criteria; marking; and associated feedback to students. The University has arranged staff development activities to support partner institutions in

responding to these matters and the annual monitoring and review process, including external examiner feedback, gives explicit attention to this aspect.

86 FD reviews have identified engagement with employers as an area for development, including the need to formalise employers' participation in mentoring and support arrangements; and the need to ensure a greater degree of equity between students in their work placement experience. In the audit team's view, a strengthened programme approval process would assist in helping to forge closer relationships with employers where such input is essential for successful programme.

87 The University has issued guidance on how it should be notified of recognition by PSRBs, including any final agreements. Subsequent issues which arise are considered by the relevant JBoS. A number of partner institutions are working with PSRBs, particularly through FD provision, and in the light of issues relating to the availability and quality of placements, the audit team would support the University in its efforts to assure itself that the interests of the students are protected.

Student representation in collaborative provision

88 The University's Collaborative Handbook: Validated Provision contains guidelines for student representation and there is a formal requirement for staff-student committees to include elected student representatives from each cohort of the University programme. Matters relating to the student experience are discussed and recorded; action plans are noted together with appropriate resolution of issues; and these are used to inform the reporting of the student experience in annual programme monitoring. The University expects to be kept informed of students' views through the JBoSs which receive minutes of staff-student committee meetings. Student representatives are also involved in annual programme and module review days.

89 Recent quality audits of partner institutions included a review by the University of the opportunities for student representation at each partner. The quality audit reports have advised that student representatives should receive training for their role prior to the start of the academic session. The University's SU has also started to engage in a dialogue with SUs, or their equivalent, at partner institutions with a view to developing closer links.

90 The CPSED commented on the system of student representation established jointly with the SU that was noted as good practice in the 2004 audit report. The University has provided its partner colleges with a UCoP on student representation and the CPSED indicated that all collaborative partners have in place appropriate staff-student committees. A recent review of student representation on JBoSs by the University's CPC has resulted in plans to include collaborative students on these University committees next session. The audit team noted that JBoSs had identified that some partners operated informal student meetings, and the Collaborative Handbook now makes explicit the requirement for a formal record of meetings with issues raised and proposed actions.

91 Students who met the audit team confirmed that they had elected representatives on programme committees and they expressed general satisfaction with the opportunities they have to make their voice heard within their home institutions. Any problems would normally be discussed with their programme leaders and tutors in the first instance. There was a clear awareness that, as representatives, they should express issues raised by members of their cohort at meetings of the staff-student committees. Student representatives contribute to the annual review of modules and have engaged with the University quality audit panels. They understood the procedures for making complaints and appeals within their home institution and, subsequently, to the University, if appropriate. However, there appeared to be a lack of clarity about the way in which the University listened to issues raised by students and how such information is used and acted upon.

92 The audit team agreed that student representation in the partner institutions reflects the University's requirements as expressed in the CPSED. It considered that future developments, including elected student representation from its collaborative partners on JBoSs, offered a constructive approach to enhancing the University's ability to interact with its validated students and to provide improved links with staff-student committees in its collaborative partners. Students who met the team were aware of these proposals and expected them to address any feelings of remoteness from the University. In the team's view, the training of student representatives recommended in the quality audit reports is to be welcomed as a means of enhancing collaborative student representation through their contribution to discussions relating to any concerns they may have, and the means by which they inform their fellow students of the University's responses to such concerns. The team was encouraged to hear that discussions between the University's SU and its counterparts at partner institutions are progressing.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

93 The University requires partner institutions to collect student feedback on completion of modules through its anonymised module evaluation questionnaire (MEQ) which contributes to annual programme monitoring, and to have in place mechanisms to act on such feedback received. The audit team was also told that formal annual module review meetings at the University are conducted with students present.

94 At programme level, student opinion is gathered annually through student perception of the college (SPOC) questionnaires. The audit team learnt that surveys also include the recent cohort of graduates, providing collaborative partners with employment destination information as well as feedback about their final year of study. The JBoSs scrutinise MEQ feedback from students together with action plans in annual programme monitoring reports

and they review subsequent progress. Staff involved in collaborative provision indicated that the JDBs and the QSC receive JBoS minutes, thus ensuring that the University is aware of any matters arising from collaborative student feedback.

95 Faculty responsibility for monitoring feedback at the JBoSs is increasingly being supplemented by their consideration of minutes of the staff-student committees from the University's collaborative partners. Recent quality audit reports have indicated the importance of providing collaborative students with a more effective feedback process to report on actions taken in response to their concerns. To this end, the University has recommended the inclusion of responses to action plans in the student module handbooks. The University is aware that its collaborative partners make considerable use of the SPOC surveys to gauge student opinions on their learning experience and the QEF is seeking ways of using such information to monitor programmes as a whole, and to draw on the experience of collaborative partners' approaches in developing programme feedback processes within the University.

96 Students who met the audit team were clear that the MEQ is a key method for them to express their personal perceptions of their modules and they appreciated the anonymity of the process. They confirmed that the evaluations were used to produce actions and responses, but they did not feel that the responses were always communicated back to them. The annual module review meeting was seen as a way of informing the University of students' issues and concerns. Students used staff in their home institutions as the first point of contact to resolve problems and this worked well although the audit team learnt of difficulties experienced by some students in progressing immediate issues because of perceived inadequate staffing arrangements. Students confirmed their participation in, and the importance their home institutions attached to, the annual SPOC surveys.

97 The CPSED acknowledged that the extent of graduate and employer feedback varied from partner to partner but noted the impact of FDs on the continuing development of such links, and the views of the University and its collaborative partners that they are receiving more feedback and advice from employers within the region.

98 The audit team formed the view that student feedback arrangements were applied consistently. It noted that recent quality audits conducted by the University had recognised the need for students to be kept informed of the resolution of any issues raised and the progress of action plans, leading the University to suggest the inclusion of responses in module handbooks as an appropriate mechanism, building on its own on-campus practice. The team viewed this as a positive contribution to quality enhancement through improved communications with students. Noting the absence of references to employer and stakeholder feedback on the University's programmes in recent quality audit reports, the team would wish to encourage the adoption of a systematic approach to obtaining and reporting on such feedback at programme level, particularly in relation to work-based learning and the student experience.

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

99 Students who are registered on University programmes delivered by collaborative partners are recorded on the partners' own student record systems and the audit team learnt that collaborative partners are responsible for maintaining all data from admission to completion, including the issue of transcripts of module results to students annually.

100 The CPSED indicated that the University has responsibility for final decisions on student admissions. Having identified some variation in practice with regard to the admission of students, the University now requires collaborative partners to apply formally to be

given responsibility for devolved admissions. The QSC expects to make decisions on devolution applications as specified in the University code of practice before the end of the current session. Where collaborative partners do not seek devolved admissions status, the University will make decisions on applications to programmes of study. The JBoSs and the JDBs will monitor admissions data for collaborative students.

101 The University enters progression information each session as well as recording examination board decisions and degree classifications that are used to produce final award certificates on completion. At present only one partner institution has access to the University Academic Information System (AIS) permitting direct input of data to the University. JBoSs will evaluate comparative data for progression and retention of collaborative students when the AIS has been enhanced for this purpose.

102 Collaborative partners monitor student progression and retention and report to the University through the annual programme monitoring process which requires staff evaluation of, and comment on, the data for each programme cohort. The audit team noted that comparative data are available for a limited range of programmes, for example, within the Business School and within the FDF. The team also learnt that the development of the AIS is in progress to facilitate more detailed evaluation of data by collaborative partners on a comparative basis.

103 The audit team noted that the University is currently formalising devolution agreements with its collaborative partners to eliminate inconsistencies in admissions practices and to make explicit its requirements for the production of transcripts. It considered that the University should seek to ensure that its data systems enable it to compare student attainment at different locations, particularly at module level where student performance can be directly compared. The team noted that progress on the implementation of more detailed data analysis is dependent on improvements to the AIS that

include better integration of University and collaborative partner systems. In the team's view, it would be desirable for the University to develop a common student information system to facilitate comparative analysis of student progression and achievement across its on-campus and equivalent collaborative programmes.

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

104 While partner institutions are responsible for the recruitment and selection of their staff, members of their staff who teach, or conduct assessment, on programmes leading to a University award are required to have University RTS (see paragraph 33 above). Faculties are responsible for ensuring all partner institution staff teaching on programmes leading to University awards have RTS on the basis of criteria determined by the AAC which are set out in the Quality Handbook.

105 The Quality Handbook indicated that, to obtain RTS, lecturers would normally have at least a first degree (or equivalent), a minimum of three years' teaching experience (or equivalent), and be qualified at least to the level at which they are to teach. Application for RTS must be approved prior to involvement with a University collaborative programme and is made by collaborative partners, to the appropriate faculty, through submission of a proposal form, and a current curriculum vitae, in addition to a statement of support from the collaborative partner, or a supporting reference in the case of on-campus/distance taught programmes.

106 Three-year appointments are the norm but, if a candidate has limited experience, or there is some other reservation concerning suitability, the initial approval will be for one year, in which case, a mentor is assigned to the RTS. If a nomination is refused, the nominee may not teach or assess on the programme. RTS, when approved, is at one of three levels; foundation, degree and post-degree. Extension

of RTS requires completion of a standard extension form, with evidence of peer observation and at least five student module feedback forms. Once an RTS nomination or extension is approved, faculties inform the AAC where all such nominations are formally recorded. The University maintains a central register of RTS appointments.

107 From reading documentation available to it, and its discussions with staff, the audit team considered that, although the procedures for approving and monitoring RTS are sound in principle, their implementation is variable as it found instances of partner institution staff without RTS, or evidence of appropriate RTS, teaching on University programmes. In addition, although faculty staff use the University RTS register to check status, the register does not record the level of RTS approval. Students who met the team also expressed some concern as to the appropriateness of the requirement for staff with RTS to be qualified only to at least the level at which they teach. In the team's view, it would be desirable for the University to strengthen the implementation of its procedures to ensure all staff involved in teaching and assessing on its collaborative programmes are RTS approved in a timely manner and at the appropriate level. It may also wish to include, as part of AAC's review of the criteria and process for RTS staff appointments, the views of students on the appropriateness of its criteria for RTS.

108 The University requires partner institutions to have peer observation and appraisal schemes in place for staff who teach on its programmes. The audit team saw audit reports and other documentation provided by the University indicating that these were in place, and staff at partner institutions confirmed their engagement with peer observation and appraisal. The University identifies staff development needs and opportunities for meeting those needs through formal and informal channels. It is a standing item on JDBs, but the University also places emphasis on the establishment of close links between the University and partner institution staff.

109 The provision of staff development is a particular strength of the University. All staff development events at the University are open to staff at partner institutions and the audit team was told that partner institution staff are well informed of these opportunities. Seminars, workshops and presentations for collaborative partners are also provided, either centrally or by faculties, based on identified need. The team heard of events on HE in further education, teaching quality information (TQI) and moderation, amongst others. Collaborative partner staff welcomed the staff development opportunities provided by the University and the team saw evidence of collaborative partner staff attendance at these various events. The team considered that staff development for collaborative partner staff is a feature of good practice.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

110 The CPSED stated that students studying on franchised programmes have full access to the University's learning resource facilities in addition to those available in the partner institutions. For validated programmes, the University expects its collaborative partners to have appropriate learning resources and checks that such resources are appropriate. Faculties and the AAC play key roles in evaluating the accessibility and availability of learning support services, and for ensuring that student feedback on related issues is considered at University level. The University monitors learning support resources through the annual monitoring process and external examiners comment on the resources available to students in their annual reports to the University.

111 The University has been in discussion with its partners about the schedule for replacing the existing virtual learning environment (VLE) platform. Through the ACB, the University has responded to discussion of the benefits of access to its on-campus resources for validated students to enhance their learning opportunities. It has piloted a scheme giving two of its nearby partners the same access and borrowing rights as those for on-campus

students. The success of this scheme will be reviewed with the intention of extending full rights to all Associate Colleges next academic session. The geographical locations of partner institutions within the region, and their proximity to the University, are important factors in the debate over extending students' rights of access to its facilities to enhance their learning experience.

112 Students who met the audit team and student observations recorded in quality audit reports indicated that there is good provision of library, information technology and related facilities, commenting on generally satisfactory provision of book stock to meet their needs and expectations as set out in module booklists. They commented on the additional support provided by staff and access to journals and periodicals available through a variety of intranet databases and services. Although some students felt that access to University facilities would be beneficial, others thought that distance from the main campus would preclude such use. Students spoke with enthusiasm about the VLE within their home institutions which they used for information purposes, communication with staff and to enhance their learning experience. The audit team noted that interactive use of the VLE with the University is available on a limited basis at present, for example, within the FDF.

113 The audit team was unclear, however, about the way in which the University assured itself of the appropriateness of learning resources in its overseas provision, for example, through systematic documentation and subsequent tracking of resource changes. The University may wish to ensure that the approval process for new overseas partners includes a detailed written report on the support available locally for the students registered on its awards, and that this is subsequently monitored.

114 The audit team was told of regular staff development and training activities with University library staff. The audit team noted the positive comments made by students of their use of VLEs, and the extensive use of the University's VLE as a learning resource,

communications forum and assessment tool in the delivery of an FD across the FDF of five partner colleges and the University. The team viewed the use of VLEs and the consultation between the University and its partners on the schedule for replacing the existing VLE platform as a feature of good practice.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

115 University guidelines provide a benchmark for collaborative partners in the provision of academic guidance and personal support for students on programmes leading to the University's awards. These guidelines are consistent with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA and indicate the University's expectations of the academic and personal support provided for its students, including those studying in overseas partners. Programme leaders are frequently designated personal supervisors for students studying a particular programme and students are able to access specialist advice and counselling services. Interaction with the University occurs through designated coordinators, or equivalent, from the appropriate faculty. The same arrangement will apply for students on non-comparable programmes when these programmes become the responsibility of faculties in the University next session.

116 The guidelines outline the personal supervisor role and include the procedures for changing supervisors, record-keeping and confidentiality. Partner institutions provide specialist support services and the University has facilitated the development of some links to its own student services. The University is consulting its partner institutions on the implementation of progress files and personal development planning (PDP) in the light of its institutional framework approved by Academic Board in 2005.

117 In response to the 2004 audit report, a review of the personal supervisor role is in progress with a view to linking the role to the operation of PDP. Recent partner institution

audits have highlighted inconsistencies in the development of PDP in some partners, and recommendations have been made to address this issue. The CPSED stated that the University supports its partners in the consideration of student mitigation at module and programme boards to ensure equitable treatment and comparability of practice. Recent audits of partner colleges, together with monitoring through examination boards and student feedback, are used to ensure the effectiveness of arrangements for student support and guidance. Informal discussions between programme leaders and designated coordinators, and formal deliberations at the QEF and the CPC, facilitate the sharing of good practice in this area.

118 The University stipulates that all students on its collaborative programmes must receive a handbook at the start of their studies. As a minimum, the handbook must contain statements on the relationship with the University and the role it plays in validation; channels whereby students can contact the University directly; full details of the programme, including programme specifications; communication in the department; personal supervision arrangements; health and safety; programme of study information; regulatory information; complaints and appeals procedures; financial arrangements; and resources available at the University. In general, students who met the audit team confirmed the accuracy and reliability of prospectuses and other materials they received when applying for their programmes. The team noted that handbooks available to it met the University's content requirements. With one exception, it noted that students were very positive about the accuracy and usefulness of the student handbooks they received.

119 Students who met the audit team considered that they were well supported and found their student handbooks informative. They valued the fact that they are University students but had very little interaction with staff from the University which some would have liked. Students commented positively on the

accessibility and approachability of staff who provided them with opportunities to seek informal assistance as required. Academic feedback on assessments was said to be constructive although some students indicated that marked work was not always returned in a timely manner. The team saw examples of student handbooks incorporating appropriate sections of University regulations, including complaints and appeals procedures and mitigating circumstances. The team also noted that module handbooks were produced to a high standard.

120 The audit team noted a perception on the part of some students that staff resources on one FD should be enhanced. It also heard from other students that another programme of study had been re-titled before they entered the honours year, and that there had been little consultation over the resulting bifurcation of specialist pathways. In another example, the team was told of an FD articulation to honours level that had been expected to consist of a one-year top-up programme at the collaborative partner. Subsequently, the students were informed that the to-up would be for two years and delivered at the University campus.

121 The audit team considered that the University's guidance to its collaborative partners is largely being applied in a consistent manner, providing students with an effective academic and personal support system that recognises diverse student populations. The team noted that overseas distance-taught students receive support from faculty staff on teaching visits and from local contract staff. The team was also told of a change in funding arrangements at one collaborative partner which meant that careers advice was no longer available to students over 19 years of age.

122 Interaction between the University and collaborative partner staff includes monitoring and review leading to development activities to enhance student support. A particular example of this process was the identification, in external examiners' reports, of inconsistencies in the level of guidance for dissertations,

resulting in a University seminar to identify best practice with collaborative partner staff. Samples of programme and module handbooks available to the audit team demonstrated that collaborative partners conform to University guidelines. The team noted the very detailed and clear assessment criteria in many of the handbooks.

123 The students' observations about their programmes of study suggested to the audit team that the University should exercise greater vigilance in ensuring that student consultation about proposed changes is effective and that it should obtain the written agreement of students affected. The team considered that the rapid pace of responding to perceived requirements to introduce new FD programmes with appropriate articulation to honours routes is causing pressure on both staff and administrative resources in the local collaborative partners and in the University's Quality Office. In view of the comments concerning the impact of new funding arrangements on careers guidance for students aged 19 and over, the team considered that the University may wish to seek clarification from the partner institutions concerning the provision of careers guidance for all of its students.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

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

124 For validated programmes, the University requires its partner institutions to produce marketing and promotional material in accordance with a set of principles set out in the Collaborative Handbook. Such material must be submitted for scrutiny and review by the University's Quality Office and the Marketing and Communications Directorate, on an annual basis. Detailed guidance on

marketing is provided on the University's website to assist partners who are also able to draw on the expertise of the University's Marketing and Communications Directorate. The University's Marketing Toolkit, identified as an example of good practice in the 2004 audit report, is currently being updated to include information specifically for partner institutions.

125 The CPSED, and meetings with staff, indicated to the audit team that the University wishes to be more proactive in monitoring these materials and that the use of the University's logo in prospectuses and on websites is now being strictly monitored. The team noted that a draft UCoP has been considered by the CPC and the QSC, and a meeting with partner institutions' marketing managers is to be convened in June 2006 to further develop this UCoP. Furthermore, the Collaborative Handbook is to be updated to make more explicit the University's expectations in reviewing partner institutions' published materials, and consideration of these materials will become an annual item on JDBs, reinforced through the audit process of partner institutions.

126 Materials provided to the audit team from collaborative partners and the University demonstrated general adherence to the University's requirements. In one prospectus, although, it was unclear that the University was the awarding body for particular programmes. However, this has been identified and will be made more explicit in the 2006-07 prospectus. The University provides all promotional and marketing materials for its franchised provision and the audit team found these materials to be of a high standard and in line with the University's requirements.

127 The audit team noted a number of matters raised by students including the potentially misleading nature of programme information in the prospectus about an FD which was perceived to have failed to deliver the vocational work-based learning as described (see paragraph 81 above).

128 Certificates issued by the University in respect of its collaborative provision do not

identify the place of study. Collaborative partners are responsible for the provision of official transcripts at the end of each assessment process and progression point. The Collaborative Handbook indicates that transcripts should make clear that the programme was delivered by the partner institution but is a University award, normally by use of the logos of both institutions. Collaborative partner staff confirmed this was their practice. Students who met the audit team were aware of the nature and content of certificates and transcripts that they would receive. The team noted that the University is in the process of updating its requirements for transcripts and a draft UCoP for production of transcripts is being considered by the CPC.

129 On the basis of sampling documentation provided to students, and the views of students who met the audit team, the audit team concluded that the University has appropriate mechanisms to assure the provision of accurate and useful information to students on its collaborative programmes. The team considered, however, that it would be desirable for the University to ensure that the currency and accuracy of relevant programme information on its collaborative partner websites are also maintained.

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

130 The audit team noted the University's progress in meeting the requirements of HEFCE 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* in respect of its collaborative provision. The QSC has determined the policy for provision of information by collaborative partners and this is outlined in the Collaborative Handbook. TQI requirements, including those relating to collaborative provision, are addressed through the TQI Implementation Group and overseen by the QSC. To assist collaborative partners, the QEF gave a presentation on TQI and its implications for the University and partner

institutions in June 2005. The team was told that the University and its partners have agreed their relative responsibilities in relation to provision of information and population of the HERO website.

131 The audit team saw from documents available to it, and through consideration of the HERO website, that external examiner summary reports are in place and that they are representative and accurate. It also noted that appropriate quantitative data are also available on the HERO website. The University is only just beginning its cycle of periodic review of subjects at partner institutions and has yet to produce any reports which could be presented on the HERO website. It is ready to provide programme specifications as soon as the next stage of the development of the HERO website is completed. The team noted that the University, through the QEF, is discussing with partner institutions, links between the University and partner information, as developments of the HERO website allow. Based on the evidence it saw during the audit, the team formed the view that the University was making good and appropriate progress towards providing TQI data as specified in HEFCE 03/51.

Findings

Findings

132 An audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University of Hull (the University) was undertaken during the period 8 to 12 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited three of the University's collaborative partners. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice in its collaborative arrangements.

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

133 The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision has regional and international dimensions. The regional policy has focused on the Yorkshire and Humber area, involving a progressive withdrawal from provision outside the home region. The regional dimension reflects government social, economic and widening participation policy and aims to develop a regional federation of independent institutions delivering University of Hull awards funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This is rapidly expanding, sometimes at a pace that has challenged the capacity of the University to manage its collaborative provision effectively.

134 Internationally, the University has progressively withdrawn from University-validated programmes delivered by overseas partners. Overseas partnerships now focus on a limited number of well established and

prestigious institutions partly to ensure successful Association of MBAs (AMBA) and European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) accreditation for programmes offered by the Business School.

135 The University has a clearly articulated framework for managing academic standards. The committee structure, while complex, meets the nuanced needs of collaborative partners and the University's faculties. The University is consciously striving to maintain an appropriate balance between incorporating or mainstreaming collaborative and campus-based systems, while maintaining the accountability and quality of its distinctive, collaborative provision. Developments bringing collaborative provision into a federal arrangement with increasingly centralised management structures within the University should help to reduce variations in the management of collaborative provision and ensure overall confidence in the consistency of the provision.

136 The management of the quality of the student experience is well established but there have been teething problems in the application of the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes at a time of transition for the University and its partners. The different cultures, expectations and speed of change between the University and its partners pose challenges for the management of collaborative provision. It is apparent, however, that the University is aware of these challenges and is working with its partners to minimise the impact on academic standards and the quality of the student experience.

137 Overall, the audit team believes that the University's approach to the management of its collaborative provision has been ambitious, bold and successful. The University now operates at the hub of an ever-expanding network of academic and vocational providers that is seeking to meet the needs of the population and economy of East Yorkshire. The University is addressing the challenges involved in managing quality and assuring the standards of its awards delivered in collaboration with its partners.

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

138 The University's approval, monitoring and review procedures are clearly articulated in codes of practice which are understood by the parties involved in collaborative provision leading to awards of the University. However, as the University has extended its regional collaborative provision, the rate of innovation and change has had an impact on the application of these codes. At times, partner and programme approval appear to have been hurried, particularly where multiple proposals have been considered in haste, giving rise to a concern about the rigour of the approval processes involved. Some Foundation Degree (FD) developments could usefully have been enhanced by the greater involvement of employers in the approval process. Allied to this has been a concern about the ability for subsequent action, including conditions and recommendations, to be followed up and signed off in a timely and appropriate manner. Cultural differences; resource-related factors; and the need to be responsive may account for the short timescales involved in some of the approval processes noted, but the University may wish to reconsider its approach with a view to ensuring that the quality and standards of its collaborative provision are appropriately safeguarded.

139 Programme monitoring is well established, understood, and guided by codes of practice. The periodic review of programmes is undergoing change and the University is advised to revisit its decision to combine re-approval of programmes at partner institutions with subject-based periodic reviews, encompassing its on-campus and collaborative provision in a particular subject or discipline. While supporting the University's intention to have a comprehensive and consistent approach to the review of on-campus and collaborative provision, the audit team considered that care is needed to avoid any dilution of the review process at programme level in collaborative

partners. The team also supported the intention to embed processes relating to non-comparable provision in faculties with similar provision. It further noted the rigour of the University's review process at collaborative partners where provision was being phased out and considered this to be a feature of good practice.

140 The University's procedures for securing feedback on the quality of collaborative programmes from students appeared to be well embedded and consistently applied. However, the University should address the need for students to be kept informed of the resolution of any issues raised, and the progress of action plans identified in previous quality audits, in the context of its collaborative provision. Building on its own on-campus practice with regard to student feedback, the University has suggested the inclusion of responses in module handbooks as an appropriate mechanism for collaborative partner students. The University acknowledges that feedback from employers varies from partner to partner, and from programme to programme, but this continues to be developed as a result of the development of FDs, in particular. Procedures involving external stakeholders, such as employers, with whom relationships are more embryonic and less well established, could usefully be further developed.

141 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the processes for collaborative partner programme approval and review should be strengthened to enable the University to discharge its responsibilities in relation to quality and standards more effectively. The team came to the view that the University's processes for the monitoring of collaborative partner programmes and modules are secure. This is also the case with regard to most of the student feedback with the exception of the feedback loop to students, informing them of actions taken in response to their feedback. Feedback to other stakeholders involved in the University's collaborative provision may also need further consideration on the part of the University and its collaborative partners.

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

142 At the time of the audit, the University was revising its guidelines on external inputs to new programme approval and the audit team welcomed this development. In the past, externality has not operated consistently and the team considers that the University's new guidelines will both clarify requirements and strengthen the process. It was not always clear to the team how comments from external contributors had been addressed and it considered that this had the potential to impact adversely upon standards. For example, issues relating to FD work-based learning and work placements may call into question the distinctive nature of such awards. The team considered that the University should satisfy itself that new programme approvals take account of external advice. Conditions and recommendations set at the time of approval should be followed up expeditiously and action taken subsequently should be transparent.

143 Provision at partner institutions which is not comparable with on-campus programmes has presented particular challenges for the University. The University informed the audit team that academic consultants appointed by the University can initially act as academic advisers on new programmes and then, on a separate contract, act in a monitoring and support role following approval. In order to ensure an appropriate level of independence, an existing academic consultant is not allowed to act as the formal provider of external academic advice in subsequent programme approval events.

144 The University process for assuring standards through periodic review is well embedded and the audit team found that this was working effectively. The University plans to link on-campus and collaborative provision reviews through a new system of subject review which seeks to provide a more consistent and

comprehensive approach. In the audit team's view, care is needed to ensure that there is no dilution of the rigour of the process at collaborative partner programme level. The University is therefore advised to clarify, for the benefit of all parties involved in collaborative provision leading to its awards, the relationship between the revalidation of programmes and the system of periodic review of subjects. The rigorous process by which the University managed its withdrawal from a partnership arrangement which no longer matched its regional strategy was considered to be a feature of good practice. The periodic review, with appropriate external input, had been rigorous and had helped to enhance provision during the phasing out of the University's involvement.

145 The external examining system operates using the same processes and guidelines as apply to on-campus provision. The appointment process is rigorous and external examiners are involved extensively in approving assessments, commenting on the standards achieved in student work, attending assessment boards and providing feedback to programme teams through a well embedded annual reporting system. Issues raised by external examiners are addressed through action plans and are monitored through University-based committees. In distilling key issues identified by external examiners in faculty quality enhancement reports (QERs), the University has recognised that there is a danger of diluting the focus upon collaborative provision and the audit team supports the proposed University requirement for each partner institution to produce a QER. The University's overview of external examiners' comments covers both on-campus and collaborative provision. The team considered that the University makes effective use of external examiners in the management of academic standards for collaborative provision. It also formed the view that the attention given to external examiners' comments and the subsequent action monitoring process, at a variety of levels, is a feature of good practice.

146 There is significant variability in the use of statistical data for analysing student performance and facilitating comparison of student achievement between, for example, on-campus and equivalent collaborative provision. The availability of data is a constraint, particularly where student information systems are not integrated. While individual programme teams analyse data at programme level, the opportunity to consider performance between different cohorts of students is generally not possible. However, examples of valuable comparative analysis were noted in some programmes taught at a distance, and in the University's regional network. In the audit team's view, it would be desirable for the University to develop a common student information system which allows comparative analysis of student progression and achievement across on-campus and collaborative partner provision.

147 The audit team considered that, while there were some areas which needed attention, on the basis of the evidence available to it, the University's procedures for safeguarding the standards of awards gained through collaborative provision were effective.

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

148 The University considers that the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA plays an important role in assuring quality and standards and the audit team was able to identify how the *Code of practice* had been used for collaborative provision by mapping this against the University's policies and guidelines. At institutional level, for example, the team noted that the *Code of practice* had been used to inform written agreements to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities between the respective parties.

149 The University regards *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements as being fundamental in setting

academic standards at programme level. These guidelines have been taken into account by the University through the committee process with the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), in particular, playing an important role. In planning new programmes, programme teams are required to consider the implications of subject benchmark statements and external advisers are invited to comment on this in their reports. Partner institutions receive guidance through a recently produced Collaborative Handbook. While the audit team welcomed this development, the timescale for implementation of new policies was not always clear to it. The team noted that the University had supported collaborative partners through the dissemination of information from QAA and other relevant organisations, and in organising associated training events. Programme specifications are produced for all collaborative provision using the same guidelines and template as for on-campus provision. The team noted that programme specifications which should provide a clear articulation of programme objectives, learning outcomes and assessments, are core documents in the new programme approval process. Their use also demonstrated how the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA, had informed new programme development. The team found that programme specifications had been used effectively by the University in the management of its collaborative provision by ensuring a consistent approach to programme development.

150 A significant element of the University's collaborative provision relates to FDs and this has been a major component of the University's regional and widening participation agenda. The extent to which new programmes adhere to the FD benchmark guidance has been strengthened in the programme development process. The audit team welcomed this in the light of student and external audit comments about the availability and quality of work experience placements and the local availability of top-up routes to honours degree level study. This is an area the University is encouraged to continue to monitor closely.

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

151 The audit team found the collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) to present a detailed description of the different models of collaborative partnerships that reflect the University's strategies for local regional growth and for international consolidation. It made clear the way in which partner institution links are being developed in progressing the University's strategy for widening participation through a range of federations and networks. The CPSED included an account of the University's framework and arrangements for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality and standards of its collaborative provision. The team learnt of the development of policies which were under consideration or, in the process of implementation, and considered that the work in progress is contributing to the overall enhancement of quality and standards of the University's collaborative provision.

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

152 The University has set itself an ambitious enhancement agenda for its collaborative provision. Many University codes of practice have recently been adopted or are in the process of development and approval. The University is aware that it needs to embed these codes, particularly those concerned with partner approval, quality audit and periodic review of subjects.

153 The University provides a variety of enhancement opportunities for collaborative partner staff through its own staff development programme, centrally organised events and faculty-based events. These events are popular with collaborative partner staff and provide opportunities, not only for information transfer, but also for networking. Collaborative partners value these opportunities and the audit team considered that staff development offered by the University for its collaborative partners is a feature of good practice.

154 The University's intentions for joint development boards (JDBs) to continue their oversight of quality and standards, all being chaired by the University Advisor on Educational Partnerships and serviced by the University Quality Officer (Collaborative Provision), have the potential to ensure greater convergence and consistency, both of policy and practice, for its collaborative provision and the audit team would encourage the University to develop this potential. The team considers that the ambitious agenda the University is following is broadly appropriate and timely for the enhancement of the management of quality and assurance of standards of its collaborative provision. However, given the scale of activity and change, it advises the University to ensure that an appropriate level of administrative and academic staff resource provision is in place to enable it to ensure the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

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

155 A range of published materials associated with the University's collaborative provision, including marketing and publicity materials, and student handbooks, is available to collaborative partner students. The University produces some of the material but most is provided directly by the collaborative partners. The University's Collaborative Handbook provides guidance on the style and content of the materials, and the University's Marketing Toolkit provides further assistance. The

University is working towards a more systematic approach to approve material and to monitor information provided about its collaborative provision.

156 The University has well developed plans to provide the teaching quality information (TQI) set defined in HEFCE's 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*; and is proactively working with its partner institutions to ensure these requirements are met. The audit team found that the information the University and its collaborative partners are publishing currently about the quality of its programmes and the standards of the University's awards offered through collaborative links, is reliable, and that the University is making good progress towards providing TQI data for its collaborative provision.

Features of good practice

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

- i the clarity of the University's strategy for the development of higher education to meet the economic and social needs of the region (paragraph 27)
- ii the University's commitment to staff development at partner colleges including the identification of staff needs and the opportunities provided for colleagues to share experience (paragraphs 38, 85, 109)
- iii the moderation of assessment conducted at partner institutions by staff of the University (paragraph 39)
- iv the process by which the University managed the withdrawal from a partnership arrangement that no longer matched its regional strategy (paragraph 62, 66)
- v the process for ensuring that external examiner reports are effectively considered and acted upon (paragraph 76)

- vi the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and the consultation between the University and its partner institutions on the schedule for replacing the existing VLE platform (paragraph 114).

Recommendations for action

158 It is advisable that the University:

- i ensures that an appropriate level of academic and administrative staff resource provision underpins its expanding collaborative activity to enable it to assure itself of the quality and standards of such activity (paragraphs 41, 54 and 123)
 - ii stipulates the period of programme approval at validation so that it is clear when a programme should be revalidated to ensure its continued currency and relevance (paragraph 53)
 - iii clarifies, for the benefit of those involved in collaborative provision leading to its awards, the relationship between the revalidation of programmes at partner institutions and the system of periodic review of subjects (paragraph 61)
 - iv keeps under review the implementation of the new university code of practice as it relates to the use of academic consultants appointed to provide specialist curriculum advice to partners offering non-comparable provision (paragraph 67)
 - v satisfies itself that new programme approvals take account of external advice and that conditions and recommendations set at the time of approval are followed up expeditiously and clearly documented (paragraph 67)
- and desirable that the University:
- vi introduces a more systematic approach to site visits in the partner and programme approval process (paragraph 54)
 - vii develops a common student information system which allows comparative analysis of student progression and achievement across on-campus and collaborative partner provision (paragraph 103)

- viii strengthens its procedures for granting Recognised Teacher Status (RTS) to ensure that all partner staff teaching on collaborative programmes are RTS-approved in a timely manner and at the appropriate level of teaching (paragraph 107)
- ix ensures that the currency of relevant entries on partner institutions' websites is maintained (paragraph 129).

Appendix

The University of Hull's response to the collaborative provision audit report

The University welcomes the judgement of QAA that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of current and likely future management of the academic standards of our awards made through collaborative arrangements. We are also pleased by the judgement that broad confidence can be placed in the present and future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

We are particularly pleased that the report endorses our view of the range of good practice within the University and our partner institutions, notably:

- the clarity of our strategy for the development of higher education to meet the economic and social needs of the region
- our commitment to staff development at our partner institutions
- the moderation of assessment conducted at partner institutions by staff of the University
- the process by which we managed the withdrawal from a partnership arrangement that no longer matched our regional strategy
- the process for ensuring that external examiner reports are effectively considered and acted upon
- the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and the consultation between the University and our partner institutions on the schedule for replacing the existing VLE platform.

We are responding positively - in collaboration with our partner institutions and the Students' Union - to the specific recommendations contained in the report, with oversight by the University's Quality and Standards Committee. Actions will include:

- a review of the academic and administrative staff resource provision to support our expanding collaborative activity.
- the refinement of existing codes of practice to make explicit: the period of programme approval at validation; the relationship between the re-validation of collaborative programmes and the system of period review of subjects; that new programme approvals take account of external advice and conditions and recommendations set at the time of approval are followed up and documented.
- a review of the code of practice on the use of external consultants appointed to provide specialist curriculum advice to partner institutions offering non-comparable provision.

