

University of Derby

DECEMBER 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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Linney Direct
Adamsway
Mansfield
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450481

Email qaa@linneydirect.com

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited The University of Derby (the University) from 4 to 8 December 2006 to carry out a collaborative provision audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards 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 process, the team visited three of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and also conducted by video-conference an equivalent meeting with staff and students from a partner organisation overseas.

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 resources 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, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* - paragraph 13, published by QAA September 2004).

In a collaborative provision audit 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 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
- 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 close relationships that the University develops with its partner organisations at all levels through a wide variety of joint activities approached in the spirit of genuine partnership
- the overview report on annual monitoring of collaborative provision produced by the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee, which is characteristic of its effectiveness as a focus for rigorous analysis of collaborative activity
- the active involvement of University staff in assessment processes, notably in the moderation of marking which, while primarily being a quality assurance tool, also has a strong developmental element
- the creative approach to gathering student feedback on collaborative programmes which employs both formal and informal processes to elicit information directly from students as well as indirectly through the partner organisation

- the comprehensiveness of the documentation and guidance available to staff in support of their work relating to collaborative provision and the extensive range of opportunities for staff development.

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 the standards of awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained.

Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to keep under review the effectiveness and efficiency of the recent reallocation of responsibilities for the development, administration and quality assurance of collaborative provision, given the risk of overlap in activities and replication of effort between the faculties and the central functions involved
- to adopt a broader approach to sharing with students details of the feedback they give on their experiences of collaborative programmes and reporting progress on action being taken as a result
- to take steps to bring to a satisfactory resolution issues relating to students' access to course resources within the managed learning environment
- to ensure that promotional materials produced by partner organisations give due prominence to the University as the awarding institution to avoid any possibility that users of these materials might be misled about the nature of the awards provided under collaborative arrangements.

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 findings of the audit suggest that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision.

Published information

The audit process includes a check on the published information relating to the University's collaborative provision, including the students' experience of published information and other information relating to their programmes of study. The audit team was satisfied that the information the University and its partner organisations are currently publishing about the quality of collaborative programmes and the standards of the University's awards was reliable and complete.

Main report

Main report

1 A collaborative provision audit of The University of Derby (the University) was undertaken from 4 to 8 December 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

2 Collaborative provision audit is supplementary to the institutional audit of the University's own provision. It is carried out by a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. It provides a separate scrutiny of the collaborative provision of an HEI with degree awarding powers (awarding institution) where such collaborative provision was too large or complex to have been included in its institutional audit. 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)* - paragraph 13, published by QAA, September 2004).

3 In relation to collaborative arrangements, the audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its collaborative provision; and for the discharge of its responsibilities as an awarding institution. As part of the process, the audit team visited three of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video-conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from a partner organisation overseas.

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Derby

The institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision

4 The University of Derby gained university status in 1992. Subsequently, in 1998, it merged with High Peak College (a further education college in Buxton) creating the framework for the present University, which now operates from a main campus and a number of smaller sites in Derby, and a new campus in Buxton. The University offers programmes that are mainly vocational in orientation and supports research that is predominantly applied in focus. It has a significant portfolio of collaborative provision, currently involving 10 partner organisations in the UK, the majority in the East Midlands, and four overseas. Six new UK partnerships have been approved to start in 2006-07, while nine partnerships, four UK and five overseas, have recently closed or are in the process of closure.

5 The University's total student population in 2005-06 was 22,182. This represented 16,525 full-time equivalent students (FTEs) made up of 13,855 full-time students, and part-time students amounting to 2,670 FTEs; 68 per cent of the student population was classified as mature; 552 students were on collaborative programmes in the UK, comprising 105 full-time undergraduates, 348 part-time undergraduates and 99 part-time postgraduates. The corresponding figure for programmes overseas was 6,022, comprising 3,082 full-time undergraduates, 192 part-time undergraduates, 2,463 full-time postgraduates, and 285 part-time postgraduates.

6 The University's academic provision is organised within subject-based schools, each located in one of four faculties: Arts, Design and Technology; Business, Computing and Law; Education, Health and Sciences; and the University of Derby Buxton, which has responsibility for the majority of the University's extensive further education provision. All faculties have collaborative provision. Faculties were introduced in 2005 through a process

regarded by the University as rebranding rather than restructuring, since equivalent structures already existed, known formerly as schools. As part of the same process, the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning (FPL) was created outside the faculty structure. FPL combines academic and administrative functions and brings together the previously separate units responsible for the Combined Subject programme, Learning Through Work, e-learning, and partnership. It handles all initial enquiries related to collaborative provision.

7 The University's collaborative arrangements both in the UK and overseas are predominantly based on a franchise model, with the programme in question sometimes having been developed jointly with the partner organisation. The majority of franchised programmes are also delivered by the University, although on occasions the programme is only available in the partner organisation. The University has a longstanding commitment to facilitating student progression from further to higher education, as exemplified by the merger with High Peak College. In the University's view, this has been helpful in the development of Foundation Degrees with local further education colleges. It has also created opportunities for forming partnerships with colleges outside the region in niche programme areas.

8 The present Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2004, and one of his early initiatives was to instigate a review by faculties of their overseas collaborative partnerships against the criteria of strategic fit, quality and financial robustness. This resulted in a reduction in the number of such arrangements. The University's management structure has remained broadly the same for a number of years, although recently there has been a change occasioned by the replacement of the post of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) with two new pro vice-chancellors, one responsible for Learning, Teaching and Scholarship, the other for Academic Development. The current Director of Quality Enhancement is also a relatively new

appointment. All these positions have responsibilities for collaborative provision.

9 According to its mission statement, the University aspires 'to be the learner's first choice for quality and opportunity'. More specifically relevant to collaborative provision are several objectives contained in the Corporate Plan 2005. These include: 'to provide learning opportunities in further and higher education delivered directly and in partnership with other institutions...in Derbyshire and the immediate surroundings'; 'to contribute to the economic growth of the East Midlands by working with employers and key agencies to raise skill levels, promote an enterprise culture and increase levels of knowledge transfer' and 'to strengthen the internationalism of the University'. While the latter is focused on enhancing the experience of international students at the University, it is also concerned with seeking overseas partnerships that facilitate student progression to Derby. The Corporate Plan envisages growth in the number of students on collaborative programmes over the planning period. In the context of these objectives, the audit team explored the strategic development of collaborative provision as a particular theme.

Background information

10 The published information available for this audit included:

- the institutional audit report, March 2005
- the collaborative provision audit report, March 2003
- the Foundation Degree review report on Educare and Early Childhood, May 2005.

11 The University provided QAA with the following documents:

- the self-evaluation document for collaborative provision (CPSED)
- documentation linked to the CPSED (as listed in footnotes to the CPSED)
- documentation relating to the partner organisations visited by the audit team and to those with which it conducted meetings by video-conference.

12 In addition, the audit team had access to a range of the University's internal documents, including case-studies illustrating specific aspects of the University's processes. The team is grateful to the University for the access it was given to this information.

The collaborative provision audit process

13 Following the preliminary meeting at the University in March 2006, QAA confirmed that between the briefing and audit visits there would be visits to four partner organisations, one of which would be a 'virtual' visit involving meetings conducted by video-conference. QAA received the CPSED in July 2006 and documentation relating to the four partner organisations in October 2006.

14 The University's students were invited, through their Students' Union, to contribute to the audit process in a way that reflected the Union's capacity to represent the views of students in partner organisations offering the University's awards through collaborative arrangements. At the briefing visit, the audit team was able to meet officers of the University of Derby Students' Union (UDSU) as part of a wider student group, and the team is grateful to UDSU for its engagement with the audit process.

15 The audit team undertook a briefing visit to the University from 23 to 25 October 2006 with the purpose of exploring with senior members of University staff, senior staff from partner organisations, and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the CPSED and the linked documentation. At the end of the briefing visit a programme of meetings for the audit visit was agreed with the University. It was also agreed that certain audit trails would be pursued through specific case-studies prepared by the University.

16 During its visits to the partner organisations (including the 'virtual' visit) the audit team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives of the partner organisations. The team is grateful to the partner organisations for their help in

furthering its understanding of the University's processes for managing its collaborative arrangements.

17 The audit visit took place from 4 to 8 December 2006 and involved further meetings with University staff. The audit team is grateful to all those who participated in these meetings.

18 The audit team comprised Professor A Jago, Professor D Morton, Ms R Pelik, and Mr A Weale, auditors, and Mrs A Jones, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms J Holt, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

19 The institutional audit highlighted a number of areas of good practice relevant to collaborative as well as in-house provision. These included the responsiveness to staff development and the high quality of support documentation for staff; the University's regional agenda and links with local employers; and the high level of staff commitment to student support.

20 The report also identified issues which, although relating to aspects of mainstream quality assurance procedures, also had a bearing on collaborative provision. The CPSED explained that the University's responses to the audit recommendations were set out in full in an action plan and progress report, but drew attention to some aspects that had significance for collaborative activity. For instance, in addressing an advisable recommendation to achieve more consistent critical analysis in internal review reports, the University had also tackled the same issue in the context of annual monitoring reports on collaborative programmes (see paragraph 48 below).

21 The CPSED also reported on progress with the desirable recommendations. In order to raise staff awareness of quality assurance procedures, the University was using newsletters and targeted sessions to brief its own staff and those in partner organisations on new processes for the periodic review of both subjects and partnerships (see paragraphs 51-52 below). It was moving to a centrally coordinated approach

to e-learning through the appointment of a Head of e-learning within FPL. It was seeking to clarify the nature of academic deliberative systems and their links to executive structures through the ongoing review of the University's committee, management and governance structures, which is due to report with recommendations early in 2007.

22 The CPSED indicated that the outcomes of previous QAA audits had been a significant influence on the strategic changes of direction and emphasis that underpin current arrangements for managing collaborative provision. In the University's view these address the particular issues, seen to result from 'the pressures for development', which had been raised in the 2003 collaborative audit report. With respect to reviews at the subject level, a recent review of the Foundation Degree in Educare and Early Childhood, offered in partnership with a number of further education colleges, identified several areas for development and resultant action is being tracked through the University's routine monitoring processes (see paragraph 71 below).

23 The present audit team considered that the University had taken effective action in response to the institutional audit report, as illustrated by improvements to reporting on annual monitoring (see paragraph 49 below), and the strengthening of the deliberative system through the creation of an institutional committee dedicated to collaborative and distributed learning (see paragraph 29 and 35 below). Nevertheless, in the team's view, certain areas required further attention, including the impact of the recent reallocation of responsibilities for collaborative provision (see paragraph 35 below); and the arrangements for student access to the managed learning environment (see paragraph 98 below).

24 The audit team also noted the further development of strengths identified in the institutional audit, for example, the arrangements for staff support and development (see paragraph 92 below), and the level of commitment to student support, which gives impetus to the collection of feedback from

students on their experience of collaborative programmes (see paragraph 81 below). The team recognised that previous collaborative provision audits had been a catalyst for change in the University's practice, and took this as further evidence of the University's engagement with external review processes.

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

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

25 The University's strategic approach to collaborative provision is one of measured expansion, guided, as stated in the CPSED, by its intention 'to develop strategic alliances and multi-layered partnerships and to promote opportunities for the exchange of students and staff and for joint scholarship and professional development'. The approach is set out in detail in the Strategic Framework 2006 which brings together in a single document the strands of UK and overseas collaborative strategy previously contained in the Widening Participation and International strategies. The following are identified as 'key drivers' shaping the development of the collaborative portfolio:

- building on the University's reputation in areas of distinctive expertise
- establishing strategic alliances with a limited number of further education colleges in the region
- establishing a limited number of overseas partnerships in markets where there is demand for the University's subject expertise
- increasing the number of progression routes to the University for both home and overseas students
- supporting national objectives and regional development goals.

26 The framework document refers to FPL's role in sourcing potential partnerships, but also emphasises the importance of consultation with faculties and their full ownership of collaborative arrangements. It establishes the primacy of risk assessment in making recommendations about whether to proceed with a potential partner organisation and lists the criteria used in the selection process. Among these are 'strategic fit' with the University's mission and educational values; 'good quality outlets for [the University's] programmes', and 'financial viability'. The CPSED clarified that although the University employed conventional categories (such as franchise and off-campus delivery) in referring to collaborative arrangements, quality management arrangements were matched to the profiling of individual partnerships and to the particular risks they presented.

27 The University's approach to managing the quality and academic standards of its collaborative provision is described in the CPSED as 'mainstream plus additional safeguards', and is based on the recognition that 'most of [the University's] standard policies and procedures are appropriate for application to collaborative provision, but require specific augmentation'. For example, the University's normal processes for programme approval and review pertain, but with supplementary procedures for establishing the suitability of the partner organisation for delivery of the programme. Similarly, the University's academic regulations and assessment policy apply to all collaborative provision, but with specific arrangements covering translation where assessment is not conducted in English (see paragraph 34 below).

28 From the outset, senior managers briefing the audit team emphasised that partnership was regarded as a natural way of working for the University, and the positive impact of this was reflected back to the team in its meetings with partner organisations. The team saw numerous examples of joint activities approached in a spirit of genuine partnership and came to the view that the close relationships developed by the University at all levels with its partner organisations represented

a feature of good practice. Relevant examples are identified throughout the report.

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

29 In the context of the 'mainstream plus' approach, the responsibilities of the Academic Board and its Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) for oversight of quality and academic standards extend to collaborative provision. In addition, the Collaborative and Distributed Learning (CDL) Sub-committee of AQSC has a specific role in monitoring collaborative activity (see paragraph 47 below) and in relevant policy making. Local responsibility for oversight of the quality and academic standards of collaborative provision rests with faculty quality committees (FQCs). As part of the routine operation of the committee system, AQSC receives the minutes of FQC meetings. Academic Board and its committees are currently the subject of an internal audit initiated in December 2005, from which the final report is due in March 2007.

30 Similarly, senior academic staff with briefs including quality and standards have reporting to them post-holders with significant responsibilities for collaborative provision. For example, at institution level, the Head of FPL reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development) and there is a post dedicated to collaborative provision reporting to the Director of Quality Enhancement. Meanwhile, at faculty level, the post of Assistant Dean, who has the quality portfolio, and the Faculty Quality Manager, who has an operational role in ensuring implementation of University policies, also encompass collaborative provision. Linking central and local management functions is the Quality Managers Advisory Group (QMAG), convened by the Director of Quality Enhancement, which includes representation from FPL as well as from the faculties. The minutes of QMAG are received by ASQC, providing the group with a formal route into the committee system through which to influence policy matters.

31 Within the University's management structures, first-line responsibility for the implementation of academic quality and standards processes rests with the programme leader. This normally embraces collaborative provision, since the most prevalent arrangement entails the franchise of a programme that is also offered in-house. Where there is no equivalent in-house programme, or several programmes are offered by the same partner organisation, a project manager is designated from among the University's own staff. In one particular case, involving programmes that cross faculty boundaries, a management group has been set up consisting of the faculty project managers and other key staff. Programme or project managers also have responsibility for liaison with partner organisations. Local administrative functions relating to collaborative provision are subsumed within the normal arrangements for servicing programme committees, recording the results of student assessment, and monitoring module and programme information.

32 There are several key departments whose remits incorporate collaborative provision: the Quality Enhancement Department (QED), which has a role in policy formulation and implementation, as well as performing administrative quality assurance functions; Student Support and Information Services which has central responsibility for admissions, enrolment, assessment, regulations and student support; and Learning and Information Services which has responsibility for learning resources. Dedicated administrative support for collaborative activity, covering such matters as student enrolment, assessment and award, is provided centrally through the Partnership Office within FPL, which also maintains the University's register of collaborative provision, in accordance with the relevant precept of the *Code of practice*.

33 The University's quality assurance processes are documented in its procedures for Validation and Approval and for Quality Monitoring. These are reviewed annually and include dedicated sections for collaborative arrangements as deemed appropriate. The

publication Rights, Responsibilities and Regulations for Students on Taught Programmes (3Rs), which deals with the regulations and major policies affecting students, is also produced in an abridged version for students on collaborative programmes. The Collaborative Provision Guide for Staff is presented in a more digestible style than the formal procedural documents and contains advice on setting up and maintaining collaborative arrangements, drawing widely on the relevant section of QAA's *Code of practice* as a point of reference. In addition, the operational manual for each partnership details the precise arrangements for running the collaborative programme(s), including the University's requirements for routine monitoring of the students' experience. Responsibility for ensuring the currency of the staff guide and operational manuals has recently been transferred to QED.

34 Assessment processes mirror the University's standard practices, including internal moderation, which means that all student work assessed by partner organisations is moderated on a sample basis by the University's own staff, as well as by external examiners. From April 2005, it has been University policy for new collaborative arrangements to adopt English as the language of delivery and assessment; however, a translation policy governs the special arrangements for translation and moderation in cases where assessment is not conducted in English. Assessment Boards for collaborative programmes are chaired by the University's staff, and students' results are recorded on its student record system.

35 The CPSED identified coherence and integration, combined with the balance of central and local responsibilities as the essential characteristics of the University's approach to managing quality and standards in collaborative provision. The audit team was able to see evidence of integration through the creation of the Partnership Office to perform general administrative functions for both UK and overseas collaborative arrangements. Coherence was also apparent in the work of CDL, through bringing together representation from central departments and the faculties.

However, the team considered that it was too early to reach a firm conclusion on whether an appropriate balance of central and local responsibilities had been struck in respect of the development of collaborative provision, given the recent shift in the locus of these responsibilities towards FPL. For instance, the implications of the new role of FPL in selecting partner organisations were still being worked through in the re-specification of quality assurance procedures that were, as yet, largely untested. Moreover, the revised approach to risk assessment was an expanded role for FPL and a changed role for both QED and the faculties. The team was supportive of the University's objectives in seeking to separate and clarify responsibilities for development, operation and quality assurance. Nevertheless, it considers it desirable for the University to keep under review the effectiveness and efficiency of the recent reallocation of responsibilities for the development, administration and quality assurance of collaborative provision, given the risk of overlap in activities and replication of effort between the faculties and the central functions involved.

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

36 The CPSED identified a number of key initiatives as part of the University's plans for enhancement, also explaining that, 'measures [were] being implemented in the context of a systematic and comprehensive review of the University's quality strategy' to 'include significant changes to periodic review and validation procedures and a risk-based approach to annual monitoring'. By the time of the audit visit, changes to the periodic review and validation procedures had been implemented and the audit team was able to see some examples of these in operation (see paragraphs 44 and 54 below). The quality strategy had also recently been published, setting a target date of 2007-08 for implementation of a risk-based annual monitoring procedure, following a period of consultation and staff development in 2006-07.

37 In addition, the University is in the process of introducing measures aimed at more consistent operation of its validation and quality monitoring arrangements. Examples include the creation of a pool of 'experts' from which internal members for panel events would be drawn, and the adoption of a new policy to monitor the extent of liaison with partner organisations and to prescribe key outcomes for routine visits (see paragraphs 78 and 91 below). Other initiatives, at an earlier stage of development, relate to statistical reporting within the context of the University's new student record system, and a review of the content and utility of operational manuals. The University has also strengthened its procedures for the approval and subsequent monitoring of articulation arrangements (see paragraph 66 below).

38 The audit team noted that the review of the operational manuals had been prompted by a concern that guidance on managing the programmes should not be obscured by excessive procedural detail. It also noted that the new visit policy gave emphasis to obtaining feedback directly from students on their experience of collaborative programmes. Nevertheless, the team makes the observation that the strong focus on enhancing the management of collaborative provision through improvements in the operation and monitoring of procedures gives little insight into the aspects of students' learning opportunities that the University wishes to target for further development.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Approval

39 The section of the Validation and Approval procedures devoted to collaborative arrangements details the University's three-stage process for the approval of programmes for delivery by partner organisations. The programmes themselves are subject to separate mainstream processes for development and validation, and for new programmes these run in parallel with the process of approving the partner organisation for the delivery of the programmes.

40 The initial stage of planning approval considers collaboration with a partner organisation for the delivery of a proposed programme or programmes. This involves the faculty and FPL making a joint submission to a planning approvals panel of a business plan and collaborative provision profile. Based on an analysis of these documents, QED provides a summary risk assessment to inform the decisions of the panel, including that of the most appropriate route through the remaining stages of approval.

41 In the case of a new partner organisation, the next stage is an institutional quality audit (IQA), undertaken to determine the suitability of the partner organisation for offering programmes leading to the University's awards. Where a partner organisation has already been approved by the University to offer such programmes, an IQA is not normally required. The IQA takes place at the partner organisation and is conducted by a panel which includes independent external representation. Documentation is prepared jointly by the partner organisation and FPL. If the IQA leads to approval, this is for a fixed period (not exceeding five years) at the end of which a partnership review is required.

42 The final stage is approval of the collaborative arrangements and this focuses on the capacity of the partner organisation to offer specific programmes and includes an evaluation of staffing and learning resources. Again this is a panel event with independent external representation. An important outcome of this stage is agreement of the operational manual, setting out in detail arrangements for the management of the collaborative programme(s) and to which compliance will be required in the formal contract with the partner organisation. On successful completion of the approval process, contracts must be signed by all parties prior to the first delivery of any collaborative programme. Again approval is for a fixed period (not exceeding the validity of the equivalent in-house programme or a maximum of five years, if there is no such equivalent programme) and at the end of the period revalidation of the

programme for delivery by the partner organisation is required. QED receives reports relating to all panel events for submission to AQSC where the outcomes are ratified.

43 The CPSED drew attention to aspects of the approval process which had been strengthened since the previous collaborative provision audit. These included the development of the collaborative provision profile into a 'more sophisticated tool', providing the basis for the management of risk and guiding the production of operational manuals; the extension of IQA to cover all new partner organisations, where previously it had been waived for those with experience in offering higher education programmes; and the incorporation of minimum timescales between the initial and final stages of approval and between the latter and student enrolment on the collaborative programme. It was clarified for the audit team that the usual approach was to separate the IQA and the collaborative arrangements approval events, in terms of time and panel membership, although the events were sometimes permitted to occur consecutively on the same day, and that in all cases the collaborative arrangements approval event could not proceed unless the outcome of the IQA was positive.

44 Based on documentation for two recent approval events, the audit team was able to see completed collaborative provision profiles in the latest format and considered these to provide a comprehensive evidence base for the assessment of risk at the planning approval stage and for decision making in subsequent stages of the approval process. From a study of a range of panel reports relating to IQA, approval of collaborative arrangements and programme validation or revalidation, it was apparent to the team that the University had developed robust procedures for both partner and programme approval. Panels included external representation and programme development teams gave due consideration to subject or qualification benchmark statements. Through partner visits, the team learned that operational manuals were valued as an

information source by staff in partner organisations. It also formed the view that the University's approach to developing partnerships through joint preparation of documentation was helpful in promoting mutual respect, setting the tenor for the close relationships that the University forms with its partner organisations.

45 The audit team reviewed a number of contracts for both UK and overseas collaborative arrangements, noting that these were issued in a timely fashion. It found coverage of the contracts to be broadly consistent with the relevant precept of the section of the *Code of practice* dealing with collaborative provision. Specifically, they dealt with run-off arrangements in the event of termination of a partnership - these entailing completion of an action plan in consultation with the partner organisation. In one particular case, the team was able to verify that the University was honouring its commitments to students and making appropriate arrangements for their progression.

Annual monitoring

46 The present arrangements for annual monitoring of collaborative provision have essentially been in use since 2000-01. The starting point is the annual monitoring report and action plan produced by the partner organisation, with support from the University programme or project leader where necessary. Stipulated inputs include an analysis of student performance and feedback from students, module tutors, internal moderators and external examiners. The report from the partner organisation is incorporated by the programme leader into the in-house annual programme report and action plan, where an equivalent programme exists; otherwise the report from the partner organisation becomes the substantive document. Programme committees consider programme reports and also monitor action plans. FQCs analyse programme reports relating to their respective provision to produce faculty annual monitoring reports and action plans, which they subsequently monitor, keeping programme committees informed of progress.

47 Central oversight of the monitoring of collaborative provision occurs through two main routes. CDL reviews all annual monitoring reports from partner organisations alongside the related in-house reports and produces an overview report, giving emphasis to cross-provision issues and areas of concern or good practice. In a parallel exercise, a subgroup of AQSC undertakes an analysis of faculty annual monitoring reports, together with those from central departments, and produces an equivalent overview report. Both these reports are summarised by AQSC into a report and action plan for consideration by Academic Board. Monitoring of this institution-level action plan is undertaken by AQSC. In a separate exercise, CDL provides feedback to staff at both the University and partner organisations on the quality of their reporting.

48 The CPSED indicated that there had been steady improvement in the reports submitted by partner organisations, attributing this to 'focused effort, with partners, programme staff and FQMs supporting one another', although it acknowledged that the analysis and use of statistical data in annual monitoring was an area where, despite making progress, further improvement was needed. The CPSED also expressed the University's view that 'the culmination of work over a number of years to achieve consistent and comprehensive monitoring' would 'provide a firm foundation' for the risk-based framework for annual monitoring the University was shortly to introduce.

49 The audit team noted the variability in the detail and quality of annual monitoring reports from partner organisations, particularly in the analysis of student statistics. However, it recognised that the University was itself aware of these issues - the feedback given by CDL was explicit about deficiencies in reports and encouraging about improvements. The team considered the review of annual monitoring reports by CDL to be a thorough and systematic exercise. It generated an extensive evidence base for the overview report, which provided the University with a comprehensive summary from which to draw conclusions about the maintenance of quality and standards

in collaborative provision. In the team's view the overview report was also instrumental in ensuring that collaborative provision was given due prominence in the institution-level report on annual monitoring considered by Academic Board. The team identifies as a feature of good practice the overview report on annual monitoring of collaborative provision produced by CDL, which is characteristic of its effectiveness as a focus for rigorous analysis of collaborative activity.

50 From committee minutes the audit team concluded that there was assiduous consideration of annual monitoring reports at all levels and that progress against action plans was monitored attentively. Reporting on resultant action appeared to be firmly embedded through formal channels, such as programme committees, which also provided a mechanism for feedback to students through their committee representatives (see paragraph 75 below). From partner visits, it was evident to the team that the close working relationships at programme level between University and partner staff offered a supplementary informal channel for communicating progress on action plans. The team concluded that the rationale for routine monitoring was well understood across the range of partner organisations and that this would clearly be helpful to the University as it adopted a more risk-based approach.

Periodic review

51 The University's procedures for periodic review were revised in 2005-06. For collaborative provision they now include the mainstream process of subject review plus the process of partnership review. Under subject review, the programmes in each school are reviewed every five years and where a programme is delivered by a partner organisation, the management of the collaborative provision is also considered. Subject review involves a panel event with independent external representation and culminates in a report and action plan, to be approved by both AQSC and the relevant FQC. The processes of programme revalidation and any associated re-approval of collaborative

arrangements fall outside the scope of subject review. They essentially follow the procedures for initial validation and approval, and, although a further IQA is not normally required, the planning approvals panel may stipulate that a partnership review precedes any revalidation of programmes for delivery at a partner organisation.

52 Under partnership review, the continued 'health' of each partnership is formally reviewed every five years. The focus is on the partner organisation and developments that have taken place since the IQA or approval of the collaborative arrangements, or any previous review. It is also the process by which the University seeks to re-approve a partnership on expiry of the previous approval period. A review visit is undertaken to the partner organisation by a panel which includes independent external representation. Preparatory documentation is produced by the partner organisation and the visit includes meetings with staff and students, and also a check on resources. The visit leads to a report with recommendations to which the partner organisation responds by means of an action plan that must be approved by the chair of the review panel. The review report, action plan and formal confirmation of the re-approval of the partnership, where appropriate, are submitted to CDL, which incorporates any recommendations for action at University level into its annual monitoring action plan.

53 The CPSED emphasised the 'comprehensive nature of review now in place for collaborative provision' and pointed to the focus on partnerships and the visit to the partner organisation as particular strengths of the new system. It explained that under previous arrangements conducted at programme level, reviews of collaborative programmes had mostly taken place at the University, as they often also involved an in-house programme. In addition, it was clarified for the audit team that partnership review had effectively superseded internal academic audit, which had been applied to overseas collaborative partnerships on a rolling programme, although the process had been retained as a mechanism for dealing with issues of concern.

54 As the new periodic review procedures had been so recently introduced, the audit team was unable to reach any firm conclusions about their effectiveness. Only one subject review report relevant to collaborative provision was available and this gave due consideration to the management of the collaborative arrangement. There were two partnership review reports and the team noted that these were produced according to different formats, with only one of the reports reviewing the operational manual, although the team recognised that it might be the intention for this to be re-approved as part of the programme revalidation. The team was of the view that, as the process gathered pace, there might be benefit in adopting a more consistent reporting style. The majority of reports available to the team related to the former programme review process and to programme revalidation events. The team was able to verify that these were produced in line with extant reporting requirements and that recommendations were addressed by action plans monitored by FQCs.

Conclusion

55 Overall, the audit team found approval, monitoring and review processes to be well understood by staff in both the University and partner organisations and effectively managed by the University with strong engagement from partner organisations.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

56 The procedures for programme validation, IQA, approval of collaborative arrangements, subject review and partnership review all involve external participants as members of approval or review panels. The majority are academic peers, although professional practitioners are also used. They are selected and approved according to published criteria through a process centrally managed by QED, although faculties are asked for nominations. The criteria are designed to ensure that external participants have appropriate academic qualifications, together with the necessary

relevant and current experience to equip them to make judgements about academic standards and any professional requirements; in cases where practitioners do not fulfil the academic criteria, they work alongside an academic external panel member. External participants for partnership review events are required to have significant experience of managing collaborative provision. The requirement for independence is firmly embedded and external participants should have no recent association with the University, thus precluding the use of serving external examiners. External participants are also used as consultants during programme development and serving external examiners are eligible to act in this capacity.

57 In the CPSED, the University expresses confidence that an appropriate level of externality is built into its quality assurance framework, citing the 2005 institutional audit report as providing independent endorsement of this view. The CPSED indicated that for collaborative provision (as for other processes) care was taken to develop a wide network of external contacts, for example, by calling on the expertise of relevant organisations such as Foundation Degree Forward.

58 From an extensive study of documentation relating to approval and review processes, the present audit team saw, in the context of collaborative provision, considerable evidence of a high level of input from external specialists drawn from a wide range of HEIs. The team found that the University used external advice constructively and that externality in approval and review processes for collaborative programmes was strong and scrupulous.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

59 The University's mainstream procedures for external examining apply to collaborative provision, which means that the University retains full responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and the functions carried out by them. In addition to their main focus on academic standards and the standard of student achievement, external examiners of

collaborative programmes are invited to comment on the comparability of standards at different locations. If a programme is offered in-house and through collaborative arrangements, wherever practical, the same external examiner covers all locations, allowing direct comparison of standards to be made. If an external examiner is appointed to a programme at a particular partner organisation, the host faculty is expected to make arrangements for the examiner to sample work from other locations to facilitate comparison of standards. In addition, external examiners are requested to comment in their reports on aspects of assessment policy, including strategies/methods and the internal moderation of student work assessed by partner organisations. Where assessment is in a language other than English, there is provision for the translation and moderation of assessed student work under the University's translation policy.

60 External examiners receive a centrally produced induction pack, although induction and briefing of external examiners is a faculty responsibility. Induction materials have recently been revised to include specific information on the external examining of collaborative provision. The CPSED acknowledged that some external examiners were not sufficiently explicit in their comments on comparability of standards at different locations, but indicated that the new induction material was aimed, in part, at increasing awareness of the additional responsibilities in this area.

61 QED is responsible for the dissemination of external examiner reports, which are received centrally, then sent simultaneously to faculties and partners organisations. The University programme leader or project manager is responsible for drawing up the formal response to the external examiner, but does so in conjunction with the partner organisation(s). External examiner reports are read by QED which logs concerns and requests responses from faculties. In the case of any serious concern that could affect standards, the Director of QED is in a position to instigate an investigation and respond directly to the

external examiner. In addition, a 'reading panel' produces a brief institution-wide summary for AQSC on key issues arising from external examiner reports. External examiners are explicitly asked on the report pro forma whether they received a satisfactory written response to their previous report and, as part of its scrutiny of annual monitoring reports, CDL draws to the attention of faculties any issues raised by external examiners that have not been fully addressed, as well as monitoring the operation of the translation policy.

62 From its scrutiny of external examiner reports and associated responses, the audit team found that issues raised in the reports were suitably addressed by the responses to them and also carried forward to programme annual monitoring reports and action plans. One example related to timelines in the provision of data for assessment boards which had been remarked on by a number of external examiners and was subsequently dealt with through action plans. Staff meeting the team through partner visits stated that they had seen and discussed recent external examiner reports and had contributed to responses and the formulation of action plans within annual monitoring. The team noted that CDL routinely looked at whether standards achieved by students on collaborative programmes were comparable with those achieved by students on equivalent in-house programmes and the most recent overview report on annual monitoring confirmed this to be the case.

63 With respect to internal moderation, the audit team noted from the CDL overview report that the process 'continue[d] to work well'. This confirmed the team's impression from external examiner reports where comments on assessment processes had been generally positive, with instances of improvement in the consistency of marking being specifically mentioned. Through partner visits, the team learned that staff in partner organisations regarded the moderation process as a valuable exercise. The team noted that it sometimes involved staff from all delivery sites and that in one case the process had been conducted as

part of a staff development event. The team identifies as a feature of good practice the active involvement of University staff in assessment processes, notably in the moderation of marking which, while primarily being a quality assurance tool, also has a strong developmental element.

64 Overall, the audit team found the University's use of external examiners in summative assessment to be strong and scrupulous, with reports containing sufficient detail for the University to be confident in the security of the academic standards of awards offered through collaborative arrangements.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

65 The University's approach to the Academic Infrastructure, as stated in the CPSED, 'is to embed the recommended good practice and more regulatory aspects, such as *the framework for higher education qualifications* within [its] own regulations, policies and procedures'. Amendments to the Infrastructure and initiatives associated with it are monitored by QED in particular, but also by other central departments, which then consider the implications for their own policies.

66 In respect of revisions to the *Code of practice*, the general policy is to map revised sections to University procedures and to report on this mapping to AQSC, together with any recommendations for amendment. The revised section dealing with collaborative provision resulted in minor changes to University procedures relating to monitoring of the marketing protocol, guidance on admissions audits and the provision of operational manuals to external examiners. Of greater significance are the revised procedures being implemented for the approval and monitoring of articulation arrangements. These resulted in part from the changed approach to defining collaborative provision in the revised section of the *Code*, which brought the quality assurance of arrangements involving 'specific credit towards an award' within its scope, at the institution's discretion.

67 The mechanism for maintaining alignment between the University's procedures and the *Code of practice* is to have a nominated manager for each section who reports annually to the relevant committee of Academic Board on how issues of alignment are being addressed. CDL, which deals with the section on collaborative provision, most recently considered the University's practice relative to the *Code* in September 2006. Contrary to the University's usual approach, which is not to issue staff with sections of the *Code*, but to rely on its own procedures being consistent with the precepts, key staff in the University and partner organisations are given a copy of the section dealing with collaborative provision. According to the CPSED, the University sees this as being particularly important for overseas partner organisations, leading to a better understanding of the commitment to quality and standards within UK higher education.

68 In respect of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and the subject and qualification benchmarks, these are respectively used as reference points in the University's regulations and programme validation and review processes. Through partner visits, the audit team was able to verify that staff were aware of the Academic Infrastructure and making use of its various elements.

69 Programme specifications are mandatory for all programmes and are available on the University website. The University is concerned about their student-friendliness, but all programme handbooks contain some of the key elements of programme specifications, including learning outcomes and programme structures (see paragraph 103 below).

70 The audit team concluded that the University was making appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure in relation to collaborative provision. In particular, it had introduced systematic mechanisms for dealing with revisions to the *Code of practice* and for maintaining the consistency of its procedures with the various sections. In the overview report on the annual monitoring of

collaborative provision, CDL was able to confirm that the University's policies and procedures remained valid in terms of the relevant section of the *Code*.

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

71 Since the institutional audit in December 2005, there has been no QAA review at the subject level. The May 2005 Foundation Degree review of Educare and Early Childhood Studies, offered in partnership with five further education colleges, provides an illustration of the University's processes for responding to the outcomes of external reviews. The review resulted in judgements of confidence in the emerging academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities and this outcome was reported to Academic Board. AQSC is responsible for approving and monitoring the action plan based on recommendations in the review report and requires a progress report one year on - in this particular case by spring 2007. Action taken forward at faculty or programme level is also recorded in the respective annual monitoring reports.

72 The University maintains a composite log of the accreditation arrangements with professional statutory or regulatory bodies in each faculty. None of the University's current collaborative programmes has accredited status, although there are plans to seek accreditation in 2006-07 for several programmes offered through collaborative arrangements. Certain provision has been endorsed by such bodies as Standards Verification UK, (dealing with initial teacher training) and the British Accreditation Council (now covering private colleges overseas, as well as in the UK).

73 Under mainstream procedures, matters relating to accreditation arrangements are dealt with at faculty level, but the audit team learned that reports on arrangements involving collaborative provision would be considered by

AQSC. The team noted that this was now occurring in practice - a recent report from the British Accreditation Council was routed through AQSC, whereas an earlier report from Standards Verification UK was not. The team also noted that the log of accreditation arrangements was explicit where an in-house programme had accredited status and the equivalent programme delivered at a partner organisation did not.

74 The audit team concluded that the University was making effective preparations for a planned increase in externally accredited collaborative programmes and considered that AQSC scrutiny of external review reports was an appropriate addition to its procedures.

Student representation in collaborative provision

75 The University's mainstream policy and procedures for student feedback and representation apply to collaborative provision. In respect of representation, all collaborative programmes are required to have programme committees with student members, holding a minimum of three meetings a year within teaching weeks to enable student attendance. The precise composition and reporting arrangements for each committee vary to suit the particular collaborative arrangement and are included in the operational manual: either the University programme leader/project manager attends the meetings (usually by electronic conferencing in the case of overseas provision), or arrangements are made for the programme coordinator at the partner organisation to report back to the in-house programme committee or programme leader/project manager. Programme committees deal with a range of business relating to the management of students' learning opportunities, including annual monitoring reports, and student feedback is a routine agenda item. Under the relevant procedures, if student representatives are unable to attend the programme committee, a special meeting to obtain student feedback is separately organised.

76 The CPSED acknowledged that the extent to which students utilised programme committees varied, particularly where part-time students were concerned, and indicated that measures to improve student attendance featured in the action plans for some collaborative programmes. It also gave examples of arrangements aimed at facilitating student participation, such as moving meetings between locations where a collaborative programme was delivered at several partner organisations. Programme staff meeting the audit team were aware of the obligation to collect student feedback by other means in the absence of student representatives at programme committees and gave instances of when this had been carried out.

77 Students briefing the audit team indicated that UDSU was increasing its involvement with student representatives from regional partner organisations, for instance, through their inclusion in UDSU training events, even though take-up was limited. The students explained that the University was supporting this and other relationship building initiatives by providing UDSU with information on collaborative arrangements, although they did not underestimate the difficulties associated with liaison over a distance. Through partner visits, the team found evidence of the variability in the student representation system. Some student groups were forthcoming with examples of actions taken in response to students' views, such as a change to the pattern of delivery of the University's contribution to one programme, and they clearly valued the opportunity to provide feedback directly to the University through the in-house programme leader's attendance at programme committees. However, other student groups were less well informed about the function of student representation, also indicating that it had not been positively promoted to them.

78 The audit team noted that the CDL overview report on annual monitoring confirmed that programme committees were working well in most cases. It recognised that the University was responding to shortcomings in the system,

for example, through the mandatory requirement in the new visit policy for a meeting with students (at which partner organisation staff would not be present) during at least one liaison visit made by University staff during each year. In the team's view, such meetings would provide an opportunity to reinforce for students the representation routes available to them through the University's committee structures, particularly since the formal records of the meetings are considered by FQCs.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

79 The University and its partner organisations employ a range of formal mechanisms to obtain feedback from students on collaborative programmes. These include student representation on programme committees, the student meeting as required by the new visit policy (see paragraph 78 above); questionnaires completed by students; and student involvement in periodic review. The specific arrangements for obtaining, analysing and responding to student feedback are contained in the operational manual for each collaborative programme. With respect to module evaluation, partner organisations adopting the University's standard questionnaire (designed to be read by an optical character reader) are able to send forms to the University for processing. Other partner organisations implement their own evaluation surveys.

80 Supplementing formal mechanisms are the opportunities afforded students to give feedback through tutorial sessions and day-to-day contact with staff. The CPSED referred to 'the customer service ethos' pervading many collaborative arrangements, particularly those involving private partner organisations, which encouraged students to raise issues affecting their progress without delay and ensured that responses were made with similar promptness.

81 From programme committee minutes, visit reports and feedback summaries within annual monitoring reports, the audit team saw considerable evidence that due attention was given to obtaining students' views on their

experience of collaborative programmes. While the team noted the low response rate to some questionnaires, it also noted that the University was already addressing this problem in the context of online surveys. Staff meeting the team through partner visits conveyed strongly that through day-to-day interaction they were able to pick up on student concerns and respond to them, while University staff explained that joint teaching arrangements provided opportunities to discuss with students aspects of their experience. The students confirmed that they found staff involved in programme delivery to be approachable and that they could raise issues directly, as they occurred. The team identifies as a feature of good practice the creative approach to gathering student feedback on collaborative programmes, which employs both formal and informal processes to elicit information directly from students as well as indirectly through the partner organisation.

82 Most students met by the audit team were familiar with module feedback questionnaires, although few were aware of what happened to the questionnaires once completed. Neither were they able to corroborate that the analysis of feedback collected by this means was communicated to the student body or aware of their entitlement under University procedures to receive this analysis. The team noted that programme handbooks contained limited information on arrangements for 'closing the feedback loop', although the relevant procedures are contained in the version of the 3Rs for students on collaborative programmes. However, since this is a regulatory document, inclusion here did not, in the team's view, adequately bring to the attention of students their right to a response to feedback. The team was also of the view that reliance could not be placed on programme committees as the primary channel for communicating to students action resulting from their feedback and from routine monitoring processes, due to the variability in attendance by student representatives at these committee meetings (see paragraphs 76-77 above). It therefore considers it desirable for the University to adopt

a broader approach to sharing with students details of the feedback they give on their experiences of collaborative programmes and reporting progress on action being taken as a result.

83 The CPSED made no reference to feedback from graduates from collaborative programmes and senior staff clarified for the audit team that this was not routinely sought, although limited information was available from students who progressed to the University from partner organisations. The CPSED indicated that the University had close links with employers who are involved in the design and validation of programmes, particularly Foundation Degrees. It also acknowledged the challenge of converting employer engagement into formal feedback, but explained that QED (in liaison with FQCs) had been assigned this task in the institution-level action plan resulting from the latest round of annual monitoring.

84 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University was apprised of the difficulties associated with making feedback mechanisms work in the context of collaborative provision and was channelling resources into making further progress in this area.

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

85 Entry requirements for collaborative programmes are specified in the relevant operational manual. Different methods are used to check the authenticity of qualifications, ranging from direct involvement of University staff to audits of the admissions decisions made by partner organisations. Once accepted for admission, students on collaborative programmes are enrolled by the University and their records are maintained on its central record system. In this way, the University assumes responsibility for the validity of data input and its close involvement in assessment processes, which includes producing profiles of students' results for assessment boards, assists in this respect. It also has full control over

issuing transcripts of students' results. In addition, the University is maintaining the database from which statistical reports on admission, progression and achievement are generated. The University is in the process of implementing a new student record system and this will standardise both data capture and reporting across partner organisations; to date there has been one sizeable partnership for which data were collected differently and bespoke reports had to be created.

86 In relation to student performance indicators, the University has moved to a position where separate reports are available on each partner organisation; these are sent to the respective partner organisations for use in annual monitoring. Reports by faculty, distinguishing between in-house and collaborative provision, are also available, to allow comparison of student performance on collaborative programmes with that on in-house programmes. The CPSED acknowledged that the first use of these reports in the last round of annual monitoring had not been without 'teething problems', in particular because reports sent to partner organisations were drawn down too early to include the most recent assessment results; these problems are being remedied for the next round.

87 The audit team considered that the admissions audit reports demonstrated careful scrutiny of entry qualifications and effective stewardship of entry standards to collaborative provision, although the team noted that there was no subsequent reporting or analysis of entry qualifications. The team was able to verify that award certificates referred to the existence of transcripts and that transcripts relating to programmes not assessed in English explicitly mentioned the language of assessment. In this respect these documents are consistent with the relevant precept of the *Code of practice* through imparting necessary information for a full understanding of student achievement. With regard to the use of student progression and achievement statistics, the team saw instances of aberrant student performance being tracked through annual monitoring reports and action plans. It also noted that as

improvements in reporting were realised, greater priority was being given to encouraging more consistent engagement with statistical information by partner organisations.

88 The audit team concluded that the University was in a good position to develop its statistical reporting capacity, now having the basis for producing reports showing comparisons between in-house and collaborative provision and the analysis of trends. This, in the team's view, would enable the University better to benchmark its students' performance against others in the sector.

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

89 The University takes care to ensure that teaching staff on collaborative programmes are appropriately qualified and experienced. Curricula vitae (CVs) of the proposed teaching staff are scrutinised by the University as part of the process for the approval of programmes for delivery by partner organisations. For overseas franchise arrangements additional measures are in place, involving University staff in discussions about prospective appointments or in the interview process itself. Thereafter, CVs for further appointments to all collaborative programmes are submitted to the University, according to the mechanism specified in the operational manual. In addition, staff from partner organisations may be recognised by the University as accredited lecturers for the period they contribute to its collaborative programme(s), although the CPSED explained that this status afforded few privileges over and above those currently available to non-accredited staff and, as a consequence, the scheme was under review.

90 While policies for staff appraisal and reward are the responsibility of partner organisations, operational manuals set out the arrangements for evaluating the quality of teaching. Some partner organisations adopt the University's scheme for teaching observation and support, enabling reciprocal observation by

University and partner staff in the case of joint teaching arrangements; others, including most further education colleges, operate their own observation schemes and this is seen as appropriate by the University. Staffing and staff development within collaborative provision are monitored through the University's processes for annual monitoring and periodic review. The University routinely makes available to partner organisations a range of internal documentation aimed at developing their familiarity with its quality assurance policies and procedures. These include the Collaborative Provision Guide for Staff; the Staff Guidance Handbook; the Programme Leader's Handbook; and the relevant section of the *Code of practice*.

91 The University is also directly involved in staff development in partner organisations, with faculty staff taking the leading role in providing dedicated sessions as well as ongoing support through email communication. According to the CPSED, 'this is a very important facet of the close relationship between University staff and its partner organisations'. The new visit policy has introduced the requirement for reporting on development work undertaken by faculty staff during liaison visits, strengthening quality assurance in this area. Staff development events are also organised centrally through either FPL or QED and these are aimed at staff involved in collaborative programmes across all partner organisations. As a general policy, the University makes sure that organised events such as conferences or away days are open to staff from partner organisations, and the CPSED gave as an example the annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment Conference.

92 The University's commitment to staff development was recognised in the institutional audit report and the present audit team considered that this was also evident in the arrangements for collaborative provision. The team was impressed by the variety of development opportunities open to staff in partner organisations which were complemented by user-friendly information materials. Worthy of mention in this respect is the newsletter produced by the Partnership

Office, providing a regular update on matters relevant to collaborative provision. Through visit reports, the team was able to verify that staff development was routinely included in liaison visits. The team therefore identifies as a feature of good practice the comprehensiveness of the documentation and guidance available to staff in support of their work relating to collaborative provision and the extensive range of opportunities for staff development. Regarding the review of the accredited lecturer scheme, the team would draw attention to the value placed on this by the staff it met from partner organisations who saw its benefit less in terms of access to facilities than in terms of acknowledging their status and formalising their relationship with the University.

Assurance of the quality of distributed and distance methods delivered through an arrangement with a partner

93 At the time of the audit, the University was running one distance-learning programme through two separate overseas collaborative arrangements. The programme is delivered through paper-based materials for which the University assumes full responsibility, supplemented by blocks of on-site delivery by University staff. The collaborative arrangements entail provision by the partner organisation of information technology (IT) facilities and accommodation for tutorial meetings, and the appointment of a programme coordinator. In one case, where the link is well-established, local tutors are also used in the supervision and first marking of dissertations. There is an equivalent UK programme, not operating as a collaborative arrangement, which uses an e-learning platform. The intention is to move to this mode of delivery for students overseas, pending the resolution of issues concerning connectivity to the University's managed learning environment, University of Derby online.

94 From documentation, the audit team was able to verify that the University's quality assurance processes for collaborative provision were being applied to this distance-learning

variant. For instance: the operational manuals contained detailed guidance on the lines of responsibility and channels of communication; the University approved the CVs of local tutors; locally marked dissertations were second marked by University staff; and feedback was regularly sought from students. From University programme staff, the team learned that during periods spent at partner organisations they provided induction for local staff and support and development as required. The team concluded that the University was maintaining an appropriate level of oversight of local arrangements, while also developing the role of local tutor in an established partnership. In the team's view, this was a further indication of the spirit of partnership which characterises the University's approach to collaboration.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

95 Learning resources provision at partner organisations is addressed at all three stages of the approval process and is subsequently checked through annual monitoring and periodic review. The collaborative provision profile contains a brief account of the general resources available at the partner organisation and these are assessed through the IQA, which includes a representative from the University's Learning and Information Services on the panel. Programme-specific resources are considered as part of the approval of the collaborative arrangements. Operational manuals detail the respective responsibilities of the University and the partner organisation for resources provision; they also contain the procedure for notifying the University of significant changes (for example, a move to new facilities), which require approval through the University's committee system at both faculty and institutional levels. Programme annual monitoring reports contain a specific section on resources, while periodic review and programme revalidation together cover resources provision at the level of the partner organisation, as well as the programme.

96 The University gives students and staff from partner organisations access to electronic library resources and learning materials (course resources) through University of Derby online. While acknowledging that the latter had attracted 'mixed student feedback' and that there were still technical issues to be resolved, the CPSED indicated that online provision had 'enjoyed major advances' and was 'a major asset' for students. The University is in the process of transferring its course resources to a proprietary virtual learning environment (operating within University of Derby online). Collaborative programmes have been included in the pilot phase, so that potential issues for partner organisations can be dealt with prior to roll-out of the new software. The University's learning centres are also open for use by students on collaborative programmes, although usage is not high, even among students within the region, since most of their needs are satisfied by their local provision, supplemented by electronic library resources.

97 From documentation relating to approval, monitoring and review, it was clear to the audit team that consideration of resources provision was embedded in these processes. The team noted several instances where resources provision had been commended in panel reports. Through partner visits the team was able to verify that from the perspective of partner organisations procedures for assessing resources provision were rigorously conducted.

98 Students meeting the audit team were generally satisfied with the learning resources at partner organisations and also appreciative of the open access to the University's own learning resources. However, the team was aware that a significant number of students had experienced difficulties accessing University of Derby online and also that there had been problems in adopting it as the delivery system for elements of the University's overseas collaborative distance-learning provision (see paragraph 93 above). Therefore, the team considers it desirable for the University to take steps to bring to a satisfactory resolution issues relating to students' access to course resources

within the managed learning environment. On a related matter, the team noted that following a system change the electronic communication link with one overseas partner had proved unreliable, affecting the delivery of a sizeable component of a programme. The University will no doubt wish to see a general improvement in the functioning of internet-based technologies. This point notwithstanding, the team concluded that the quality assurance of learning resources within collaborative provision was operating effectively.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

99 Responsibility for academic guidance and personal (pastoral) support for students rests primarily with the partner organisation and specific details are formalised in the operational manual. This also outlines procedures for student discipline and student complaints. The student support arrangements established at approval are subsequently subject to regular monitoring and review through the University's quality assurance processes. Students on collaborative programmes also have access to the University's specialist support services and to the associated telephone and email helplines and website information. In addition, Learning and Information Services provides induction for students from partner organisations on using its learning resources.

100 The University has been supporting the development and implementation of personal development planning (PDP) for students on collaborative programmes. The CPSED gave examples of schemes currently in operation, including the adoption by some partner organisations of the University's own scheme and recording mechanism, but acknowledged that student engagement with the process was variable and that it was too early to evaluate the impact of PDP on the student learning experience. The CPSED also stated that operational manuals now had to identify how PDP would be managed in partnerships and annual monitoring reports had to include specific reference to the implementation of PDP.

101 The support arrangements for workplace learning within Foundation Degrees have been aided by the University's engagement with an externally funded project. For instance, the University is currently trialling an online communication system to facilitate interaction between the placement tutor, student and employer. The University offers an extensive range of 'top-up' honours degrees and gives guidance to students progressing to programmes at the University. Similar guidance is made available to students whose programmes are covered by articulation agreements.

102 Students who met the audit team through partner visits consistently expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the support and guidance they received, also confirming that they knew how to obtain advice and assistance if they needed it. Reports generated from annual monitoring and periodic review have consistently commended aspects of student support in partner organisations, while issues identified in action plans are carefully tracked until specified actions are recorded as complete. In the context of PDP, the team noted that while in-house annual programme reports included comment on its implementation, the pro forma for the report produced by partner organisations made no reference to PDP, and the University may wish to revise its pro forma accordingly. The team concluded that the University was exercising appropriate oversight of arrangements for student support within its collaborative provision, although it acknowledges the University's view (expressed in the CPSED) 'that strong and effective support is not the result of monitoring, but arises from the context in which partners operate and from the commitment of staff'.

Section 3: The audit investigations: published information

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

103 The main sources of information for students on the University's collaborative programmes are publicity materials aimed at prospective students and the set of core information drawn to their attention at enrolment. This includes the 3Rs (special version for collaborative provision), the programme handbook, containing relevant information from programme specifications, together with information about modules, and the course resources accessed through University of Derby online.

104 Partner organisations have responsibility for student recruitment, although the University requires them to obtain its prior approval for the publicity of programmes leading to its awards. The arrangements are set out in a marketing and publicity protocol which gives precise information on matters of policy, such as use of the University's logo and name. Under this protocol, publicity materials produced by partner organisations are submitted to the University's Marketing Department for checking prior to publication. Faculties monitor the continued accuracy of published information, including website material, notifying any breaches of the protocol to the Marketing Department which then takes appropriate action on behalf of the University. The Partnership Office also has a role in the general monitoring of websites. In the case of material produced in languages other than English, monitoring is undertaken either by University staff having the relevant language skills or by agencies from which the University commissions translation services. The protocol is included in each operational manual, together with details of how it is to operate in the context of the particular collaborative arrangement.

105 Partner organisations also have responsibility for producing programme handbooks and these are modelled on the equivalent in-house programme handbook, where this exists. Responsibility for ensuring that programme documentation for in-house and collaborative programmes is of a consistent quality rests with the relevant subject head, and the CPSED clarified that, in response to comment in the institutional audit report concerning variability in the quality of programme handbooks within one faculty, the University had reinforced this aspect of the role.

106 Students meeting the audit team maintained that they were clear from the outset that their programme led to a University of Derby award. They also confirmed that information they had received accurately represented the programme and that they found programme handbooks to be particularly helpful and informative. This was also the case in one collaborative arrangement where, instead of a handbook, students received a series of separate documents relating to specific aspects of the programme, although the team had reservations about there not being a single reference source for students. From its own survey of partner websites, the team found instances where the information on programmes was sparse or it was unclear that they led to a University of Derby award. Staff meeting the team seemed to be aware of such issues and recognised that the absence of a single locus of responsibility might be a contributory factor. The team considers it desirable for the University to ensure that promotional materials produced by partner organisations give due prominence to the University as the awarding institution to avoid any possibility that users of these materials might be misled about the nature of the awards provided under collaborative arrangements.

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

107 The teaching quality information relating to the University, as supplied by external agencies and published on the TQi website, includes the requisite quantitative datasets and National Student Survey data. As is the general case, it is not possible to obtain information from these sources relating to collaborative provision. The qualitative summaries (discontinued for the future) have been uploaded to the site under the responsibility of QED, with relevant entries being made for collaborative programmes. With respect to summaries of external examiner reports, the audit team was able to verify that these accurately represented the full reports.

108 The audit team was satisfied that the University was endeavouring to meet its obligations in terms of published information, notwithstanding the difficulties associated with the interpretation of national requirements in respect of collaborative provision.

Findings

Findings

109 A collaborative provision audit of the University of Derby (the University) was undertaken by a team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) during the week 4 to 8 December 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and by making recommendations to the University for improving on current practice.

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

110 The Strategic Framework 2006 brings together the University's strategies for UK and overseas collaborative provision. The University's collaborative arrangements are predominantly based on a franchise model and in the UK reflect its longstanding commitment to facilitating student progression from further to higher education, most recently through the development of Foundation Degrees. The majority of franchised programmes are also delivered by the University and may involve joint development with the partner organisation. All faculties have collaborative provision and partnership is regarded by the University as a natural way of working. The audit team saw numerous examples (identified throughout the report) of joint activities approached in a spirit of genuine partnership and came to the view that the close relationships developed by the University at all levels with its partner organisations represented a feature of good practice (146 i).

111 The University's framework for managing quality and standards in collaborative provision is based on the use of mainstream policies, procedures and structures, augmented as necessary to meet the specific requirements of collaborative activity. The University also identified coherence and integration, combined with the balance of central and local responsibilities as the essential characteristics of its approach. The University is introducing a more risk-based methodology such that quality management arrangements for collaborative provision are now matched to individual partnerships and the particular risks they present. The operational manual for each partnership details the precise arrangements for running the collaborative programme(s), including the University's requirements for monitoring students' experience.

112 There was evidence of integration and coherence in the work of the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee through bringing together representation from central departments and the faculties, and also in the creation of a single administrative function for UK and overseas collaborative arrangements. However, the audit team considered that it was too early to reach a firm conclusion on whether an appropriate balance of central and local responsibilities for the development of collaborative provision had been struck, given the recent shift in the locus of these responsibilities towards the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning. Moreover, the subsequent respecification of quality assurance procedures, involving a changed role for both the Quality Enhancement Department and the faculties were, as yet, largely untested. The team was supportive of the University's objectives in seeking to separate and clarify responsibilities for development, operation and quality assurance, but also aware of the need to keep the effectiveness and efficiency of new arrangements under review (147 i).

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

113 The University's quality assurance processes are documented in its procedures for Validation and Approval and for Quality Monitoring, which include dedicated sections for collaborative arrangements as appropriate. The regulations and major policies affecting students - the 3Rs - is also produced in an abridged version for students on collaborative programmes. These procedural documents, together with a range of staff guides and handbooks presented in a more digestible style, are made available to partner organisations with the aim of increasing their familiarity with the University's policies and procedures.

114 The University process for approving programmes for delivery by partner organisations involves three stages: 'planning approval' (approval in principle) for a proposed collaboration; 'institutional quality audit', establishing a partner organisation's general suitability to offer the University's awards; and 'approval of the collaborative arrangements', focusing on its capacity to offer specific programmes. The programmes themselves are subject to separate mainstream processes for development and validation, and for new programmes these run in parallel with the staged approval process. On successful completion of the review process, contracts which stipulate compliance with the operational manual must be signed by all parties prior to the first delivery of any collaborative programme. Contracts run for a fixed period with renewal dependent on a satisfactory partnership review and revalidation of the relevant programme(s). The Quality Enhancement Department receives reports relating to approval events for submission to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee where the outcomes are ratified.

115 The audit team noted that the University had strengthened its approval procedures since the previous collaborative audit, including the development of more sophisticated risk

management techniques; the extension of institutional quality audit to cover all new partner organisations; and the incorporation of minimum timescales between the stages of approval and between final approval and student enrolment. Based on two recent approval events, the team found the latest version of documentation relating to approval events to provide a comprehensive evidence base for the assessment of risk at the planning approval stage and for decision-making in subsequent stages of the process. The team considered that the University had developed robust procedures for both partner and programme approval, including appropriate external input and benchmarking. In respect of contracts, the team found that these were issued in a timely fashion and that they covered the items envisaged in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, in particular dealing satisfactorily with run-off arrangements in the event of partnership termination.

116 Arrangements for annual monitoring of collaborative provision depend on the passage through the committee system of monitoring reports and action plans produced at programme, faculty and central levels by a process of summary and synthesis of reports from the preceding level. At each level, the relevant committee is responsible for the subsequent monitoring of its action plan. The starting point is the report and action plan produced by the partner organisation, whose stipulated inputs include an analysis of student performance, together with feedback from students, module tutors, internal moderators and external examiners. The process culminates in the production of an institution-level report and action plan presented to Academic Board. As part of this 'pyramid' process the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee reviews all the annual monitoring reports produced by partner organisations alongside the related in-house reports to produce an overview report, giving emphasis to cross-provision issues and areas of concern or good practice. In a separate exercise, the

committee provides feedback to staff at both the University and partner organisations on the quality of their reporting.

117 The University indicated that there had been steady improvement in the reports submitted by partner organisations. Deficiencies, where these existed, such as in the use of statistical data, were being addressed through the constructive feedback given by the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee. The audit team considered the committee's review of annual monitoring reports to be a thorough and systematic exercise, generating an extensive evidence base for the overview report, from which the University was able to draw conclusions about the maintenance of quality and standards in collaborative provision. In the team's view, the overview report was a feature of good practice (146 ii), instrumental in ensuring that collaborative provision was given due prominence at institution level.

118 The audit team found that there was assiduous consideration of annual monitoring reports at all levels and that progress against action plans was monitored attentively. Reporting on resultant action appeared to be firmly embedded through formal channels and it was evident to the team that the close working relationships at programme level between University and partner staff offered a supplementary informal channel for communicating progress on action plans. The team concluded that the rationale for annual monitoring was well understood across the range of partner organisations and that this would clearly be helpful to the University in the forthcoming revision of the process to adopt a more risk-based approach.

119 The procedures for periodic review were revised in 2005-06 and for collaborative provision include the mainstream process 'subject review' plus 'partnership review', each operating on a five-year cycle. Reports of subject review panels, together with action plans, are approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and the relevant faculty quality committee. The processes for

programme revalidation and any associated re-approval of collaborative arrangements fall outside the scope of subject review and are a variant of the procedures for initial validation and approval. Partnership review assesses the continued 'health' of each partnership, resulting in formal confirmation of the re-approval of the partnership, where appropriate. Panel reports and action plans are approved by the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee.

120 While noting the comprehensiveness of the new periodic review procedures, the audit team was unable to reach any firm conclusions about their effectiveness since they had been so recently introduced; however, it was able to confirm that review panels included independent external representation. The majority of reports available to the team related to the former programme review process and to programme revalidation events. The team was able to verify that these were produced in line with extant reporting requirements and that recommendations were addressed by action plans monitored by faculty quality committees. There was also evidence of a high level of input from external specialists drawn from a wide range of higher education institutions, leading the team to conclude that the University used external advice constructively.

121 Embedded in the University's quality assurance processes are detailed procedures relating to oversight by the University of staffing, learning resources and student support arrangements, which affect the quality of the experience of students on collaborative programmes. Resources provision at partner organisations is assessed through the approval process and subsequently checked through annual monitoring and periodic review. The University is also a direct provider of resources and services to collaborative programmes and these arrangements are similarly subject to its quality assurance processes. Operational manuals detail the respective responsibilities of the University and the partner organisation, including the requirements for routine monitoring.

122 In respect of staffing and staff development, the University scrutinises the curricula vitae of teaching staff on collaborative programmes, including those of local tutors appointed to a distance-learning arrangement. It also requires partner organisations to monitor teaching quality through teaching observation. Faculties are directly involved in staff development and ongoing support, which the audit team was able to verify from the recently introduced visit reports. The University organises centrally staff development events aimed at staff involved in collaborative provision, as well as making sure that such events as conferences or away days are open to staff from partner organisations. In the team's view, the variety of development opportunities open to staff in partner organisations, complemented by user-friendly information materials, was a feature of good practice (146 v).

123 In respect of learning resources, the University includes a representative from Learning and Information Services on approval and review panels to assist with the assessment of resources provision at partner organisations. The University also gives students and staff from partner organisations access to electronic library resources and learning materials on its managed learning environment. While the audit team found students to be generally satisfied with the learning resources available to them, it was aware of problems associated with accessing the University's online facility which were preventing some students from realising the full benefits of electronic resources provision (147 iii). This point notwithstanding, the team concluded that the quality assurance of learning resources within collaborative provision was operating effectively.

124 In respect of student support, which is primarily the responsibility of partner organisations, the audit team found that the University was exercising appropriate oversight of arrangements through its various monitoring systems. It noted from annual monitoring and periodic review reports the consistent commendation of aspects of student support in partner organisations and this was reinforced by the feedback from the student groups it met.

125 Student feedback is a key input to the University's annual monitoring and periodic review processes and a range of formal mechanisms is employed to obtain feedback from students on collaborative programmes. These include student representation on programme committees; the student meeting as required by the new visit policy; questionnaires completed by students; and student involvement in periodic review. Supplementing these are the informal opportunities afforded students to give feedback through tutorial sessions and day-to-day contact with staff.

126 The audit team found considerable evidence that due attention was given to obtaining students' views on their experience of collaborative programmes. The students it met confirmed that staff involved in programme delivery were approachable, so that issues could be raised directly, as they occurred. In the team's view, the University's creative approach to gathering student feedback on collaborative programmes was a feature of good practice (146 iv). However, the team found that from a student perspective there was limited communication to the student body of the analysis and results of feedback. The team concluded that this was due partly to overreliance on programme committees as the channel for this communication, since student attendance at these meetings was variable, and that there would be benefit in adopting a broader approach (147 ii).

127 In summary, the audit team considered the documentation and guidance for staff relating to collaborative provision to be comprehensive. It found approval, monitoring and review processes to be well understood by staff in both the University and partner organisations and effectively managed by the University with strong engagement from partner organisations. It also found that externality in the University's approval and review processes for collaborative programmes was strong and scrupulous. Other aspects of the University's procedures for managing the quality of the wider student experience were, in general, operating well. These factors support

the judgement of broad confidence 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.

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

128 In the first instance, the University seeks to secure the standards of awards offered through collaborative provision by the close involvement of its own staff in assessment processes that mirror its standard practices. Thereafter, its approach entails the monitoring of student achievement through analysis of statistical data and the utilisation of external examiners whose principal functions are to monitor academic standards and the standard of student achievement, including comparability of standards across equivalent programmes offered at different locations.

129 Specific responsibilities for setting assessment tasks and conducting assessment processes are set out in the operational manual for each collaborative programme. The University is directly responsible for internal moderation of student work assessed by partner organisations (prior to any moderation by the external examiner); production of students' results profiles for assessment boards; and chairing assessment boards and recording decisions. A translation policy governs cases where the assessment is not conducted in English, although it is now University policy for new collaborative arrangements to adopt English as the language of delivery and assessment.

130 The effectiveness of internal moderation was confirmed by the audit team from external examiner reports and the overview report on annual monitoring produced by the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee. The team also found that staff in partner organisations regarded the moderation process as a valuable exercise, sometimes

conducted in conjunction with staff development. In the team's view, the active involvement of University staff in assessment processes was a feature of good practice (146 iii)

131 With respect to student data, the University checks the authenticity of the qualifications of entrants to collaborative programmes and maintains the record of their subsequent progress on its central record system, which provides the source data for statistical reports on admission, progression and achievement. The University also has full control over issuing transcripts of students' results and the audit team was able to verify that award certificates referred to the existence of transcripts, and that transcripts relating to programmes not assessed in English explicitly mentioned the language of assessment.

132 In relation to student performance indicators, separate reports are available on each partner organisation, while reports by faculty, distinguishing between in-house and collaborative provision, are also available to allow comparison of student performance on collaborative programmes with that on in-house programmes. The first use of these reports in the last round of annual monitoring had been problematic because reports sent to partner organisations were drawn down too early to include the most recent assessment results; however, this is being remedied for the next round.

133 The audit team considered that there was effective stewardship of entry standards to collaborative provision. It saw instances of statistics being used to track aberrant student performance through the annual monitoring process, also noting that greater priority was being given by the University to encouraging more consistent engagement with statistical information by partner organisations. The team concluded that the University now had the basis for producing reports showing comparisons between in-house and collaborative provision and the analysis of trends, enabling it better to benchmark its students' performance against others in the sector.

134 The University retains full responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and their induction to the role. Wherever practical, if a programme is offered in-house and through collaborative arrangements, the same external examiner covers all locations allowing direct comparison of standards to be made. New induction material for external examiners has recently been introduced aimed at increasing their awareness of responsibilities in this area.

135 External examiner reports are received centrally by the University and then sent simultaneously to faculties and partner organisations. Reports are read by the Quality Enhancement Department which logs concerns and requests responses from faculties. In the case of any serious concern that could affect standards, the Director of Quality Enhancement is in a position to instigate an investigation and respond directly to the external examiner. Otherwise, the University programme leader or project manager is responsible for drawing up the formal response, but does so in conjunction with the partner organisation(s). External examiner reports are dealt with at all levels of the annual monitoring process and, in addition, a 'reading panel' produces a brief institution-wide summary for the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

136 The audit team found that issues raised in external examiner reports were suitably addressed in the responses to them and also carried forward to programme annual monitoring reports and action plans. Partner staff meeting the team verified the involvement of partner organisations in the process. The team noted that the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee routinely looked at whether standards achieved by students on collaborative programmes were comparable with those achieved by students on equivalent in-house programmes and the most recent overview report on annual monitoring confirmed this to be the case.

137 In summary, the audit team concluded that the University's procedures for assessment, external examining and monitoring student achievement were being operated effectively.

Specifically, it found the use of external examiners in summative assessment to be strong and scrupulous. These factors support the judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

138 The University seeks as far as possible to embed aspects of the Academic Infrastructure into its own regulations, policies and procedures and then amend these as appropriate in order to maintain consistency in the light of changes made to the components of the Academic Infrastructure over time. The University's normal practice, therefore, is not to issue sections of the *Code of practice* to staff, instead relying on its own procedures. However, in the case of collaborative provision, key staff in the University and partner organisations are given a copy of the relevant section. The University sees this as being particularly important for overseas partner organisations, leading to a better understanding of the commitment to quality and standards within UK higher education.

139 The audit team considered that the University had introduced systematic mechanisms for dealing with revisions to the *Code of practice* and for maintaining the consistency of its procedures with the various sections. In respect of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and the subject and qualification benchmarks, the team found that these were used as reference points, respectively, in the University's regulations and programme validation and review processes. Through partner visits, the team was also able to confirm that staff were aware of the Academic Infrastructure and making use of its various elements. In the case of programme specifications, which are mandatory for all programmes, the team verified that these were

published on the University website and that key elements were included in programme handbooks. Overall, the team concluded that the University was making appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure in relation to collaborative provision.

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

140 The audit team found the University's self-evaluation document relating to collaborative provision to be clear and concise and particularly well referenced to supporting documentation. It provided a critical evaluation of the development of the University's collaborative provision, linking this to its responses to the 2005 institutional audit report and previous QAA reports. It described clearly the current framework for managing quality and standards in collaborative provision and explained the rationale for recent changes to quality management processes, also outlining the University's plans for further changes through implementation of the newly adopted quality strategy. During the course of the audit, the team learned that the self-evaluation document had been prepared in full collaboration with partner organisations, the student body and staff associated with the delivery of collaborative programmes. Although on occasions, the team gained the impression from the document that developments were further advanced than it later found to be the case (statistical reporting, internet-based technologies and personal development planning, providing examples) it nevertheless found the document to be a most useful starting point for the audit and a valuable reference source throughout the process.

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

141 By the time of the audit visit, there had been significant progress with several of the enhancement initiatives identified in the self-evaluation document: the University had very recently introduced changes to periodic review and validation procedures, the quality strategy had been published, and a target date of 2007-08 had been set for implementation of a risk-based annual monitoring procedure. In addition, the University is in the process of introducing measures aimed at more consistent operation of its validation and quality monitoring arrangements, such as the creation of a pool of 'experts' from which internal members for panel events would be drawn and a policy setting minimum standards for liaison visits to partner organisations, including related record-keeping. Other initiatives include improvements to statistical reporting, a review of operational manuals, and a strengthening of approval and monitoring procedures for articulation arrangements.

142 The audit team, while being supportive of the initiatives being undertaken and proposed for the future, makes the observation that there is a strong focus on enhancing the management of collaborative provision through improvements in the operation and monitoring of procedures and this gives little insight into the aspects of students' learning opportunities that the University wishes to target for further development.

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

143 Partner organisations have responsibility for student recruitment, although the University requires them to obtain its prior approval for the publicity of programmes leading to its awards. Published information, including website material, is monitored for continued accuracy by both the faculties and the

Partnership Office, with University staff having the requisite language skills undertaking checks on material produced in languages other than English. Responsibility for ensuring that programme documentation for in-house and collaborative programmes is of a consistent quality rests with the relevant subject head.

144 Students meeting the audit team confirmed that information they had received accurately represented the programme and that they found programme handbooks to be particularly helpful and informative; they had also been clear from the outset that their programme led to a University of Derby award. However, from its own survey of partner websites, the team found instances where the information on programmes was sparse or it was unclear that they led to a University of Derby award and, therefore, considered it appropriate for the University to take remedial action (147 iv).

145 The teaching quality information relating to the University, as supplied by external agencies and published on the TQi website, includes the requisite quantitative datasets and National Student Survey data. As is the general case, it is not possible to obtain information from these sources relating to collaborative provision. The qualitative summaries (discontinued for the future) have been uploaded to the site, with relevant entries being made for collaborative programmes. With respect to summaries of external examiner reports, the audit team was able to verify that these accurately represented the full reports. Overall, the team was satisfied that the University was endeavouring to meet its obligations in terms of published information relating to collaborative provision.

Features of good practice in the management of quality and academic standards in collaborative provision

146 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the close relationships that the University develops with its partner organisations at

all levels through a wide variety of joint activities approached in the spirit of genuine partnership (paragraphs 28, 44, 50, 55, 91-92 and 94)

- ii the overview report on annual monitoring of collaborative provision produced by the Collaborative and Distributed Learning Sub-committee, which is characteristic of its effectiveness as a focus for rigorous analysis of collaborative activity (paragraph 49)
- iii the active involvement of University staff in assessment processes, notably in the moderation of marking which, while primarily being a quality assurance tool, also has a strong developmental element (paragraph 63)
- iv the creative approach to gathering student feedback on collaborative programmes which employs both formal and informal processes to elicit information directly from students as well as indirectly through the partner organisation (paragraph 81)
- v the comprehensiveness of the documentation and guidance available to staff in support of their work relating to collaborative provision and the extensive range of opportunities for staff development (paragraph 92).

Recommendations for action by the awarding institution

147 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i to keep under review the effectiveness and efficiency of the recent reallocation of responsibilities for the development, administration and quality assurance of collaborative provision, given the risk of overlap in activities and replication of effort between the faculties and the central functions involved (paragraph 35)

- ii to adopt a broader approach to sharing with students details of the feedback they give on their experiences of collaborative programmes and reporting progress on action being taken as a result (paragraph 82)
- iii to take steps to bring to a satisfactory resolution issues relating to students' access to course resources within the managed learning environment (paragraph 98)
- iv to ensure that promotional materials produced by partner organisations give due prominence to the University as the awarding institution to avoid any possibility that users of these materials might be misled about the nature of the awards provided under collaborative arrangements (paragraph 106).

Appendix

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

The University welcomes the CPA report. It provides an accurate account of the University's approach to the strategic and operational management of its collaborative provision. The report, together with the outcomes of the 2005 Institutional Audit, confirms the effectiveness of the University's current arrangements for the management of standards and quality. The report also identifies features of good practice, at the heart of our policies and procedures, which reflect favourably on the commitment and professionalism of staff at all levels within both the University and its partner organisations.

The University was pleased to note that the report recognises the strategic development of its partnerships and its quality management system. The first of the desirable recommendations reflects the fact that there have been significant, positive developments in the University's framework for the management of quality and standards, and it is consistent with the University's over-arching commitment to the evaluation of its work and to evidence-based action. Work is already in hand in relation to the second and third recommendations. That work will enhance the arrangements for securing and responding to student feedback, and significant progress has been made in resolving the specific issues relating to students' access to course resources within the managed learning environment. The University is addressing the issues raised in the final recommendation by clarifying the location of responsibilities for the production and approval of promotional materials.

The University experienced the audit process as a constructive and collegial dialogue which, alongside the institution's other external engagements, contributed significantly to the continuing development of the Strategic Framework and quality management system.

