

Staffordshire University

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Preface

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

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

The purpose of collaborative provision audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of collaborative provision audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Staffordshire University (the University) from 18 to 21 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 met staff and students from three of the University's partner organisations.

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 awards. 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)* - September 2004, published by QAA, paragraph 13,).

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.

The audit team also concludes that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the University publishes and authorises to be published about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards and about the standards of those awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the operation and management of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) which has created a strong regional network with well-developed management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities
- the collaboration between University and partner college staff in Joint Information Systems Committee-funded projects, which has had the effect of enhancing the University's relationship with its partners and of improving e-learning support for students
- the use of partner institution staff in the role of rapporteur in annual monitoring, which encourages the integration of partner institutions into the University's quality assurance processes

- the inclusive approach adopted in relation to students on University programmes in partner institutions, which fosters a strong sense of identity with Staffordshire University.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University 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.

The audit team considers it advisable for the university to:

- review the role of the University Examiner to ensure that responsibilities are clearly defined and distinct from those of the External Examiner.

The audit team considers it desirable for the university to:

- monitor the operation of the revised committee structure for UK collaborative provision in order to confirm its suitability for retaining the balance between executive and deliberative structures and for providing parity of treatment for SURF and non-SURF provision
- formalise and undertake on a periodic and regular basis the review of all partners and partnerships, as distinct from the periodic review of programmes, in order to provide for further assurance of quality and academic standards
- hold regular and frequent meetings between senior staff of the University and those of all of its individual partner institutions to strengthen the strategic approach to the operation of partnerships
- review its internal arrangements for the monitoring of partner institution publicity materials, to ensure complete coverage of all types of collaborative provision and that any delegated responsibility is operating within agreed limits and is consistent with current Memoranda of Cooperation.

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 is making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of the management of its collaborative provision.

Main report

Main report

1 A collaborative provision audit of Staffordshire University (the University) was undertaken from 18 to 21 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 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). It provides a separate scrutiny of the collaborative provision of an HEI with degree-awarding powers (awarding institution) where such collaborative provision is 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) - September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA*).

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 met staff and students from three of the University's partner organisations.

Section 1: Introduction: Staffordshire University

The institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision

4 The University previously Staffordshire Polytechnic, was established in 1992 following the passage of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). The Polytechnic had been formed from a merger of the Staffordshire College of Technology, the Stoke-on-Trent College of Art and the North Staffordshire College of Technology. In 1995, the University incorporated the Shropshire and Staffordshire Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery. The University operates from campuses in Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford and Lichfield.

5 The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) emphasised the significance of the University's long-standing regional role which is aimed at supporting the regeneration of Staffordshire, a county which has seen a decline in traditional industries. The CPSED stressed that this role did not restrict the University's engagement at national and international levels which the University considers brings an added strength to the regeneration of the region. The University has a history of outreach and provision of opportunities for all those who have the potential to benefit from higher education. The aim of widening participation was reaffirmed in the University Plan (2003-2008) which states that: 'as an accessible learning community, we value inclusion and diversity and share the Government's commitment to increasing access and widening participation. We remain committed to ensuring that people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to study with us and we encourage a wider social mix.' The University sees collaborative provision as making a significant contribution to achieving this aim.

6 The mission statement of the University is: 'our mission is to help you succeed'. The CPSED expanded on this, stating: 'we aim to engage with our students and customers and to offer them the products, skills and opportunities they

need to succeed, and as a University rooted in its communities, our economic, social and civic responsibilities are central to our activities'. The University Plan states that the University will work by and be known for the following values.

- 'Inclusion - excelling in our fundamental commitment to widening participation, diversity and respect for the individual and communities.
- Accessibility - promoting flexible, adaptable and responsive approaches to all our activities.
- Creativity - being known for our creativity, innovation, enterprise and agility.
- Partnership - working in partnership through local, regional, national and international partnerships and networks.
- Supportiveness - providing a friendly, warm, professional and positive environment for staff, students and customers.
- Excellence - exercising quality, reliability, transparency and professionalism.'

7 At the time of the audit, the University defined its collaborative arrangements under three groupings:

- international collaborations
- collaboration within a consortium known as the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF)
- non-consortium United Kingdom (UK) collaborations.

8 International collaborations are managed in the wider context of the University Plan and the International Strategy which identify the need for expansion in international student recruitment, in fully economic-costed income generation, and in the number of significant international partners. The University has selected specific geographical areas for its international collaborations. At the time of the audit, the University's major collaborative arrangements overseas were with institutions in Malaysia with satellite sites in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. There was also collaborative provision with a partner institution with bases

in Oman and Bahrain, and with a single institution in each of France, Germany, Greece and Spain.

9 Prior to 1999, the University worked with a number of further education colleges (FEC) within the UK allowing the latter to deliver programmes franchised by the University. During the academic year 1999-2000, the University, nine FE/sixth form colleges in Staffordshire, and two FECs in Shropshire, established the SURF. The development was, in part, a response to the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) policy of encouraging such consortia to provide unified management and funding regimes for both franchised and directly-funded provision. Additionally, it fulfilled the desire of both the University and the colleges to put the existing arrangements on a more formal footing within defined geographical boundaries. The fundamental purpose of SURF is to deliver HE awards at FE colleges. In the early years the awards were mainly Higher National qualifications and student numbers were stable. Since 2003, both the range of awards and student numbers have grown, largely because of the introduction of Foundation Degrees (FDs) and the addition of courses in education to the consortium's portfolio. In many cases, identical awards are offered in some or all of the consortium colleges; by way of example, an FD for teaching assistants is offered in nine colleges. By contrast, more specialised provision meeting local needs may be offered in only one college. At the time of the audit, 10 of the SURF colleges offered franchised programmes of the University. The single sixth form college had no programmes in approval.

10 Non-consortium collaborative provision in the UK consists of: FE collaborations which fall outside the SURF geographical region; awards delivered both for and by local public and private sector employers, and joint awards with another university. At the time of the audit, the University's overall strategy for such collaborations was not yet fully articulated but significant strategic directions were emerging: with the agreement of the consortium, the University plans to extend its relationship with

the FE sector and has decided to offer FDs with colleges outside the SURF consortium. Collaborations with employers are managed in the Centre for Professional Management which is part of the University's Business School. The Centre for Professional Management's strategy is to provide programmes which are valuable to both employees and employers and which transfer training and education back into the workplace.

11 Collaboration provision is a significant component of the University's total portfolio. The CPSED listed programmes offered in collaboration with 16 international partners, 10 SURF partners and 12 non-consortium UK partners. At the time of the audit, the University's total student body was 10,285 full-time and 6,270 part-time students. The total collaborative provision student numbers were 3,441 full-time and 2,740 part-time students made up of 2,585 full-time and 799 part-time international students, 751 full-time and 1,731 part-time SURF students and 105 full-time and 210 part-time non-SURF UK-based students. Thus students on collaborative programmes make up 33 per cent of the University's total of full-time students and 44 per cent of its total of part-time students.

Background information

12 The published information available to the audit team included:

- the report of the institutional audit of the University (April 2005)
- the report of the overseas audit of the University's collaboration with the Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology (APIIT Lanka) (May 2004)
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level for the University and its collaborative partners for the five years preceding the audit.

13 The University provided QAA with the following documents:

- the CPSED and appendices
- the University's Register of Collaborative Provision
- documentation relating to the partner organisations visited by the audit team.

14 In addition, the audit team had access to a range of the University's internal documents in hardcopy or on the University's website, including the intranet. The team is grateful to the University for the ready access it was given to this information.

The collaborative provision audit process

15 Following the preliminary meeting at the University in April 2006, QAA confirmed that between the briefing and audit visits there would be three visits to partner organisations. QAA received the CPSED in August 2006 and documentation relating to the partner organisations in October 2006.

16 The audit team undertook a briefing visit to the University from 7-9 November 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.

17 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's Student's Union as part of a wider student group.

18 During its visits to the partner organisations 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.

19 The audit visit took place from 18 to 21 December 2006 and involved further meetings with University staff and students. The audit team is grateful to all those who participated in meetings.

20 The audit team comprised: Professor B Anderton; Mr P Brunt; Professor R Davis, and Ms C Vielba; auditors, and Mr D Stannard, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

21 In April 2005, the University was subject to institutional audit by QAA, resulting in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. Since the institutional audit the University has modified its academic structure. At the time of the institutional audit the academic structure consisted of four faculties: Art, Media and Design; Computing, Engineering and Technology; Business and Law, and Health and Sciences. The last two of these faculties have now been disbanded with the formation of a School of Business, a School of Law, a Faculty of Health and a Faculty of Science, while the other two faculties remain extant. There have also been changes to the University's committee structure relevant to collaborative provision (paragraphs 31-39).

22 A Business Plan for 2004-2007 was devised to deliver the strategic aims set out in the University Plan. Since the institutional audit, the Business Plan has been revisited, leading to the inclusion of three additional priorities:

- 'Customer Focus - the University is committed to meeting the personal development needs of an increasingly diverse range of customers and sees this as key to its success.
- Diversifying our Business - while recognising that the majority of its educational activity will focus on full-time HEFCE-funded undergraduates, the University will seek out opportunities to further develop a more varied portfolio of work including post-experience and CPD activities, in-company work, international partnerships and FE/HE partnerships including SURF.
- Flexibility - to meet the changing needs of society, the economy and its students, the University aims to make itself distinctive by its willingness to be flexible in the following ways:
 - a as a distributed university, it will work from a number of campuses and those of its partners
 - b continually updating its academic programmes
 - c continuing to innovate in its learning and teaching methods
 - d refining its assessment methods
 - e offering an appropriate range and balance of programmes in terms of modes of attendance and methods of delivery
 - f ensuring that its calendar is responsive to its total agenda
 - g promoting lifelong learning
 - h meeting the skills and employability agenda.'

The audit team considers these priorities to be particularly relevant to the operation of the University's collaborative provision. The audit team noted specifically that in response to the refreshment of the Business Plan, the University had restructured the International Office and reviewed its International Strategy (paragraphs 25 and 32).

23 In 2002, QAA conducted a subject review of both Computing and Engineering programmes offered in a total of seven of the SURF colleges. For both programmes areas, the reviewers expressed confidence in the academic standards achieved and the quality of learning opportunities. In 2004, QAA carried out an overseas audit of the collaborative arrangement between the University and the APIIT in Sri Lanka. The findings of this audit supported confidence in the University's stewardship of academic standards and of the quality of the student experience in the collaborative provision. Also in 2004, QAA undertook a review of the FD for teaching assistants offered in nine of the SURF colleges. The findings of the review were that the reviewers had confidence in the emerging academic standards, the emerging achievements of students and the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. The Healthcare programmes offered by the University were reviewed in 2005 as part of a national scheme of reviews of all National Health Service-funded Healthcare programmes in England. The review included a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology and a Diploma (HE) in Operating Department Practice offered in collaboration with another UK university. For both programmes, the reviewers expressed confidence in the academic and practitioner standards achieved through the programmes. During the present audit of collaborative provision, the audit team was able to satisfy itself that the University was taking appropriate actions regarding issues raised in all of these reviews.

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

24 The CPSED gave the background to the development of the University's collaborative

provision which has been shaped in part by the long-standing regional role which has increased in significance over the years. The University does not see itself as being restricted to a regional role and has developed significant national and international collaborative arrangements. Significant elements of the University's overall rationale for collaborative provision are the sharing of good practice and enhancement of the student learning experience for students in its collaborative organisations and the enrichment of the curriculum offered by all partners through internationalisation and global perspectives and the provision of high standard internationally recognised qualifications.

25 The University's strategy for assuring the academic standards and quality in programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements is in part determined by the classification of the provision (paragraph 27). The University has structures in place for managing the quality of students' experience and the academic standards of the awards for each category, further detail of which may be found at paragraphs 33-50. At the time of the audit, the University was engaged in developing an overarching strategy for collaboration provision which reaffirmed the three categories of collaborative activity and identified three overarching aims:

- access and inclusion
- regional engagement
- working in partnership.

26 The University aims to promote access and inclusion by taking a national lead in offering learning opportunities to all of those who can benefit, at a range of levels and in a variety of modes of study. Thus it plans to develop regional initiatives aimed at non-traditional and under-represented learners, both within the SURF consortium and with other suitable partners. Widening participation is also seen as important in relation to overseas collaborations, the aim being to create opportunities for students who would otherwise be denied access to higher education; such opportunities are made available to students both within the country of the partner and within the University.

The University's aim of engaging with its regional community is achieved through the SURF consortium and other non-consortium partnerships. There are three strategic aims of working in partnership: first to retain existing and form new international partners to increase the number of international students studying at the University and abroad in partner institutions; second, to sustain and develop the SURF consortium and other appropriate FE/HE partnerships; third, to develop other mutually beneficial partnerships, strategic alliances and other forms of collaboration which support the University's mission and promote economic, social and community developments.

27 The strategy for assuring the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities in the University's collaborative provision is also governed by its categorization of its collaborative arrangements: These partnership relationships are defined as follows:

- Franchise - whereby the University authorises the provision of the whole or part of its own approved programme(s) by a partner institution.
- Outreach - whereby the University provides a programme of learning leading to one of its awards at a location remote from the University and receives teaching support from the partner institution.
- Joint Awards - are created where a validated University programme is developed to be taught and assessed with partner organisation(s) using the complementary expertise and resources of all partners.
- Dual Awards - are created where a validated University programme is developed to be taught and assessed jointly with a partner educational institution with degree awarding powers using the complementary expertise of both partners. The programme of study is created from provision at both the University and the partner and students are required to complete studies at both institutions in order to receive an award from each.

- Commercial Contracts - these vary considerably in their nature, but in all cases the University retains responsibility for content, delivery, assessment and quality assurance arrangements. The majority of these are arrangements whereby the University contracts to deliver the programme for a partner and only a few involve direct input from the partner.
- Quality Assurance - whereby the University assures the quality of the provision of another educational institution, usually overseas, the award being that of the partner not the University. The latter's role is to confirm that the award is of a comparable standard to that of a UK higher education institution.
- Accreditation - whereby the University assures the quality of the provision of a commercial partner, the award being that of the partner not the University.

28 The University is a member of a Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) scheduled to begin operation in April 2007, and which is seen by the University as key to implementation of regional engagement and working in partnership. The LLN involves a number of educational providers, including universities, a university college, 15 regional FECs (including the SURF consortium) and other stakeholders. It will provide opportunities for young people, adults as individuals, and employees supported by their employers to enrol on HE awards, including FDs and honours degrees as well as bespoke qualifications and Continuing Professional Development.

29 In summary, the University's approach to assuring the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities in collaborative arrangements is defined by a combination of the category of arrangement and the nature of the programme relationships. The approach to programme approval, monitoring and review, and specific roles and responsibilities within the framework of the University's committees and management teams are set out at paragraphs 57-87 below).

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

30 The Academic Board of the University has primary responsibility for academic matters and takes an overarching view of the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities and of academic standards, including those in collaborative provision. It receives and debates the minutes of its committees in addition to those of faculty and school boards. The University is managed by a defined network of teams and groups, all of which report to the University Leadership Team which defines the overall vision for the University and sets the strategic framework to ensure delivery of the University Plan and the Business Plan. The Academic Leadership Team is the senior group within the University responsible for academic planning, academic resource issues and curricular strategy. A subgroup of the Academic Leadership Team is responsible for initial approval of proposed new programmes for both internal and collaborative provision. The Academic Development Team, reporting to the Academic Leadership Team, has the primary purpose of taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students. At the time of the audit a Recruitment Management Team, reporting to the Academic Leadership Team, was being established to integrate marketing and recruitment activities across the University and its partners to increase the University's attractiveness to potential students.

31 The committees principally concerned with collaborative provision are the Quality Development Committee (QDC) and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee. The QDC is responsible for developing and maintaining the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement strategies; the procedures for the validation of programmes and the reports of such validations; the processes for the review of programmes, subjects and services and the reports of such reviews; formulation and review

of all academic regulations and, the appointment of internal and external examiners. To discharge its duties in respect of collaborative provision, the QDC operates through a network of subcommittees which had recently been restructured at the time of the audit visit. The International Collaboration Sub-Committee is responsible to the QDC for the quality assurance procedures for international collaborations; coordinating validations and reviews; considering memoranda of cooperation and schedules for such collaboration; appointing international programme advisers (paragraph 43) from among University staff; considering minor changes to approved programmes, and receiving reports, including annual monitoring reports from faculties and schools about their international collaborations. The International Partnerships Operational Management Group is a subgroup of the International Collaboration Sub-Committee, meeting on an ad hoc basis, with the remit to consider operational issues in relation to the management of international collaborations. An international strategy group has the role of developing, implementing and evaluating the University's international strategy, reporting directly to the University Leadership Team. The International Strategy Group is also responsible for approving new international partners, with the Academic Leadership Team receiving the paperwork for information; the approval of new international programmes is the responsibility of the Academic Leadership Team.

32 At the time of the audit there had been a recent shift in the locus of responsibility for all aspects of international collaborative partnerships from faculties and schools to the International Office. An International Strategy Group includes in its membership a number of other staff of that office and staff from the faculties and schools who have responsibility for international activities. A Retention Strategy Group reports to the University Leadership Team and is responsible for implementing the University Student Retention Strategy (2004-2008, paragraph 127). The International Collaboration Sub-Committee, International Partnerships Operational

Management and International Strategy Group are all chaired by the Director of the International Office and have very similar memberships. Since, at the time of the audit, the University had recently implemented its revised international strategy and changed its arrangements for managing its international collaborations, including strengthening the role of the International Office, the audit team took the view that the arrangements described above were suitable to the management of collaborative provision at that time. The team would encourage the University to keep its approach under review as the strategy and management arrangements mature, with particular reference to the separation of the executive and representational arrangements for managing its international strategy.

33 The management of the SURF consortium involves a three tier structure. The SURF Management Board is responsible for the strategy and performance of the consortium; allocation of student numbers among constituent colleges; agreeing proposals to HEFCE for additional student numbers, and determining the financial arrangements under which the consortium operates. It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and the majority of its membership comprises representatives, usually the principals, of each of the 11 constituent colleges. Senior members of the University including the Director of Educational Partnerships, the Director of the Academic Development Institute and the Foundation Degrees Development Manager also sit on the Board. In its discussions with senior staff of partner colleges, the audit team learnt that the constitution and operation of the Board was valued highly by partner colleges, leading it to form the view that the consortium, although led by the University, operated as a partnership of equals.

34 The SURF Management Committee is responsible for implementing strategies agreed by the SURF Management Board. It formulates and monitors a one-year delivery plan and a five-year development plan and sets the framework for FDs operated by the consortium,

as well as identifying good practice and ensuring its dissemination among members. The Committee is chaired by a college principal and each college is represented by a senior staff member nominated by its principal. An interrelationship with the SURF Management Board is secured through three senior University staff being members of both bodies. The SURF Quality Committee reports to the SURF Management Committee and to the QDC. It oversees the assurance of quality and the academic standards of the awards delivered in the colleges, including initial approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. It is chaired by the Director of the Academic Development Institute and among its members are the quality managers of each college, University faculty and school staff with a quality assurance remit, the Director of Educational Partnerships and the Foundation Degrees Development Manager.

35 From its reading of documentation and discussions with staff of both the University and the colleges, the audit team concluded that the arrangement of committees and the SURF Management Board provided a sound structure for management of the consortium at the operational levels to assure the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of awards. The operation and management of the SURF Consortium is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit. At the more strategic level, the SURF Management Board did not appear to the team to have a clear reporting line to either the University's Academic Board or the Board of Governors; the team would encourage the University to consider whether provision for direct reporting between the SURF Management Board and the University's most senior committees might support its strategic ambitions for the SURF consortium.

36 The University has drawn on the proven management structure for SURF to strengthen the monitoring of quality and academic standards in non-consortium UK FE partnerships, which are growing in both volume and importance to the University. The audit team learned that the SURF Quality

Committee, reporting to the QDC, would be reconstituted at certain points in the year as the HE in FE Sub-Committee by including members representing non-consortium provision. It is planned that the enlarged committee consider validation, periodic review and annual monitoring reports for all non-consortium FE provision, based on activity already undertaken in the faculties and schools. At the time of the audit visit, the HE in FE Sub-Committee had not had its first meeting. The audit team recognises that this arrangement has the potential to allow the University to gain a more coherent oversight of the quality and academic standards of non-consortium provision. It is less clear to the team whether the revised arrangements will provide support for non-consortium partners in terms of strategic and operational management analogous to that enjoyed by SURF members. The audit team therefore considers it desirable that the University monitor the operation of the revised committee structure for UK collaborative provision in order to confirm its suitability for retaining the balance between executive and deliberative structures and for providing parity of treatment for SURF and non-SURF provision.

37 Since the University does not intend to expand SURF, it has not developed a methodology for approving new members of the consortium. Responsibility for approval for potential new non-consortium partners is vested in the Academic Leadership Team, while programme approval for new FE college partners will be undertaken by the HE in FE Sub-Committee. Approval of short courses of 60 credits or fewer and commercial contracts is the responsibility of the Flexible Learning Approval Panel, a subcommittee of the QDC. The Flexible Learning Approval Panel is chaired by the Director of the Academic Development Institute and includes all faculty directors of teaching and learning and the Director of Information Services in its membership. At the time of the audit, the University had recently set up a Commercial and Flexible Learning Sub-Committee comprising members of the Flexible Learning Approval Panel and additional members representing the relevant provision. The Commercial and Flexible Learning Sub-

Committee will consider annual reports of short courses and commercial contracts and reports of full awards delivered by or for a commercial partner or a private UK-based college. The reports will be submitted by the faculty holding responsibility for the award or contract. The Commercial and Flexible Learning Sub-Committee will also consider validation and review reports for commercial contracts and full awards. At the time of the audit visit the Commercial and Flexible Learning Sub-Committee had not held its first meeting. The University has adopted this framework to strengthen its central overview of the quality and standards of its flexible learning and commercial short courses and full awards. The audit team viewed this development as prudent given the University's intention to expand such provision, which by its very nature is likely to become increasingly diverse.

38 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee is a committee of the Academic Board with, in the view of the audit team, the potential for extending its current focus on home provision to play an important role in quality assurance in collaborative provision. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee's terms of reference include the development, implementation and evaluation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and the identification, dissemination and sharing of information on good practice in learning and teaching. The representational role of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee role parallels the executive role of the Academic Development Team. The CPSED recognised that there was a considerable amount of good practice within the University's partners, particularly the FECs, that it was not identifying and using in a systematic way in its management of collaborative provision. In the course of the audit, the team learned of the intention that that the SURF Quality Committee hold thematic discussions of the learning and teaching process to support a more structured approach to gathering and using information about good practice in partner institutions. The team noted that the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee included a

representative of the SURF Quality Committee in its membership and that the Director of Educational Partnerships was on the Academic Leadership Team which would assist in methodical gathering and dissemination of good practice from collaborative provision. The University may wish to consider whether input to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee from the International Collaboration Sub-Committee and representatives of SURF and non-consortium partners might also contribute in this respect.

39 In the view of the audit team, there are some apparent inconsistencies in the membership of some of the teams and deliberative bodies, given their aims in relation to collaborative provision. One illustration is that the Academic Development Team has no member with a specific brief for quality enhancement of international partnerships. Further, the Recruitment Management Team has as members all faculty recruitment directors and the Director of the International Office, but no one with a brief for recruitment of SURF and non-consortium students. The Retention Strategy Group has no members with specific responsibility for any international, SURF or non-consortium provision. The University may wish to re-examine the membership of these groups in order to strengthen quality enhancement, student recruitment and retention in its collaborative provision.

40 The operation of each collaborative arrangement is governed by a memorandum of cooperation between the University and the partner institution. In the case of the SURF consortium, there is an overarching agreement signed by all partners and an individual memorandum of cooperation between the University and each college. An accompanying schedule is agreed between the University and the partner to define the detailed arrangements for each programme of study involved in the collaboration; the schedule covers responsibilities for resources, publicity and funding. The University has identified areas of overlap between the memoranda and the schedules and is taking action to eliminate such duplication. A service level agreement rather

than a memorandum and schedule is agreed for arrangements for delivery of commercial courses. The audit team viewed samples of memoranda of cooperation and confirmed that the form and content were in adherence with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

41 There is a series of University handbooks that sets out the University's policies and procedures for the quality assurance of its provision. The overarching Quality Assurance Handbook is supplemented by a SURF quality assurance handbook, an overseas collaborative quality assurance handbook and a UK non-SURF quality assurance handbook. The audit team found these to be comprehensive documents which were fit for the purpose and provided a sound framework for the operation of the University's collaborative provision.

42 The operational management arrangements for collaborative provision are defined in validation documents and schedules and vary slightly depending on local need. All programmes of study offered through collaborative arrangements have a defined programme management team, led by the college-based programme director, which includes other college tutors and a designated member of the University's staff with a liaison responsibility. The team may additionally include University tutors and employers representatives.

43 For each international collaboration, the University appoints an International Programme Adviser from amongst its academic staff. International programme advisers are nominated by the faculty sponsoring the programme and appointments are approved by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee. International programme advisers must have appropriate subject expertise and relevant experience of curriculum design, quality assurance and enhancement and, usually, of programme management. Information on the role and duties involved is provided on the Quality Improvement Service website and in the Overseas Collaborative Quality Assurance Handbook and is set out in memoranda of

cooperation. Larger collaborations have a number of international programme advisers drawn from each of the faculties and schools involved and, in these cases, there is an International Programme Adviser Forum associated with the collaboration which allows the sharing of experience and good practice. The University sees international programme advisers as playing an important role in providing consistent and effective liaison with its partners. International programme advisers are required to produce annual reports, including action plans, which are considered in the relevant faculty or school. The reports are then submitted to the International Collaboration Sub-Committee to allow the University to monitor any significant developments and respond in a timely fashion. International programme advisers contribute to annual monitoring of programmes and undertake a staff development role within partner institutions.

44 For large international partnerships, the University has introduced account managers, whose main role is to ensure effective communication between the partner and the University, particularly where more than one faculty or school is involved. Account managers are appointed by the International Office and may be drawn from its own staff or from one of the faculties involved in the collaboration. Account managers are responsible for effective communication between all international programme advisers associated with a partnership, part of which involves convening international programme adviser forums. Account managers also have a supervisory role in ensuring that any proposed new developments with partners are taken forward in a controlled and coordinated manner. Account managers have no financial responsibility, which remains with the International Office. At the time of the audit the account manager role was in its infancy; it was therefore too early for the audit team to come to a view on the efficacy of the role which will be kept under review by the University.

45 For all UK-based collaborations, both within and outside the SURF consortium, the

University appoints a link tutor for each collaborative programme from among the staff of the sponsoring faculty or school. The role of link tutor is similar to that of the international programme adviser and is clearly delineated in a Link Tutor Handbook. Where an identical programme is offered by a number of partners, by way of example within the SURF consortium, a single person takes on the link tutor role for all of the partners. Link tutors are required to liaise with partners regarding:

- the admission of students
- student induction
- the accuracy, completeness and currency of student handbooks
- the University's policy for accreditation of prior learning
- matters relating to the assessment of students
- nomination and appointment of external examiners, and supporting the examiners in the performance of their duties
- attending examination boards
- ensuring course committees are properly constituted and attending committee meetings
- any changes to module and programme content and assessment
- submitting the curricula vitae (CVs) of a partner's new teaching staff to the University for approval
- ensuring students have the opportunity to provide module feedback
- producing the annual monitoring report
- assisting in the progression of students to the University.

46 Both international programme advisers and link tutors are required to meet with students without staff from the partner institution present. In the course of its visits to UK partner institutions, the audit team heard of instances, mainly in long-standing collaborative arrangements where such meetings did not always happen. While the audit team found no

evidence of detriment to the student experience through the absence of such meetings, the University may wish to restate its expectations in this area, including the formalisation of ad hoc alternative or delegated arrangements, to both its partners and the link tutors.

47 The framework for the assessment of student achievement is defined by the memorandum of cooperation and schedule for each programme. All students on collaborative programmes are subject to the University's assessment regulations but the detailed operational arrangements depend upon the type of collaboration. The membership of assessment boards and the roles and responsibilities of the University and partner institutions in assessment are formalised in the schedules attached to memoranda of cooperation. Outreach programmes do not have separate assessment boards; assessment boards for provision that is quality assured are managed by the partner institution. The pattern in franchise provision is for assessment to be designed either locally or jointly and sent to the University for formal approval. Initial marking and moderation is done locally and samples sent to the University for further review and external moderation. The University provides a chair for assessment boards through the relevant faculty. Assessment boards may be held in the partner institution or at the University; some overseas boards are conducted by video-conferencing to allow participation by the partner institution's staff. Link tutors and international programme advisers attend assessment boards and are responsible for ensuring that partners are fully aware of, and follow, University assessment procedures.

48 In discussion with staff at partner institutions and reading of documentation, the audit team found evidence that the membership of one assessment board for an award delivered through a non-consortium college did not include any University academic staff. Membership of the assessment board did always include a University-appointed external examiner who was required to attend to provide for the security of the standard of the award. Nonetheless, the team would encourage the University to consider

whether the inclusion of formal representation from the academic staff of the University on all assessment boards might provide additional assurance of the security of awards offered through collaborative arrangements.

49 The audit team found that the approach to the security and integrity of assessment in collaborative provision was rigorous and thorough but could also be protracted and time consuming. The University identified that the requirements of the process could result in delays in issuing students with assessment tasks and in providing results, which could result in difficulties for staff and students, with particular reference to assessment feedback. In recognition of the importance of timely provision of feedback to students, the University has agreed that students may be issued with provisional grades in defined circumstances.

50 From discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of documentation, the audit team concluded that the University's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in collaborative provision was well-defined and took due account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The team found that the framework was fit for the purpose and operating as intended within the University and across its collaborative arrangements.

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

51 The CPSED described the University's intended arrangements for the enhancement of its management of its collaborative provision and outlined some actions taken in this area. The principal areas identified for enhancement activity were:

- the signing-off of memoranda of cooperation and associated schedules prior to the commencement of a programme
- the simplification of schedules, to reduce replication with the memoranda
- learning from the good practice of partners

- monitoring the performance of the newly configured International Office
- monitoring the success of a monitoring process based around thematic enquiries for the University's own programmes, for possible introduction into collaborative provision arrangements
- further clarification of the roles of international programme advisers and link tutors
- raising awareness for the prevention of plagiarism among overseas partners
- clarification of the roles and remits of committees responsible for collaborative provision.

52 The CPSED did not identify how these areas of enhancement activity had been identified but, through discussion with staff and review of documentation, the audit team formed the view that these items originated from separate experiences of the operation of collaborative provision rather than being an institutionally-led series of strategic priorities. In the course of the audit the team found evidence of enhancement activity beyond that listed in the CPSED and which had originated through the University's formal structures. An example of this was a paper from the Academic Development Team about the clarification and development of the roles and remits of committees in processes for the approval and monitoring of programmes for UK-based institutions outside the SURF. Consideration of the issue through the University's committee structure led to the creation of the HE in FE Sub-Committee as an adjunct to the SURF Quality Committee; the Commercial and Flexible Learning Committee as a subcommittee of the Flexible Learning Approval Panel; and the renaming of the Academic Collaborations Sub-Committee to become the International Collaboration Sub-Committee, thereby reflecting its revised remit. These proposed enhancements to the University's management of its collaborative provision were agreed by the Academic Development Team and the then Academic Collaboration Sub-Committee before

being approved by the QDC and then the Academic Board in September 2006. The QDC will be responsible for monitoring the contribution of the revised structure to the management of collaborative provision.

53 Through its discussions with staff and students and reading of documentation the audit team was able to confirm that the University's plans for the enhancement of the management of its collaborative provision set out above were being taken forward. By way of example, as noted above (paragraph 32) the expansion of collaborative provision overseas and consequent growth student numbers necessitated the restructuring of the University's International Office in 2003. Staffing for the reconstituted International Office involved secondment of key staff from the faculties and new appointments. The University also established the International Partnerships Operations Management Group to deal with day-to-day operational issues and the International Strategy Group to consider issues of strategic importance in the University's overseas collaborative provision. At the time of the audit the University was monitoring the way in which the revised arrangements in the restructured International Office were supporting the management of overseas collaborative provision.

54 The audit team heard details of collaboration between staff from the University and other HEIs in a HEFCE-funded project investigating the effectiveness of partnerships between HEIs and FECs involved with higher education. The project reported in the summer of 2006, producing a good practice guide and made recommendations to provide advice on some of the salient issues associated with the successful establishment of a HEI/FEC partnership. These included the need for regular meetings of high-level University and College staff to facilitate better communication.

55 Staff from the University's Learning Development and Innovation Unit and staff from the SURF network have been involved with a series of Joint Information Systems

Committee (JISC)-funded projects since 2001. These have, in various ways, focused on supporting both learners and employer mentors associated with work based learning in HE in FECs. The outcomes of the projects include over 80 learning objects, which are now freely available, and offer resource materials for personal development, research skills and improving employment prospects. The way in which staff from the University worked with their regional SURF partners both improved the e-learning opportunities for students and enhanced the relationship between the University and its partners.

56 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had identified for itself a suitable programme of enhancement activities in support of its management of its collaborative provision. The CPSED did not explain how these activities were matched to an overall strategy for collaborative provision, demonstrating congruence with need, reflection and evaluation. The team considers that, as the University develops its strategy for collaborative provision, the incorporation of explicit enhancement objectives would strengthen the University's approach to the management of its collaborative provision. While, at the time of the audit, it was too early for the team to appraise the effect of most of the actions identified in relation to enhancement, the collaboration between University and partner college staff in JISC-funded projects, which has had the effect of enhancing the University's relationship with its partners and of improving e-learning support for students is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

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

57 The University's suite of quality assurance handbooks (paragraph 41) set out the arrangements for approval, monitoring and review for each of the types of collaborative provision.

Partner and programme approval

International partnerships

58 The revised responsibilities of the International Office include selection and oversight of all international collaborative partnerships. The University has separated the approval of new international partners from programme approval. Approval of a new partner starts with completion of the Initial Notification Form which records information about the proposed partner including compatibility of mission; financial and legal status; management structure; quality assurance systems and learning resources. The Initial Notification Form goes to the International Strategy Group for approval and to the Academic Leadership Team Programme Approvals Sub-Group for information. The International Strategy Group considers compatibility of mission; financial status of the partner organisation; the income-generating potential of the proposed partnership, and also potential competition with established partners in the geographical market. The CPSED indicated that it was usual to have an 'institutional visit' by senior members of the University as part of the approval process. The Quality Assurance Handbook for Overseas Collaborative Provision states that such visits occur where the Director of Quality Improvement and the Director of the International Office deem it necessary, taking account of discussion of the Initial Notification Form in the International Strategy Group.

59 Where programme approval involves franchised provision, joint and dual awards and international outreach, it follows standard University procedures, using the normal pro forma:

- Val 1: which gives a brief rationale for the proposal including linkages to faculty and University plans, and which is submitted to the Academic Leadership Team

- Val 2: which details rationale, market demand, target student profile, nature of the proposed programme and resourcing requirements. The Val 2 goes to the Academic Leadership Team Programme Approvals Sub-Group for 'consideration' and to the International Strategy Group for information.

60 Validation panels with members external to the University consider both approval of the award and the delivery pattern at the partner. Validation is usually a two stage process with stage 1 being at the University and stage 2 at the partner except in the case of a new programme being approved at an established partner where there is only a UK stage. A visit to the overseas partner does not normally take place for dual and joint awards but the University considers it to be good practice for a representative of the partner organisation to attend the validation. Validation panels must be satisfied with the capacity of the partner to resource and deliver a student experience comparable with that provided at the University, and with the appropriateness of the proposed arrangements between the University and its partner for programme management and administration. Validation reports are considered by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee which reports its decisions to the QDC.

61 Approval of articulation arrangements, defined by the University as 'the formal process leading to the recognition of the credit rating of a named qualification of a partner institution ... and the creation of opportunities to transfer with advanced standing and specific credit to an appropriate programme of study at the University' differs in that it is undertaken by a faculty articulation panel, rather than by a panel convened by the Quality Improvement Service. Faculty articulation panels include a member drawn from another faculty but not membership external to the University. Reports from faculty articulation panels go to faculty quality committees for approval prior to submission to the International Collaboration Sub-Committee.

Consortium partnerships:

62 The University does not plan to expand the SURF consortium so there are no specified arrangements for the approval of new partners in this category of provision. Programme approval procedures are stated in the Quality Assurance Handbook for SURF and largely mirror the processes for international partnerships. The Quality Assurance Handbook for SURF distinguishes between approval of a new University programme to be delivered by one or more SURF colleges and approval for a SURF college to deliver a University programme that is already in approval. In the former case, the validation panel includes an academic adviser external to the University and, in the case of foundation degrees, a practitioner adviser. In the latter case, membership of the panel is internal to the University, but includes a member drawn from a faculty not involved in the collaboration. From the academic year 2006-07, representatives from SURF colleges have been included in the membership of validation panels for all consortium provision. If a proposal involves several colleges the validation event is held at the University and separate college visits are only undertaken when evaluation of specialist resources is required. Reporting of outcomes from validation panels for new University programmes to be offered through SURF is to the SURF Quality Committee and the QDC. Validation reports for delivery of existing University programmes to be delivered through SURF are considered by the SURF Quality Committee.

Non-consortium partnerships

63 Partner selection takes account of whether the proposed collaboration is to be offered through franchising, accreditation or outreach and considers the status and maturity of the proposed partner which may be an FEC, private college or commercial organisation. The standard Initial Notification Form applies, with overall responsibility for approving a new partner being vested in the Academic Leadership Team.

64 Where the proposed partner is a commercial organisation or private sector college with little experience in delivering HE, a visit to the proposed partner institution involving the Chair of the Academic Leadership Team, a senior staff member from a faculty unconnected with the collaboration and an officer from the Quality Improvement Service may take place. A report on the visit is then provided to the Academic Leadership Team to support the decision-making process on approval. The University also arranges for the Director of Employability and Student Support and a representative from Information Services to visit the partner to appraise the appropriateness of student support mechanisms and learning resources. Reports of such visits must state whether the current facilities are adequate, identify the improvements required before the collaboration can begin or indicate that improvements are unlikely to be possible by the proposed start date; in the latter case the start date is deferred until resources are confirmed as adequate.

65 Programme approval for franchise, outreach and joint and dual awards uses the standard University Val 1 and 2 procedures. Where the programme is already approved for delivery on-campus or with another partner, validation for proposed franchise and outreach provision focuses on the suitability of the partner to deliver the award. The validation panel includes an external subject specialist with experience of collaborative provision.

66 Approval for franchise, outreach and joint and dual awards is a two stage process: the first stage involves a meeting of the validation panel at the University to approve any new programmes and to consider the proposed arrangements for the management of the collaboration. Except in the case of joint and dual awards the second stage involves a visit to the partner institution involving meetings with management and support staff, teaching staff and students. In the case of joint and dual awards, while a visit to the proposed collaborating institution may not be deemed necessary, it is customary for representatives of

the staff of the partner to be invited to attend the validation event at the University. Panel reports are considered by the HE in FE Committee with decisions being reported to the QDC.

67 In reviewing documentation the audit team read about the approval of an international programme, recorded as 'outreach provision' in the University's Register of Collaborative Provision, which had been carried out within a very short timescale under a 'Faculty Enhanced Validation procedure'. The approval did not involve an external academic adviser or a stage 2 validation panel at the overseas collaborative partner, both in contravention of the University's normal requirements. The team did not find, and the University could not point to, any formal specification of the requirements for Faculty Enhanced Validations, but in meetings with senior staff of the University, the team was informed that such validations should include input from an external academic adviser. The University may wish to review and formalise its requirements for Faculty Enhanced Validations and take steps to ensure that its requirements are observed and that any procedural deviations are formally sanctioned and recorded.

68 For short courses, defined by the University as attracting 60 credits or fewer, and for commercial contracts where swift response to market need is advantageous, the process of programme approval is overseen by the Flexible Learning Approvals Panel. The Flexible Learning Approvals Panel has the authority to approve both programmes and the partner to deliver the programmes. The Panel may set conditions, requirements and recommendations which may include the requirement for a visit to be made to the partner institution. Flexible Learning Approval Panel decisions are reported to the QDC.

69 The CPSED identified the University's procedures for both partner and programme approval as areas of strength. From reading of documentation and discussions with staff of the University and its partner organisations, the audit team was able to confirm that the University's procedures for the approval of its

different categories of collaborative provision were to the purpose, operating as intended and were in alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

70 At the time of the audit, the University was piloting a new system of annual monitoring for its on-campus provision starting with the monitoring for the academic year 2005-06. The CPSED confirmed that the University intended to retain its previous system for annual monitoring for its collaborative provision until it had evaluated the alternative approach.

International partnerships:

71 There is annual monitoring at both module and programme level but not at institutional level. Module tutors provide module monitoring reports using standard University pro forma at the end of each module. The reports evaluate the operation of the module, drawing on supporting evidence such as student feedback. Through meetings with staff from partner institutions and consideration of relevant documentation the audit team confirmed that module monitoring reports were compiled in accordance with the University's requirements.

72 At the programme level, the international programme adviser completes an award monitoring report in conjunction with the 'appropriate personnel' at the partner institution, using a standard pro forma. Areas to be covered by the report are specified and include the requirement to respond to external examiner comments and student feedback, analyse student progression data and highlight good practice. The audit team had access to annual reports from several overseas partners of the University and found that, in the main, the reports conformed with the University's requirements.

73 The procedure for annual monitoring of provision which the University categorises as 'quality assured' also requires the production of an annual report. The report is designed to allow the University to monitor the progress of students admitted to the University from the provision; track changes in the partner

institution's curriculum; record liaison activities with the partner, and identify an action plan for the faculty, university and partner institution.

74 Annual monitoring reports for collaborative provision are submitted to the appropriate faculty quality committee. Attendance at the meeting of the faculty quality committee which considers the annual monitoring reports includes a rapporteur appointed by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee. Drawing on the outcomes of the annual monitoring reports, faculties produce faculty action plans and evaluation reports on the annual monitoring process. Rapporteurs compile a report on the conduct of the annual monitoring process for the faculty to standard pro forma to verify that the University's requirements have been observed including confirmation that all monitoring reports have been received and have undergone appropriate scrutiny; all external examiner reports have been received and have had a response; all outstanding issues from reviews and validations have received a response; previous year's action plan has been implemented; and action plans for the current year have been identified. The report also identifies areas of good practice and common issues to draw to the attention of the International Collaboration Sub-Committee.

75 The outcomes of annual monitoring of all programmes offered overseas through collaborative arrangements are considered by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee through receipt of rapporteur reports; faculty action plans, and faculty reports evaluating the annual monitoring process. The International Collaboration Sub-Committee produces an annual monitoring action plan and a report evaluating the operation of the process. The International Collaboration Sub-Committee reports are submitted to the QDC and are incorporated into the University's overall annual monitoring action plan.

Consortium partnerships

76 Annual monitoring of the SURF consortium provision operates to broadly the same model as that used for monitoring international collaborations, with both module and programme level reporting. Where modules are delivered at multiple locations, module reports from individual colleges contribute to an integrated report covering delivery of the module at all of the locations. The approach to monitoring at the programme level depends on whether the award is delivered only in one of the SURF colleges, or whether it is delivered in one or more SURF colleges and/or on-campus. If the programme is delivered exclusively at one college then the college programme leader and University link tutor complete an annual monitoring report for the award, but do not need to produce a separate appendix reporting on collaborations. If the programme is delivered in a number of the colleges and/or at the University then the programme leader in each college produces an annual monitoring appendix for collaborations all of which are then considered by the course committee. The link tutor then compiles a composite annual monitoring report for the programme.

77 The annual monitoring reports are considered by the faculty quality committee with a rapporteur nominated by the SURF Quality Committee in attendance. In addition to its own staff the University uses staff from the SURF colleges to act as rapporteurs. QIS provides training for all staff involved in the role. The use of partner institution staff in the role of rapporteur in annual monitoring, which encourages the integration of partner institutions into the University's quality assurance processes is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit. Following the faculty quality committee the processing of the reports matches that that for international collaborations, except that the SURF Quality Committee fulfils the role played by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee.

Non-consortium partners

78 The annual monitoring procedure mirrors that for consortium partners, but with reporting

of outcomes to the HE in FE Committee. The Flexible Learning Approvals Panel is responsible for monitoring the operation of short and commercial courses. The audit team noted discussions at the Flexible Learning Approvals Panel suggesting that the normal procedure for annual monitoring was inappropriate for 15-30 credit awards, leading to an intention to introduce a 'slimmed down' reporting process for such courses for the academic year 2006-07. Awards attracting 60 credits will continue to be subject to the full reporting process. As the University develops its overall approach to annual monitoring in collaborative provision it will wish to keep under review the effectiveness of any revised processes in contributing to its overall management of collaborative provision.

79 In the CPSED the University described its approach to annual monitoring, including the rapporteur system as a strength, and the report of the institutional audit identified annual monitoring as a feature of good practice. The audit team read samples of annual monitoring reports and was able to track the consideration of the reports through the various University committees, culminating in consideration by the QDC of an overarching annual monitoring action plan. From its scrutiny of documentation and discussion with staff, the team confirmed that annual monitoring of collaborative provision was conducted in accordance with the stated procedures and as set out the CPSED. The team concluded that the approach to annual monitoring enabled the University to maintain an overview of the consistency with which programmes were delivered by different partners, particularly within SURF, and that the attention of the QDC was drawn to key issues in relation to collaborative provision through the overall University action plan.

Periodic review

80 The University's Quality Assurance Handbooks identify three purposes for periodic review:

- to review critically the health of an award, a group of awards or a subject area

- to evaluate the faculty's and the partner organisation's success in achieving its academic objectives and to assess its future plans
- to assess the effectiveness of the quality management process.

81 The report of the institutional audit confirmed that the periodic review process was effective while noting that, within a constrained time-frame, panels rarely reached the third objective of considering faculty quality management processes. In meetings with the audit team staff of the University reported that officers from the Quality Improvement Service were encouraging review panels to give more attention to this aspect of the process.

International partnerships

82 The normal interval for periodic review in international partnerships is five years. The process is based upon a self-evaluation document produced by the sponsoring faculty and the partner organisation. The review is conducted by a panel which includes an external academic adviser. In addition to the self-evaluation document, the panel has access to supporting documentation which includes external and University examiner reports, reports from international programme advisers, annual monitoring reports, statistical information on student progression and staff CVs. Where the proposal involves changes to the provision being reviewed, validation documentation is also produced. The initial panel meeting takes place at the University and is followed by a visit to the partner. Reports from both the initial UK visit and that to the overseas partner are considered by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee which reports its decision to the QDC. The sponsoring faculty coordinates an interim response to the review outcomes six months after receipt of the approved report, and a detailed response at 12 months. The QDC is responsible for confirming that these responses are satisfactory.

Consortium partnerships

83 Wherever possible, review of programmes offered through SURF takes place on a quinquennial cycle alongside the review of the University's provision in the subject area. The QDC agrees the academic groupings and schedules for the reviews, and the Quality Improvement Service identifies which SURF awards will be included in each academic grouping. Where SURF programmes are combined into the internal review, each college team produces an individual self-evaluation document. The college documents are used to inform the overarching self-evaluation document for the subject area to which they are annexed so that they are available to the review panel. SURF staff are included in the membership of review panels, and the panels has separate meetings with college staff and SURF college students.

84 Where it is not possible to combine the review of SURF provision with a review of University programmes in the subject area, the review is based on a self-evaluation coordinated by the sponsoring faculty in consultation with the partner and supporting documentation. The panel meets students, teaching staff and the University link tutor. The review panel reports are considered by the SURF Quality Committee and the sponsoring faculty coordinates responses to the review outcomes at six and 12-month intervals after the confirmed report is made available. The SURF Quality Committee and the QDC are responsible for confirming that the responses are satisfactory.

Non-consortium partnerships

85 The review procedure for provision offered through non-consortium partners is the same as that for SURF provision, with review in the partner being combined, wherever possible, with review of the University's provision in the subject area. Reporting of the review panel outcomes is direct to the QDC.

86 The audit team noted that the University made no provision for periodic review of partners and the overall operation of the

partnership as such, which were subsumed in programme review. The team had access to the summary report from an internal review of SURF provision undertaken in February 2006 but, while this contained an extensive and useful set of action points relating to the overall operation of the scheme, it did not provide any evaluation of the University's relationship with the individual partners. In meetings with staff at the University, the audit team was informed that, for international collaborations, an attempt was made to undertake programme review across all programmes delivered through the partner, simultaneously wherever possible, with a view to providing some insight into the partnership overall. The University may wish to consider systematizing this approach and extending it to all categories of collaborative provision to provide information about the operation and vitality of individual partnerships. Accordingly the team considers it desirable that the University formalise, and undertake on a periodic and regular basis, the review of all partners and partnerships, as distinct from the periodic review of programmes, in order to provide for further assurance of quality and academic standards.

87 From discussion with staff at the University and from some of its collaborative institutions and review of documentation, the audit team concluded that the University had established a robust set of procedures for periodic programme review, tailored to the requirements of each type of collaborative provision, and with the appropriate use of external academic advisers. The team found that the procedures were operating as intended and met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

88 The University operates a standard process of involvement of external subject experts and practitioners in programme validation, revalidation and review for all of its provision.

The relevant quality assurance handbooks for collaborative provision specify the use of external academic advisers in the review of all categories of collaborative provision, including the requirement for a practitioner adviser for Foundation Degrees. The CPSED noted that, occasionally, external advisers were unable to attend panel meetings, in which case reliance was placed on their written comments. Sometimes the University retains the external advisers as external examiners after the validation or revalidation process has been completed. The CPSED identified the ability to continue to attract high-quality and experienced external advisers as a challenge for the University. The report of the institutional audit found that the University's use of externality in periodic review supported a judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of academic quality and standards. From examination of documentation for a range of periodic review activity the present audit team was able to confirm the University's strong and scrupulous use of external academic advisers in periodic review of collaborative programmes and concluded that the use of such advisers supported a judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of academic quality and standards in its collaborative provision.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

89 The CPSED stated that the University took 'the role of external examiners seriously' and that the role was seen as central to assuring the quality and standards of collaborative provision. The processes of appointment, moderation and reporting are detailed in the quality assurance handbooks for collaborative provision and mirror those adopted in relation to University-based programmes. The report of the institutional audit found that the process of appointment of external examiners was 'consistent and robust' and that there was 'robust scrutiny' of external examiners' reports and monitoring of responses through the Quality Improvement Service and annual monitoring.

90 The University appoints external examiners for all awards and modules delivered in collaborative provision with the exclusion of foundation (year 0) level courses. Partner institutions are consulted about potential nominations to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. The criteria for appointment are laid down in the University Quality Assurance Handbook and focus on the examiners' expertise and independence. Appointments are confirmed by the External Examiner Approval Panel of the QDC. In addition to the information about their role provided to examiners by the Quality Improvement Service, faculties organise briefing and induction events to which external examiners are invited.

91 As well as their standard responsibilities, external examiners responsible for programmes in collaborative provision are asked to comment on the comparability of standards across partner institutions. There is an expectation that external examiners, will, where feasible, visit partners and such visits may include meetings with students. Comparisons across all sites where degrees are delivered are not always possible. In some cases, for example where a partner operates on multiple sites, one external examiner covers all sites where a programme is delivered. In other cases different external examiners cover programmes in different partners and there may be different external examiners for on-campus and collaborative provision. The audit team did not observe any formal mechanisms for communication between external examiners that would ensure that full comparison between different delivery sites was always achieved.

92 External examiners' reports are received centrally, annotated by the Quality Improvement Service and circulated for response. Reports are sent to the school/faculty office, the school/faculty Director for Learning and Teaching, the Dean of Students and, where applicable, the partner organisation, the Chair of the International Collaboration Sub-Committee, the Chair of the SURF Quality Committee, Edexcel and the SURF Quality Committee College representative. The response to

comments made by external examiners is normally developed through the annual monitoring procedure and external examiners receive copies of the annual monitoring reports. Where an external examiner's report raises urgent matters the Quality Improvement Service invokes a procedure that requires the relevant faculty to make a rapid formal response. The audit team saw an example of the use of this procedure which resulted in the agreement of a detailed action plan with a partner institution within three months of receipt of the report.

93 The report of the institutional audit recorded that institutional oversight of external examiners' reports was maintained by an annual survey of external examiners' comments being reported to the QDC and to the Academic Board. The audit team noted comment in the report that the methodology used needed to be improved. Notwithstanding this reservation, the latest summary report available at the time of the audit demonstrated that external examiners' comments were overwhelmingly positive about the comparability of standards in collaborative provision.

94 For overseas collaborative provision the University appoints University examiners from among subject experts from relevant faculties. Each overseas collaborative programme has both an external examiner and a University examiner. The CPSED referred to these staff as 'Internal External Examiners' but staff who met the audit team confirmed that they were formally designated University examiners. University examiners are appointed by the External Examiners Approval Panel using the same process as that used to appoint external examiners. The Quality Assurance Handbook for overseas provision states that the criteria for appointing University examiners and external examiners are the same. In discussion of the role of the University examiners with the team staff of the University conceded that different criteria should be applied because University examiners could not, by definition, fulfil the requirement for independence. University examiners are expected to have subject

expertise and relevant experience and would not normally teach on the programme or be involved in its management.

95 The terms and conditions of appointment of University examiners are the same as those for external examiners. University examiners in some faculties are paid for their duties; elsewhere they receive a time allowance, a difference of approach which could give rise to disparity in perceptions of the significance of the role. The audit team formed the view that there was potential for conflicts of interest and issues of objectivity for University Examiners where they are required formally to comment on assessment at a partner institution that contributes to a University award. The University acknowledged this possibility but stated that the risk was mitigated by a rigorous appointment process which had rejected some nominations. The University has identified a recent growth in appointments as University examiners and the need for this to be monitored. The CPSED noted the difficulty of recruiting the requisite number of suitably qualified and experienced external examiners for overseas provision. The team considered that the appointment of University examiners represented an expedient device to alleviate the problems of securing external examiner coverage for the University's expanding overseas collaborative provision.

96 The Handbook also states that the role and responsibilities and reporting requirements of the University examiner are the same as those of external examiners. University examiners have the same authority to raise issues up to the highest level in the University. The CPSED described the role of University examiner as complementary to that of the external examiner, ensuring comparability of standards between programmes delivered at the University and those delivered through collaborative provision overseas. The report by QAA on the University's provision with APIIT Lanka noted that, through their attendance at assessment boards held overseas, University examiners could ensure that the boards operated in line with University regulations and custom and practice.

97 Like external examiners, University examiners are appointed to both modules and awards. Module responsibilities are divided between the University Examiners and external examiners. The audit team calculated that it was possible for at least half of the modules on the final stage of a degree programme to be externally moderated only by the University examiner. In meetings with the team, senior staff of the University were firm in stating that the University ensured that all parts of a degree programme were subject to external scrutiny through the working of the assessment boards whereby the external examiners saw all marks. In addition, it was stressed that University and external examiners were expected to work as a team and discuss the modules that they moderated separately. Nonetheless, based on its discussions with a range of staff and scrutiny of documentation, the audit team came to the conclusion that the current approach to the deployment of external examiners and University examiners could not guarantee full external scrutiny of all of the contributory elements of degree programmes delivered in overseas collaborative provision.

98 The University is satisfied that University examiners perform an effective role in supporting the security of assessment in overseas collaborative provision. The University emphasised that, while University examiners and external examiners prepared similar reports, issues raised by the external examiner carried more weight. On the other hand, the University has found that on occasion University examiners have been more scrupulous in their comments. The audit team was assured by senior staff of the University that no external examiner had expressed formally any concern about working with University Examiners; it was stated that, on the contrary, external examiners had commented favourably on the valuable role in assessment performed by the University examiners.

99 The audit team accepted the cogency of the arguments and the principles behind the concept of the University examiner, including the contribution of University examiners to confirmation of comparability of standards and support for the assessment process in overseas collaborative provision. Nonetheless, the team considers that the way in which the University examiners are currently deployed represents a potential conflict of interest in that the University is contributing to the external scrutiny of assessment of provision that contributes to its awards in quality assured and franchised provision overseas. The team therefore considers it advisable that the University review the role of the University examiner to ensure that responsibilities are clearly defined and distinct from those of the external examiner. Notwithstanding this recommendation, the team concluded that the University's use of external examiners in assessment of its collaborative provision was strong and scrupulous and supported a judgment of broad confidence in the University's management of academic standards. The team also confirmed that the University's approach in this area was in alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

100 The CPSED stated that, since the publication of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the University had moved to align its programmes and awards with the FHEQ while also implementing an outcomes-based approach to learning, which incorporated the University's statement on transferable skills. A common approach has been adopted for both internal and collaborative provision, involving the provision of learning outcomes and skills requirements for each level of study, utilising the level descriptors of the FHEQ. A set of common learning outcome headings were provided for all programmes; these were knowledge and understanding; learning; enquiry; analysis;

problem solving; communication; application; reflection. In addition two individual learning outcomes were specified for each programme to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the award. The audit team examined programme specifications for a range of collaborative provision and confirmed that this approach had been adopted in all cases. In discussion with both staff and students from partner institutions, the team found an understanding of the value of programmes specifications in aiding the learning process. In the CPSED, the University acknowledged that the matter of teamwork was a significant omission from the list of common learning outcome headings. The team was informed that the University was now encouraging award teams to incorporate teamwork within the two additional learning outcomes, pending a systematic revision of the model in the future. From a review of programme specifications the team was able to confirm that the revised approach was being implemented.

101 Programme award teams must demonstrate at validation and revalidation that subject benchmark statements have been incorporated into award structures and this expectation is built into the programme specification template provided by the University. There is also a requirement to link assessment requirements to learning outcomes. Documentation seen by the audit team demonstrated that both of these stipulations were addressed on a systematic basis by programme teams.

102 Link tutors and international programme advisers play a leading role in ensuring that staff in partner institutions become cognizant with and apply the Academic Infrastructure in the development and delivery of programmes and staff development sessions have been provided for partner staff where necessary. There was recognition in the CPSED that staff in partner institutions were not always fully familiar with the detailed content of all elements of the *Code of practice*. Nonetheless, through reading documents and in discussions with staff in partner colleges, the audit team

was satisfied that, as a result of observation of the University's own requirements by staff in partner institutions, the operation of the University's collaborative provision took due account of the *Code*.

103 The University maintains central oversight of observance of its policies and procedures, and thereby ensures alignment with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure, through the validation, annual monitoring, review and revalidation processes. From its review of documentation and discussion with staff of the University and its partner institutions, the audit team was able to confirm the University's systematic use of external reference points in collaborative provision. The team also concluded that the University's approach to the application of elements of the Academic Infrastructure to its collaborative provision was fit for the purpose and contributed to the management of the quality of learning opportunities and academic standards.

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

104 The CPSED noted examples of the need for professional body or overseas governmental approval of the content and delivery of some of its collaborative provision. The University's Quality Assurance Handbook lays down formal procedures for managing external reviews and responding to reports. Management of the process is the responsibility of the Quality Improvement Service and the relevant faculty. Reports are considered initially by faculty quality committees and then by the QDC, with the faculty's comments attached. Reports from external bodies on collaborative provision within SURF are discussed by the SURF Quality Committee. Reports from external bodies are also considered in the annual monitoring process.

105 The audit team noted that, at local level, the University engaged in careful consideration of the reports of professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) reviews and developed effective action plans based on their

outcomes. By way of example, the QAA review of the Foundation Degrees for Teaching Assistants at SURF Colleges resulted in the establishment of a management meeting for the degree which received and discussed the report at its first meeting. The report was also sent to the SURF Quality Committee who agreed its dissemination to faculty quality committees and award teams for action. Examples of recent external body reports involving collaborative provision seen by the audit team were complimentary about the collaborative arrangements between the University and its partners.

106 The Quality Assurance Handbook states that the QDC will provide an annual report to the Academic Board on 'activities associated with professional bodies'. The Academic Board notes the response to PSRB reports through its receipt of QDC minutes.

107 The audit team found clear evidence that the University worked closely with its partners in preparation for external reviews. Representatives of partner institutions who met the team were very appreciative of the support they received from the University, which includes training for accreditation and review events. University staff participated in the 2006 Ofsted inspection of a partner college which, in due course, shared the report with the University. Joint review and validation arrangements are in place for professional qualifications in collaborative provision; for example, the Law Society sends a representative to validation events involving legal professional qualifications awarded by the University and receives copies of the relevant annual monitoring reports.

108 From its review of documentation and discussion with staff of the University and its partner institutions, the audit team concluded that the University engaged with review and accreditation by PSRBs and external agencies in its collaborative provision in a timely and effective fashion and that the University's approach made a positive contribution to the assurance of quality and academic standards in collaborative provision.

Student representation in collaborative provision

109 The CPSED stated that 'all partners [were] required to have some form of student representation system in place'. Requirements for student representation, focused on the award management board or equivalent committee, are incorporated into the schedules attached to the memoranda of cooperation agreed between the University and partners at the point of validation. The quality assurance handbooks for collaborative provision state that student representation must be in line with the University's Student Representation Policy developed jointly between the University and its Students' Union. In addition, the University requires that where an award is delivered at multiple locations structures and processes be adopted to secure representation of students at all sites.

110 The effectiveness of student representation at programme level is viewed by the University as a mechanism for quality assurance and enhancement at review and revalidation. Programmes may be recommended or required to improve the operation of such mechanisms as part of the conditions of re-approval. In meetings with the audit team students from partner institutions expressed satisfaction with the opportunities for their views about their programmes to be represented and gave examples of effective actions that had resulted.

111 Students are represented on key committees of the University, such as the QDC and the International Collaboration Sub-Committee, that deal with matters related to collaborative provision but these representatives are students of the University rather than partner colleges. Representation at this level is generally organised through the University's Students' Union. The Union stated its commitment to acting on behalf of all students, including those studying University programmes at SURF colleges. The University acknowledges that distance and resources limit the extent to which full representation of, and support for, students in collaborative provision can be achieved. Some partner institutions, such as

those in SURF, have their own Students' Unions and arrangements for student participation in governance. Details of arrangements for student representation are included in student handbooks.

112 Students are not involved directly in validation, review, revalidation or annual monitoring. Review and revalidation panels meet groups of students studying on the programmes under consideration. The audit team saw examples of conditions attached to revalidation which arose directly from the input of students, demonstrating the responsiveness of the University to student representation. The requirements for annual monitoring include evaluation of student opinion within the section on critical appraisal of the operation of the collaboration.

113 The CPSED also noted the importance of informal communications and other channels by which the student voice can be heard. In particular, link tutors and international programme advisers play a key role. Link tutors are required to attend course committees and to meet with student groups at least once a year. Similarly, international programme advisers are required to meet with students to identify best practice and issues for discussion as well as to resolve problems.

114 Students from partner institutions who met the audit team commented favourably on the opportunities the University afforded for their voice to be heard and the effectiveness of the system of student representation, both formal and informal, in resolving issues raised in discussion. The team concluded that the University had in place effective systems for student representation in collaborative provision and that it was responsive to issues raised by students through the deliberative structures supporting collaborative provision.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

115 The CPSED stated that all partner institutions were required to operate mechanisms for collecting feedback from students. Partner institutions are able to tailor

the systems used to suit the type of students involved and local conventions. The role of student representatives in channelling feedback has been noted above (paragraph 110). Students who met the audit team also confirmed that they had frequent opportunities to give feedback in a more ad hoc and informal way through tutorials and other contact with programme staff.

116 All students from the University's collaborative provision have the opportunity to complete an end-of-module questionnaire. The University issues a standard questionnaire and requires that this be used where awards are delivered in multiple locations to allow for consistent comparison across delivery sites. Feedback obtained in this way is not made available directly to the University but is used to inform module reports which form part of the annual monitoring process.

117 Link tutors and international programme advisers play a central role in the collection of, reporting on, and action in response to, feedback from students. Link tutors are required to ensure that module feedback is collected and used properly, and that relevant University questionnaires are completed. International programme advisers have similar duties. The students who met the audit team were generally aware of the role of the link tutors or international programme advisers, considering them to be helpful recipients of ideas and matters of interest or concern to the student body.

118 Where partner colleges undertake their own student satisfaction surveys there is an expectation that they include students on the University's collaborative provision but the outcomes of such surveys are not always shared with the University. Students studying on collaborative programmes within SURF participate in the University's annual Viewfinder Survey, but response rates have been poor and, at the time of the audit the University was considering how participation from SURF students might be improved.

119 The CPSED reported that the University did not have a system for consistent collection

of feedback from graduates of collaborative provision, although some partners have alumni associations and alumni services and gather information for their own purposes. At the time of the audit, improving the approach to gathering graduate feedback had been identified as an area for action by the University but no firm plans for accomplishing this had been developed.

120 Employer feedback is collected in various ways. Validation panels are expected to take account of employer views with respect to curricula, particularly for vocational programmes. Employer input has been developed particularly closely within SURF in relation to Foundation Degrees. Course teams developing Foundation Degrees are expected to consult with employers and industry bodies on the proposal. The audit team saw examples of the effectiveness of such involvement; by way of illustration, the report of a validation of a Foundation Degree in Performing and Small-scale Touring highlighted the course team's engagement with employers during development of the programme and the plans to secure continued involvement. The team also saw evidence that validation panels set conditions for approval that required employer engagement where this had not been developed fully.

121 Employers may be invited to sit on programme management committees, act as mentors and participate in formative assessment. Links with employers are also fostered through PSRBs and accreditation of collaborative provision. Where appropriate, curricula are benchmarked against industry and occupational standards. Some of the University's collaborative provision involves the development of programmes to meet explicit employer needs, such as the courses and awards in the Centre for Professional Development. Some overseas provision has been designed to implement in country national economic plans and priorities such as the supply of graduates in key areas.

122 The audit team concluded that the University was making effective use of feedback collected from students and employers in its management of collaborative provision. The team noted and supports the University's intention to build on work in this area to systematize its approach to feedback from graduates and from employers of students not engaged in vocational programmes.

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

123 The University adopts a variety of approaches to admissions depending on the type of arrangement involved. Operational responsibility for admission decisions is retained for foundation year and outreach programmes. For other programmes the University provides UK partners outside SURF and overseas partners with admissions criteria and delegates authority to take decisions on the admission of students to the collaborative provision. Link tutors are required to ensure that agreed admission requirements are implemented consistently and fairly across all partners; they must be consulted on non-standard applications; and must agree any selection methods to be applied if courses are over-subscribed. Similarly, international programme advisers are responsible for monitoring the suitability of candidates admitted to overseas partners. The University's requirements for admissions and registration of students are set out in the schedules to memoranda of cooperation with partner institutions.

124 SURF colleges have their own Universities and Colleges Admissions Services entries and are directly responsible for admissions within University regulations and University procedures as set out in the Student Administration Procedures Handbook for SURF. The University works closely with the colleges to reconcile student data for reporting purposes. Some colleges have direct access to the University's student records system and can enter marks onto the system.

125 The University sends enrolment forms to colleges for students to complete.

The University enters data onto its central student database and sends information to colleges for checking three times a year. At the time of the audit, the University student record system did not cover students enrolled with overseas partner institutions which therefore used their own student record systems; data for overseas students are then entered on spreadsheets which are checked by both the partner institutions and the University. At the time of the audit, the University's Student Office was working with account managers with a view to including overseas collaborative provision in the University's record system. Student progress is monitored at assessment and award boards. Annual monitoring includes a detailed analysis of programme statistics and trends related to student profile, recruitment, retention and achievement.

126 The University uses a variety of means to maintain oversight of the performance of collaborative provision. Revalidation events look at student progression and may make recommendations about actions to reduce withdrawal rates or to increase recruitment. The Student Office produces a suite of management information reports from student statistics. The International Office considers information across all partnerships including international programme adviser reports and the International Collaborations Sub-Committee receives the annual monitoring reports from faculties. The Dean of Students and Academic Registrar has a pivotal role through oversight of complaints and evaluations reporting thereon to the Academic Leadership Team. Detailed consideration of the performance of collaborative provision may be delegated to committees; but the QDC receives any relevant action plans on and monitors their implementation; the QDC also refers issues to the Academic Board when consideration at that level is required.

127 An example of the University's strengthening of oversight of collaborative provision is the Retention Group's work in comparing withdrawals for collaborative and on-campus provision. At the time of the audit,

the work of the Group was focused on UK-based students; particularly those who were campus based, but was starting to extend in scope across the University's provision. There is a SURF annual report which analyses and presents student data across the consortium. The CPSED also noted that, within SURF, benchmarks had been calculated to allow individual partners to calibrate their own performance. The audit team found that the University worked effectively with its partner institutions to ensure that admissions decisions were appropriate and to monitor student performance on programmes delivered through its collaborative arrangements.

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

128 The University requires partner institutions to provide the CV of proposed teaching staff as part of its procedures for approving new programmes of study. For collaborative programmes staff development and appraisal procedures at the proposed partner institution are considered at approval and built into memoranda of cooperation. In discussion with staff from the University's partner institutions the audit team established that, in some cases, subsequent to the initial approval, the University had devolved authority for the selection of suitably qualified teaching staff to its partner institutions. Generally, where changes take place to staffing in partner institutions after the initial approval, the University expects the relevant link tutor or international programme adviser to appraise the suitability of the staff, and if satisfied, to approve appointments on behalf of the University. The University has adopted the policy that the partner and the relevant link tutor or international programme adviser should report any staffing changes in annual monitoring reports.

129 The variety of the University's partnership arrangements does not lend itself to a single approach to monitoring staff development arrangements. In most cases, the University

expects that this will be undertaken by the link tutors and international programme advisers. Link tutors and international programme advisers are aware of the extent and nature of peer observation of teaching in the partner and provide staff development to support the delivery of the provision and curriculum development and on other matters, such as changes in University procedures for assessment, as necessary.

130 In addition to monitoring and encouraging development for staff delivering provision with its partners, the University has also taken steps to encourage the provision of staff development via centrally organised and faculty-based activities. In recent years events offered for SURF partners by the Quality Improvement Service have included sessions on: The Link Tutor - Roles and Responsibilities; Rapporteur Briefing; Student Assessment; Student Finance; Accreditation of Prior Learning, and Financial Aspects of SURF. For partners outside SURF, the Quality Improvement Service has organised sessions on the regulations, briefing for new external examiners, training for international programme advisers and, in one case, an extensive staff development programme for a new partner organisation. The audit team also encountered examples of staff development activities organised by faculties associated with colleges outside SURF and overseas; by way of example, the international programme adviser for one overseas partner held a series of development sessions throughout 2006 including the initiation, conduct and assessment of undergraduate projects; advising students on ethics in final year and MSc projects, and the peer observation of teaching.

131 In view of the considerable responsibilities and expectations that the University vests in its link tutors and international programme advisers, the audit team inquired particularly into the staff support and development opportunities available to these staff. The team was informed that there was a handbook setting out the written terms of reference for the roles, and that in the academic year 2006-07 the University had convened a

meeting, to be repeated annually, for all course coordinators and had begun to provide additional support through training courses and workshops. The performance of University staff who act as link tutors or international programme advisers is included in the scope of the University's standard staff appraisal scheme.

132 On the basis of the information available to it in the University's documentation and from its discussions with members of the staff of the University and staff in partner organisations, the audit team came to the view that the University was taking suitable measures to check that its partners retained appropriately qualified staff to deliver provision leading to its awards and that the University facilitated opportunities for staff development at its partner institutions. At the time of the audit, the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) was being used to support some staff development opportunities in partner institutions. From the academic year 2006-07, staff belonging to the SURF partners delivering University programmes can be identified by the University as its associate lecturers, an honorary title, which makes a helpful contribution to their sense of identification with the University and to their staff development.

133 From its conversations with members of the University and staff based in its partners, the audit team was able to confirm substantial levels of communication and interaction between staff at several levels, for example between the link tutor or international programme adviser and the programme leader in the partner, and the relevant partner and University head of department. Meetings at a more senior level did not appear to occur on a routine basis for some UK partners outside SURF. The audit team considers it desirable that the University hold regular and frequent meetings between senior staff of the University and those of all of its individual partner institutions to strengthen the strategic approach to the operation of partnership.

134 The audit team noted the range of staff development opportunities available to University staff supporting the delivery of

collaborative provision, the measures being taken to improve support and staff development for link tutors and international programme advisers and the means by which the University's partners were encouraged to support the development of their staff. The team found that the approach taken by the University to ensure that its partners took appropriate steps to support and develop staff associated with collaborative provision leading to the University's awards was sound.

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

135 Procedures for the approval of distance and e-learning are set out in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook. Following completion of Val 1 and 2 forms, the Learning Development and Innovation Unit is notified of the proposal and course teams must liaise with the Unit before proceeding to validation. The University has mapped its practice against the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, identifying responsibilities for consideration of the implications of the precepts for the University's practice. At the time of the audit the responsibilities of the Learning Development and Innovation Unit had not been mapped against the relevant precepts of the *Code*; as it develops its approaches to distance and e-learning the University may wish to extend its mapping activity to include the work of the Unit.

136 At the time of the audit, the University had only one collaborative programme delivered by e-learning, an MA in Sustainable Development, offered in collaboration with two Indian universities; the audit team noted that a proposal for the LLM by distance-learning programme to be delivered in collaboration with a Chinese institution had been approved to go forward for validation. The MA programme was already in approval at the time of the establishment of the collaborative partnerships in India and had been validated for e-delivery

with occasional attendance at the University for workshops. The collaborative arrangement was originally designed to encourage recruitment of students by facilitating the running of workshops in India, and through the provision of access to local IT resources, pastoral support from local staff, and logistical support for University of Staffordshire staff to run the workshops in India. The team saw evidence in visit reports and minutes of the International Collaborations Sub-Committee that the arrangement had developed to a point where local staff were authoring option modules and that there was an intention to involve them in assessment. Initial approval of the collaboration had not involved a visit to the institutions in India and discussion in the then Academic Collaboration Sub-Committee had highlighted the need formally to approve the staff in the Indian universities involved with academic aspects of delivery. The team confirmed that the provision was subject to normal external examiner arrangements and the University's standard annual monitoring procedures.

137 The report of the institutional audit noted a considerable volume of e-learning provision, that the University had established an e-learning policy, and that distributed learning programmes were validated and monitored using similar quality assurance mechanisms to those used for programmes delivered by traditional means. The report stated that the University had very well developed quality management systems for its distributed learning activities, and identified the commitment to and success of the development and validation of distance learning as a feature of good practice. The present audit team found that the University's management of e-learning in its collaborative provision was also generally sound.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

138 In the CPSED the University articulated the following guiding principles in relation to learning support resources for students in collaborative provision:

- the partner institution must have, or acquire before commencing delivery of the award, the necessary learning resources to ensure comparability of experience with students in on-campus provision
- the University has invested heavily in technology-supported learning which makes such facilities readily available off campus. The University regards this provision as supplementary to and not a substitute for partner institutions having adequate learning resources. Memoranda of cooperation record the division of responsibilities between the parties for the provision of learning resources.

139 Partner institutions seeking approval to deliver programmes leading or contributing to a University award are required to submit information about the resources which will support its delivery. The Initial Notification Form includes a section for the sponsoring faculty to set out the extent of the library provision, quality of IT access and provision, teaching accommodation and technical support available at the proposed partner. Similarly, the Val 2 (Planning Approval Submission) form has a 'Resources' section which requires details to be provided of physical resources, including teaching accommodation, facilities and equipment, library and IT, available to support the proposed collaboration. In the case of non-consortium UK partnerships, the Quality Improvement Service alerts the Director of Library and Information Services to the need for such visits.

140 Approval and re-approval of collaborative provision focus attention on the appropriateness and adequacy of the partner's learning resources to support students on the collaborative programme, which validation panels are asked to evaluate. In the case of international partnerships, approval documentation provided to the panel incorporates a statement of resources, including:

- library resources including the book stock and its currency, journals and on-line information resources, and whether students are routinely provided with key texts

- hardware and software including the number of computing laboratories and the number and specification of PCs available to students, software including the number of licenses held, and the balance between timetabled teaching sessions and open access to facilities
- any specialised equipment required for the proposed collaborative programme.

141 The University has identified that international partners may be reluctant to invest in learning resources before approval has been secured. The University has sought to overcome this difficulty by requiring the potential partner institutions to make a commitment that they will acquire the necessary resources subsequent to approval; compliance with this requirement is monitored by the international programme adviser.

142 In the case of non-consortium UK partnerships, validation documentation must include information on specific learning resources available to support delivery of the programme, and a schedule of texts and other learning resources indicated on module descriptors, with a statement of whether these are already available or, alternatively, the strategy for acquiring them.

143 For SURF provision, validation documentation includes information on the following:

- physical resources which will support delivery at each college involved in the proposal
- a table indicating, for all books listed in the module descriptors, availability and the number of copies in each SURF college library and, where books are not held, a commitment either to purchase or a statement of the alternative means whereby this material will be made available to students.

Where specialist learning resources are required, an on-site inspection by the validation panel may be arranged at each of the SURF partners involved in the proposal.

144 Ongoing monitoring of the appropriateness and adequacy of learning resources is undertaken by link tutors for UK collaborations and by the international programme advisers for overseas provision. Any problems connected with learning resources would be picked up through their regular meetings with students, as well as through the process of module reporting in annual monitoring. Reporting pro forma require comments on developments relating to learning resources and their impact on student learning opportunities. The CPSED indicated that University module leaders also liaised with their colleagues in partner institutions to alert them to any changes in the learning resources required to support the following year's teaching. In the course of the audit, the team also learned that staff from the University's library maintained systematic links with UK partners, in the case of SURF colleges through a SURF library forum, and in the case of non-consortium provision by having a University librarian identified as the link to library staff at the partner. The University recognizes that maintaining such links with international partners is more challenging.

145 The University has invested in technology-supported learning including e-books, full-text databases and on-line journals, all of which support remote delivery of learning resources to students. The accessibility of these University electronic learning resources was confirmed to the audit team in meetings with senior staff from partner colleges. In meetings with the team, students in partner colleges also confirmed that they had access to the University's electronic learning resources, including both library and information resources and the VLE. The extent to which students made use of University e-learning resources varied, with some students reporting extensive use of specialist resources, for example, in subjects such as Law, while others

were aware of the University's resources but made less use of them. Many partner institutions have their own VLEs which students use in preference to the University's system.

146 Through examination of documentation and discussion with staff and students, the audit team confirmed that the University was successful in implementing its principles for the provision of learning resources in partner organisations. The team concluded that the University had robust approval systems for ensuring that learning resources were appropriate and that they remained so during the operation of the collaboration. The University has a notably inclusive policy in relation to access to its e-learning resources by students studying through collaborative arrangements, and this was well regarded by students the team met. The involvement of central library and information resources staff with UK-based partners is a positive feature, and the University may wish to consider how this might be extended to international partners.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

147 The CPSED stated that 'the University [was] committed to providing excellent academic and pastoral support for its students'. Part of the University's generic expectation in such matters is that students studying in a partner organisation have access to academic guidance and support through meetings with locally-based tutors, and, where necessary, with link tutors and international programme advisers. In the course of its visits to partner colleges, the audit team was told by students based in the UK and overseas that they enjoyed good access to locally-based staff and some also spoke favourably of the frequency with which they were able to meet members of the University, typically through course committees, emphasising the value that they placed on these meetings.

148 In the course of the audit, the audit team met groups of students studying at the University's partner institutions. Academic guidance and personal support arrangements

for such students were not described in detail in the CPSED which did refer to the requirement for partners to provide a handbook for students outlining the support mechanisms available to them. Student handbooks also confirm where additional information, such as procedures for complaints and appeals, may be found. The team was able to establish that all students were issued with a handbook and were also typically assigned to a partner-based tutor, who they were either required to meet on a regular basis or could call upon when required. Placement students reported that each had the assistance of a mentor in their workplace to support the work-based learning component of their studies. In meetings with the audit team, from partner organisations confirmed that support for students was monitored on behalf of the University by link tutors or international programme advisers.

149 Students based with partner organisations have access to the University's centrally provided student services, which includes a telephone helpline, student counselling and careers guidance. Students who discussed their access to personal support and guidance arrangements with the audit team were able to cite instances where they or other students had been able to refer matters, (chiefly requests for deferments of assessment submission dates, and all reported satisfaction with the way such requests had been dealt with.

150 The audit team formed the view that students studying through the University's collaborative arrangements received appropriate guidance and support, and saw some localised examples of where this was of a particularly high standard. The University's management and monitoring of this aspect of collaborative provision is broadly sound and effective. Procedures for the validation of programmes at partner institutions gives due consideration to the provision of academic guidance and personal support for students.

Thematic enquiries

151 The audit team did not select any areas for thematic enquiry.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

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

152 The University aims to provide information for students registered for its awards and studying with partner institutions equivalent to that provided for students on its home provision. This approach is intended to contribute to establishing a student experience in partner organisations comparable with that in the University's home provision and, accordingly, expectations in this matter are set out in student handbooks. Depending on the nature of provision, the partner organisation may be the primary source of published information, usually provided through its prospectuses and websites, together with the University's own prospectuses and website and bespoke booklets and leaflets for specific programmes. There are jointly produced materials for the SURF network.

153 As part of the information provided to support the audit, the University made available copies of its prospectuses and examples of promotional leaflets and brochures for its awards, together with examples of the guidance it provides for applicants for admission to the programmes. Programme specifications for all provision offered with partners and leading to its awards are available on the University's website.

154 The CPSED stated that the University relied on the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar to check and approve all the relevant promotional materials. It also noted that such a procedure had not been adopted by all colleges, and that, following a review, responsibility for the approval of information had been devolved to the SURF office for SURF colleges. The CPSED also stated that the International Office and the Quality Improvement Service were responsible for periodic checks on the websites of the

University's partner organisations to confirm the accuracy of statements about provision and arrangements linked to the University. In meetings with some non-SURF UK partner institutions the audit team established that arrangements for the checking of publicity materials were not always explicit and although partner staff appeared to be working within agreed parameters, these were not always in alignment with the current memoranda of cooperation.

155 The content of the University's pre-enrolment literature and its manner of addressing applicants makes it plain that students are enrolled on the University's programmes and, where relevant, alerts them to opportunities to transfer to the University for further study. The audit team saw examples of such literature and met students who confirmed that the statements in leaflets and brochures were accurate and offered a fair representation of the provision and associated learning opportunities. Students were clear about where they could find key information, by way of example, assessment criteria and procedures, and that information on making an appeal against an academic decision or a complaint was available to them on websites. From the content of the materials seen and through discussions with students, it seemed to the team that a feature of the published information made available to students was a clear emphasis on Staffordshire University as the awarding institution: an approach which contributes to students' sense of belonging to the University.

156 Overall, the audit team was able to confirm that students studying for the University's awards through collaborative arrangements were provided with accurate promotional and other information which encouraged a strong identity between students, including those overseas, and the University. The way in which student handbooks and other publicity materials related to collaborative provision clearly identifies the relationship with the University is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit. As noted in paragraph 154 above and acknowledged in the

CPSED, it would be desirable for the University to review its internal arrangements for the checking of partner organisation's publicity materials to ensure complete coverage for all types of collaborative provision and that any delegated responsibility is operating within agreed limits and is consistent with the memorandum of cooperation.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information on collaborative provision.

157 At the time of the audit the University was making adjustments to its procedures in line with Teaching Quality Information (TQi) requirements and had appointed a Quality Systems Administrator with the responsibility for the collation of data and maintenance of databases. The University has reviewed its external examiner reporting practice in response to TQi requirements: standard reporting requirements are supplemented by the appointment of chief examiners for subject areas who will produce summary reports for posting on the TQi website. Reports of internal reviews, with responses from the relevant faculty, are also made available for the TQi website, as are standard statistical data. The data include entry information, continuation information, achievement information, and destination information statistics. The information makes it clear where provision is delivered in collaboration with a consortium partner.

158 The audit team concluded that the University satisfied the TQi requirements in place at the time of the audit and that it was taking appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it published about programmes offered through collaborative provision.

Findings

Findings

Introduction

159 A collaborative provision audit of Staffordshire University (the University) was undertaken from 18-21 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.

160 The University was established in 1992 following the passage of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). The mission statement of the University is: 'our mission is to help you succeed'. The University Plan states that the University will work by and be known for the following values:

- 'Inclusion - excelling in our fundamental commitment to widening participation, diversity and respect for the individual and communities.
- Accessibility - promoting flexible, adaptable and responsive approaches to all our activities.
- Creativity - being known for our creativity, innovation, enterprise and agility.
- Partnership - working in partnership through local, regional, national and international partnerships and networks.
- Supportiveness - providing a friendly, warm, professional and positive environment for staff, students and customers.
- Excellence - exercising quality, reliability, transparency and professionalism.'

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

161 In the Collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) the University

emphasised its long-standing regional role, describing itself as rooted in its communities with its economic, social and civic responsibilities being central to its activities. At the time of the audit, the University had recently reaffirmed its aim of widening participation in higher education (HE) and was developing an overarching strategy for collaborative provision reaffirming three categories of collaboration and defining each in terms of three overarching aims of; access and inclusion; regional engagement; and working in partnership. The three categories are:

- international collaborations
- Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF consortium)
- non-consortium UK collaborations.

162 The SURF consortium, involving 11 regional colleges, was established in 2000 in order to offer a substantial range of HE programmes; the University does not plan to expand the consortium. Non-consortium collaborative provision takes a number of forms; there is an increasing number of collaborations with further education (FE) colleges, aimed at widening participation through the development of Foundation Degrees. The University also provides programmes in collaboration with public and private sector employers as well as joint awards in healthcare with another United Kingdom (UK) university. The University sees international collaboration as creating opportunities for overseas students who would otherwise be denied access to HE.

163 Collaborative provision leading or contributing to awards of the University is classified as one of franchise, outreach, joint awards, dual awards, commercial contracts, quality assurance and accreditation. The approach to the management of collaboration arrangements and for assuring the standards of awards and the quality of the student experience is determined by both the category of collaborative arrangement and the type of award. Implementation of the policies and procedures for collaborative provision is supported by a series of executive management

teams and groups and a parallel structure of representational committees.

164 Approval of new collaborative partners and initial approval of new collaborative programmes is the responsibility of the Academic Leadership Team, the University's senior team with responsibility for academic planning, academic resource issues and curriculum strategy. The Academic Development Team reports to the Academic Leadership Team and is primarily concerned with quality enhancement of both on-campus and collaborative programmes. At the time of the audit, a Recruitment Management Team was being established to improve recruitment to both on-campus and collaborative programmes. The Retention Strategy Group is responsible for implementing the University's student retention strategy. The University's international strategy is the responsibility of the International Strategy Group.

165 The audit team considered that the executive structure provided a strong basis for the management of all aspects of collaborative provision. In the view of the audit team there are some apparent inconsistencies in the membership of some of the teams and deliberative bodies, given their aims in relation to collaborative provision. One illustration is that the Academic Development Team has no member with a specific brief for quality enhancement of international partnerships. Further, the Recruitment Management Team has as members all faculty recruitment directors and the Director of the International Office, but no one with a brief for recruitment of SURF and non-consortium students. The Retention Strategy Group has no members with specific responsibility for any international, SURF or non-consortium provision. The University may wish to re-examine the membership of these groups in order to strengthen quality enhancement, student recruitment and retention in its collaborative provision.

166 The principal committees concerned with the academic standards of University awards and the quality of the student experience are the Quality Development Committee (QDC)

and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee. Subcommittees of the QDC take responsibility for aspects of the operation of collaborative provision. The International Collaboration Sub-Committee is responsible for international collaborations and is supported by the International Partnerships Operational Management Group. The International Strategy Group, the International Collaboration Sub-Committee and the International Partnerships Operational Management Group have very similar memberships. In the context of the recent implementation of a revised international strategy and new arrangements for the management of international collaborations, the audit team came to the view that the overlap was pragmatic. The audit team came to the view that, as the strategy and management arrangements mature, the University may wish to see greater separation of the executive and representational arrangements for managing its international strategy.

167 SURF is managed through a well-defined three tier structure consisting of a management board responsible for strategy and finance, an operational management committee and a quality committee. From its reading of documents and its meeting with University and college staff, the audit team came to the view that this is an exemplary example of management of such a consortium in which all partners have a strong voice. College staff are fully integrated into the three tiers of management and lead on some aspects of the deliberative structures. The management of SURF is identified in the audit as a feature of good practice.

168 At the time of the audit, the University had recently made changes to its management of non-consortium UK partnerships. The HE in FE Sub-Committee takes responsibility for provision consisting of full awards, mainly Foundation Degrees, delivered in FE colleges outside the SURF consortium. While the audit team recognised the potential of this arrangement for gaining a more coherent oversight of the quality and standards of this type of provision, it was less clear that it would

strengthen strategic and operational management in a way similar to that applying to SURF. The team therefore considers it desirable that the University monitor the operation of the revised committee structure for UK collaborative provision in order to confirm its suitability for retaining the balance between executive and deliberative structures and for providing parity of treatment for SURF and non-SURF provision.

169 Originally the University managed its collaborative short course provision (60 credits or less) at faculty level, with programme approval being the responsibility of the Flexible Learning Approval Panel. With the planned growth in commercial contracts and other awards delivered in collaboration with commercial partners and private colleges, a Commercial and Flexible Learning (CFL) Sub-Committee has been established to provide more coherent oversight of this type of provision. The audit team support this development, given the likely diversity of such provision.

170 The operation of collaborative arrangements is governed by memoranda of cooperation and accompanying schedules covering all aspects of the collaboration. The audit team found instances where the approval of publicity materials produced by a college was not following the agreed procedures. There was no indication that this particular omission had immediate implications for the accuracy of published information but the University will wish to adopt a more formal approach to its delegation of such matters to a partner, so that it operates within agreed limits and is consistent with the memorandum of cooperation.

171 Memoranda of cooperation specify the annual monitoring and periodic review processes for collaborative programmes. The audit team found that reviews of partnerships per se did not occur on a systematic basis, although it did hear of adhoc meetings which could be initiated by either the University management or senior staff of the partner. The audit team considers that it would be desirable for the University to formalise and undertake on a periodic and regular basis the review of all

partners and partnerships, as distinct from the periodic review of programmes, in order to provide for further assurance of quality and academic standards.

172 The University appoints an international programme adviser for each international collaborative programme and a link tutor for UK-based partnerships. In both cases, they have the primary responsibility responsible for liaison on all matters concerning the operation of programmes of study, award standards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. In discussions with students and staff of collaborative partners, the audit team was made aware of the significant contribution of both international programme advisers and link tutors to the operation of collaborative provision. In some cases the University's requirement that they meet students in the absence of partner staff is not observed consistently. Such occasional exceptions generally involve long-standing collaborations but the University may wish to formalise any alternative or delegated arrangements with both partners and its own staff.

173 From its conversations with members of the University and staff based in its partners, the audit team was able to confirm substantial levels of communication and interaction between staff at several levels, for example, between the link tutor or international programme adviser and the programme leader in the partner, and the relevant partner and University head of department. Meetings at a more senior level did not appear to occur on a routine basis for some UK partners outside SURF. The team considers it desirable that the University hold regular and frequent meetings between senior staff of the University and those of all of its individual partner institutions to strengthen the strategic approach to the operation of partnership.

174 The University has a thorough and effective system in place to assure the quality of assessment through the application of University regulations and policies. Appropriate assessment tasks are delegated to staff in partner institutions but the University maintains

authority over the assessments used and marks awarded within all awards delivered through collaborative arrangements.

175 The overall view of the audit team is that the University's approach to managing its collaborative provision is carefully specified and, in the main, is rigorously observed. The CPSED indicated the University's intention to gain benefit for all its provision by learning from the good practice in learning and teaching currently operating among its partners. The team concluded that the implementation of the University's approach to management of its collaborative provision makes a full contribution to the soundness of the present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards and the learning opportunities for students on programmes offered through collaborative arrangements.

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

176 The University's policies and procedures for the operation of each of its categories of collaborative provision are set out in a suite of quality assurance handbooks which provide comprehensive guidance for approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision.

177 The University separates approval of partner institutions from programme approval, and, at the time of the audit, had recently vested responsibility for the selection and oversight of all international partnerships to its International Office. Approval of new international partners is overseen by the International Strategy Group. It is usual but not obligatory for senior staff from the University to make an institutional visit to the proposed partner. In approving new partners outside SURF, similar procedures apply, but approval of the new partner is vested in the Academic Leadership Team. The Chair of the Academic Leadership Team may lead a visit to the proposed partner where it is a commercial organisation or private sector college. No expansion in membership of SURF is planned by the University so no procedures for the approval of new partners are required.

178 Programme approval is broadly similar for International and non-consortium partnerships, and uses standard University procedures for programme approval. In both cases a panel, which includes a member external to the University, is asked to make judgements about the ability of the partner to resource and deliver the programme, and the appropriateness of the proposed arrangements between the partner and the University for programme management. Panel proceedings are normally held in two stages, with the second taking place at the partner. For all UK provision there is a formal engagement between University's central services and the partner, with visits made to the partner to appraise the appropriateness of student support mechanisms and learning resources. The University might wish to consider replicating this for international partnerships. The reports of outcomes of international approval panels are considered by the International Collaboration Sub-Committee. Reports of panels for the approval of non-consortium provision are considered by the HE in FE Committee. There are two important exceptions to these general procedures: approval of international articulations is undertaken at faculty level, and short courses and commercial contracts are approved by the Flexible Learning Approvals Panel. In both of the latter cases, the approval panel does not include membership external to the University. Consortium programme approval is broadly similar, but draws a distinction between approval of a new programme, when an external panel member is used, and approval of a partner to run an existing award when an internal panel is used for approval.

179 The University sees partner and programme approval as an area of strength. The audit team was able to confirm that the University's procedures were fit for the purpose, were in line with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* and were operating as intended.

180 At the time of the audit visit, the University was piloting a biennial system for monitoring of its on-campus provision, but had retained the annual system of monitoring for its collaborative provision pending the outcome of the pilot. The approach to annual monitoring is broadly similar for all three types of collaborative provision with reporting at both module and programme level. For international provision, the monitoring report is produced jointly by the international programme adviser and partner college staff, while in the case of Consortium Provision where a programme might be operating in a number of SURF colleges, the College award leaders produce reports which the University link tutor consolidates into a composite annual monitoring report for the award. Annual monitoring reports go forward to the appropriate faculty quality committee.

181 A distinctive feature of the University's approach to annual monitoring is the use of rapporteurs external to the faculty, and appointed by the relevant committee of the University with oversight for the particular type of collaboration: International Collaboration Sub-Committee, SURF Quality Committee and the HE in FE Committee. The audit team saw evidence that, in the case of SURF, rapporteurs included staff from partner colleges and regarded this as an example of good practice, encouraging the integration of partners into the University's quality processes. Annual monitoring leads to the production of action plans which go forward to the QDC for incorporation into the University's overall annual monitoring action plan.

182 The University regards its process of annual monitoring, including the use of rapporteurs, as a strength. The audit team confirmed that the CPSED represented an accurate account of the University's approach to annual monitoring of its collaborative provision. The team concluded that the process enabled the University to have oversight of the conduct of its collaborative provision, and to be aware of key issues through the overall University action plan.

183 Periodic review of international collaborations is based on a self-evaluation document jointly produced by the partner and the sponsoring faculty, and supported by a range of reports and other documents relating to the collaboration over the preceding five years. The review is conducted by a panel which includes an external academic adviser, and it involves a visit by the panel to the partner. In the case of consortium and non-consortium collaborations, periodic review of programmes delivered through partners is, wherever possible, conducted alongside review of the University's on-campus provision in the same subject area. The process relies on self-evaluation documents from each college which then feed into an overarching self-evaluation for the subject area. The review panel, which includes an external academic adviser, has the opportunity to meet staff and students. The audit team saw evidence which supported the view that the University had a robust set of procedures for the periodic review of programmes delivered through collaborative provision.

184 Memoranda of cooperation stipulate that there must be mechanisms in place at partner institutions to secure student feedback, including student representation on the award management board or equivalent committee and end of module questionnaires. Results from the latter are not usually made directly available to the University, but are incorporated into the module annual monitoring report. International programme advisers and link tutors also gather direct feedback through meetings with students. Students whom the audit team met commented favourably on feedback arrangements, and believed their voice was heard. The team formed the view that the University was making effective use of student feedback in managing the quality of its collaborative provision.

185 The University acknowledged that it did not have a systematic approach to the collection of feedback from graduates in its collaborative provision, and identified this as an area for future action. Employer engagement was evident at the programme development

phase for vocational programmes, for example Foundation Degrees. The audit team formed the view that the University would benefit from the extension of the availability of feedback from both graduates from its collaborative provision and employers on the less vocational programmes.

186 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's approach to assuring the quality of educational provision in its collaborative provision was in alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* and supported a judgement of broad confidence in the University's current and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision.

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

187 The University uses both internal and external information in order to assure the standards of its awards. The mechanisms used are the same as those used to assure the standards of its campus-based awards, augmented where appropriate to take account of the higher risks associated with collaborative provision.

188 In all cases the University defines admission criteria for programmes offered in partner institutions and formalises in writing the admissions process to be used. Where the admission process is delegated there is an effective system of oversight maintained through the link tutors and international programme advisers. All students on programmes offered through collaborative arrangements of the University in the UK are registered on the University's student records system and the University works closely with its partners to ensure that data held are accurate and provide a basis for monitoring and statistical review. Some UK partners have direct access to the University's records system. At the time of the audit, data for students in overseas collaborative provision were collected manually and held on spreadsheets. The University was

working towards full coverage of collaborative provision within its student records system, proposing to extend access to it: both developments will reinforce the University's ability to monitor academic standards in its collaborative provision.

189 The University uses its annual monitoring system to review admissions, progression and completion on its collaborative provision, requiring both statistical analysis and analytical commentary. The annual monitoring process allows for a comparative view of campus and collaborative provision at the programme level and also provides the basis for broad oversight of the standards of awards at faculty and institutional level. Internal comparisons are additionally explored through processes such as the SURF annual review which covers all consortium partners. The University has extended key reviews such as the Retention Project to collaborative provision.

190 The University also makes effective use of external inputs to assure the standards of its awards delivered in partner institutions. Where partner institutions or collaborative programmes are subject to external accreditation or review the University provides support. The outcomes of such reviews are considered carefully at programme, faculty and institutional level.

191 The University's academic policies and procedures, which apply to both campus-based and collaborative provision are in alignment with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The University supports partner institutions in making direct use of the Academic Infrastructure, in particular, through training and the work of link tutors and international programme advisers.

192 The University appoints external examiners for all its collaborative provision above year 0. The appointment, briefing and responsibilities of external examiners are the same as for those engaged to review campus based provision. In addition external examiners involved in collaborative provision are asked to comment on the comparability of awards delivered by different partners and on different sites. The

practicability of such comparisons is not always clear, given the extent and complexity of collaborative provision, neither is it evident that there are effective channels of communication between external examiners reviewing the same degree in different locations in all cases. The University has processes for the systematic review of external examiners' reports at programme, faculty and institutional level. There is an effective fast track approach for dealing with serious problems. External examiners' comments are overwhelmingly positive about the standards of awards in collaborative provision and the assessment process.

193 The University appoints University Examiners, formerly known as Internal External Examiners, to oversee collaborative provision. These examiners are appointed and work to the same role description as external examiners but are drawn from internal faculty in the relevant subject area. The original intention of such appointments was to ensure that assessment boards held overseas operated in line with University regulations, custom and practice. The audit team considered that the definition of the role of University Examiners contained ambiguities and possible conflicts of interest that the University should address. University Examiners work in parallel with external examiners and have responsibility for the moderation of a significant proportion of modules which dilutes the external scrutiny of standards. Although University Examiners provide informed critical comments on standards they cannot be said to be fully independent. The audit team considers it advisable that the University review the role of the University Examiner to ensure that responsibilities are clearly defined and distinct from those of the External Examiner

194 In the CPSED, the University noted the strengths and current effectiveness of the systems adopted for safeguarding the standards of awards gained through collaborative provision. It also identified areas where challenges persisted, by way of example, the difficulty of securing external panel members and examiners. The audit team concluded that

the University had made a realistic assessment of these aspects of quality assurance and had identified key areas for development. The team found that the University's approach and systems for securing standards in collaborative provision were in broad alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* and supported a judgment of broad confidence in the University's current and likely future management of academic standards in its collaborative provision.

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

195 The CPSED stated that the University had assessed its practice against the *Code of practice* and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and, where necessary, had adjusted its procedures to ensure that its approach to collaborative provision was in alignment with the relevant precepts and the FHEQ. The audit team found that the University maintained central oversight of observance of its policies and procedures, confirming that they were operating in accordance with the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure. Where necessary the University has provided a range of staff development activities for staff in its partner institutions to support understanding of the Academic Infrastructure and its application in collaborative arrangements; link tutors and international programme advisers played a key role in this process. There are well developed programme specifications for each level of each award which both students and staff in partner institutions confirmed were an aid to learning. From review of documentation and discussion with staff, the team concluded that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the management of its collaborative provision.

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

196 The University prepared the CPSED in consultation with its collaborative partners, an approach that the audit team considered consistent with the collegial way in which the University worked with its partners. Overall, the document offered a clear and comprehensive guide to the University's approach to the management and development of its collaborative provision. It was well-linked to the University's mission, generally evaluative and was frank in its discussion of areas where the University had identified challenges or where systems were still evolving. The team found most of the CPSED to be a helpful and informative document that included a fair range of references to facilitate the team's enquiries into the University's processes and strategic intentions. The document represented an honest and balanced view of the University's procedures, with evidence of genuine self-reflection in assessing strengths and weaknesses.

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

197 In the CPSED, the University expressed a commitment to the enhancement of its management of collaborative provision and listed a range of actions in support of this aspiration. Many of the areas identified for enhancement activity originated from the experience of the operation of collaborative provision rather than being institutional strategic priorities. The University's intentions are congruent with the relatively early stage of development of the University's overarching collaborative provision strategy. In reviewing the areas identified for enhancement through scrutiny of documentation, discussion with staff and its reading of the CPSED, the audit team

concluded that the University was engaged in a range of actions that enhanced its management of its collaborative provision. The team found that staff at all levels were committed to an enhancement agenda and the contributions of link tutors, international programme advisers and account managers were noteworthy, as was the central role played by the QIS. In discussion with staff from a range of partner institutions, including some from SURF, the team heard that the partner institutions' profiles and reputations had been raised as a result of the partnership with the University. The team considered that the collaboration of the University and partner college staff on Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) funded projects represented good practice in the way in which the projects had both improved e-learning opportunities for students and strengthened the University's relationships with its contributing partners.

198 When consistently applied the University's quality assurance processes facilitate the identification of areas for further development and improvement, and a rolling action plan evaluates the impact and completion of enhancement and remedial activity. Based upon review of documentation and discussions with staff of the University, the audit team came to the view that the University was aware of its enhancement needs in respect of its collaborative provision and was managing this agenda to strengthen its management of its collaborative provision.

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

199 A wide range of published materials, including marketing and publicity materials, learning resources, student guidance, web resources and student handbooks associated with the University's collaborative programmes is provided to students. The audit team considered the student handbooks to be comprehensive and clear and particularly effective in terms of the overt identification of Staffordshire University as the awarding institution. In meetings with the team, students

expressed their satisfaction with the utility and accuracy of information provided to them both before enrolment and during their studies.

200 The University has procedures to monitor materials published by its partner institutions for publicity, website and student information. Partner institutions are contractually obliged to submit all publicity material to the University for pre-approval before publication, and material that is not in English must be translated. The audit team found that, in the main these procedures worked effectively, but, as acknowledged in the CSED some UK partners of long standing either had a level of delegated authority in this respect or else had become less engaged with this requirement. The team considers it desirable that the University review its internal arrangements for the monitoring of partner institution publicity materials, to ensure complete coverage of all types of collaborative provision and that any delegated responsibility is operating within agreed limits and is consistent with current memoranda of cooperation.

201 The audit team found that the University was aware of the obligations on it to publish information on the Teaching Quality Information (TQi) site and was meeting the stated requirements of TQi at the time of the audit.

Features of good practice

- i the operation and management of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) which has created a strong regional network with well-developed management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities (paragraph 35)
- ii the collaboration between University and partner college staff in JISC-funded projects, which has had the effect of enhancing the University's relationship with its partners and of improving e-learning support for students (paragraph 55)
- iii the use of partner institution staff in the role of rapporteur in annual monitoring, which encourages the integration of partner institutions into the University's quality assurance processes (paragraph 77)
- iv the inclusive approach adopted in relation to students on University programmes in partner institutions, which fosters a strong sense of identity with Staffordshire University (paragraphs 114, 146, 149, 156).

Recommendations for action

202 The audit team considers it advisable that the University:

- i review the role of the University examiner to ensure that responsibilities are clearly defined and distinct from those of the external examiner (paragraph 99).

203 The audit team also considers it desirable that the University:

- ii monitor the operation of the revised committee structure for UK collaborative provision in order to confirm its suitability for retaining the balance between executive and deliberative structures and for providing parity of treatment for SURF and non-SURF provision (paragraph 36)
- iii formalise and undertake on a periodic and regular basis the review of all partners and partnerships, as distinct from the periodic review of programmes, in order to provide for further assurance of quality and academic standards (paragraph 86)
- iv hold regular and frequent meetings between senior staff of the University and those of all of its individual partner institutions to strengthen the strategic approach to the operation of partnerships (paragraph 133)
- v review its internal arrangements for the monitoring of partner institution publicity materials, to ensure complete coverage of all types of collaborative provision and that any delegated responsibility is operating within agreed limits and is consistent with current memoranda of cooperation (paragraphs 154 and 156).

Appendix

Staffordshire University's response to the collaborative provision audit

The University welcomes the outcome of the collaborative provision audit, which confirms that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's present and future management of academic standards and awards made through its collaborative arrangements. It also welcomes the confirmation of the quality of the learning opportunities offered to our students through our collaborative provision.

The University welcomes in particular the commendations in respect of the genuine sense of partnership fostered by the University and its partners, the students' strong sense of identity with the University and the operation of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation.

The University has already commenced work on addressing the recommendations made to it by creating a small working party, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. Its initial focus will be to take a further overview of the entirety of our collaborative provision, review the relationship between the International Office and Faculties/Schools, reconsider the use of University Examiners for overseas provision and the means by which Memorandum of Co-operation and schedules are produced.

The University is also aware that we need to further articulate how our different structures for managing collaborative provision work together. We perceive there to be three tiers; senior representation, managerial responsibilities and the operational focus. It will be a useful exercise to further describe the responsibilities of and movement between these levels.

