



# **Audit of collaborative provision**

**University of Hull**

**March 2011**

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## Preface

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions. Where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's provision offered through partnership arrangements as part of the Institutional audit, it can be audited through a separate Audit of collaborative provision.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations and assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the then Department for Education and Skills. It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA. It was again revised in 2009 to take into account student auditors and the three approaches that could be adopted for the Audit of collaborative provision (as part of the Institutional audit, a separate audit, or a hybrid variant of the Institutional audit, involving partner link visits).

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002, following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK's) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students studying through collaborative arrangements, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and on feedback from stakeholders.

The Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity results in judgements about the institution being reviewed as follows:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

## Audit of collaborative provision: report

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision in collaborative partners, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

## Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Hull (the University) from 14 March to 18 March 2011 to carry out an Audit of collaborative provision. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision delivered through collaborative arrangements. As part of the process, the team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and conducted, by videoconference, equivalent meetings with staff and students from one further overseas partner.

In the Audit of collaborative provision, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

### Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Hull is that in the context of its collaborative provision:

- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers
- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

The audit found that the University has a comprehensive range of activities that constitute a strategic, thorough and effective institutional approach to quality enhancement in relation to collaborative provision.

### Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The University has no postgraduate research provision through collaborative partnerships.

### Published information

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

## Features of good practice

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

- the supportive and developmental role of academic contacts and consultants, particularly in the context of curriculum design, staff development and quality enhancement
- the clarity of the University Code of Practice: Production of Student Handbooks, and associated templates, which result in consistent and comprehensive information for students.

## Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that awards with the same title have the same content, assessment and external examining team
- make systematic use of management information, including statistical information, at university level
- improve University oversight of, and ensure timely and effective response to, issues and actions raised through monitoring processes.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- improve the timeliness of the approval and monitoring of recognised teacher status
- revise the process for approving the accuracy of marketing information prior to publication.

## Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University of Hull took account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Report

1 An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Hull was undertaken during the week commencing 14 March 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers through collaborative provision and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in relation to collaborative programmes.

2 The audit team comprised Professor Jeremy Bradshaw, Professor Alan Jago, Professor Duncan Lawson, Professor Diane Meehan and Ms Taghrid Choucair Vizoso, auditors, and Ms Linda Puttick, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Chris Clare, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University was founded in 1927 as a University College of the University of London and received its Royal Charter in 1954. Following merger with the former University College Scarborough in 2000, provision is located on two campuses, Hull and Scarborough.

4 In 2009-10 the University comprised approximately 23,165 students, plus a further 2,738 students on directly-funded programmes validated by the University and delivered in further education colleges. The total number of students who studied on collaborative programmes in 2009-10 was 3,606.

5 Current information relating to the University's collaborative partners is publicly available on the University's website. A detailed register of collaborative provision can be accessed internally via the University Quality Office website with the University's management information system.

6 Collaborative provision was last audited in 2006, when the audit team made recommendations relating to the monitoring and management of collaborative provision to ensure parity between home and collaborative provision. As part of the list of recommendations the University was asked to:

- ensure adequate staffing levels for its expanding collaborative provision
- clarify the revalidation and review processes for programmes at partner institutions
- keep under review the use of academic consultants
- introduce a more systematic approach to partner visits as part of programme approval
- develop a common information system for on-campus and collaborative partner provision
- strengthen the procedures for granting registered teacher status
- ensure the maintenance of the currency of partner institutions' websites.

7 The current audit team was satisfied that the University had reflected and acted on the findings of the 2006 audit and had given careful attention to the action taken in the light of its recommendations. However, the team found some areas relating to the recommendations where there was still some further consideration required (see paragraphs 32, 54, 72). This is reflected in some of the recommendations made in this report.

8 Until 2010, the management of quality and standards for collaborative provision was overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee, chaired by the Quality Director, University Registrar and Secretary. It was supported by the following committees, all of which reported to the Quality and Standards Committee:

- the Collaborative Provision Committee
- the Collaborative Programme Approvals Committee
- the Programme Approvals Monitoring and Enhancement Committee.

The Educational Partnerships Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and reporting to the Academic Board, also had responsibility for some aspects of collaborative provision.

9 From the beginning of 2010-11 the University implemented a new committee structure, which reflects the management remit of the reconfigured Senior Management Team. Overall executive responsibility for collaborative provision now rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). The remit of the Quality and Standards Committee, including responsibility for collaborative provision, has been subsumed in the revised University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), supported by the Programme Approvals Committee and the Collaborative Provision Forum.

10 There is a Joint Development Board for each further education college partner, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), which provides a forum for supporting the partnership, including matters of academic provision. The oversight of collaborative programmes is undertaken by University faculties through a Joint Board of Studies, which reports to the relevant Faculty Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, Joint Development Board, and previously through Collaborative Provision Committee annual summary reports.

11 A collaborative provision agreement between the University and each further education college partner sets out the expectations of each party. Agreements are ongoing, with appropriate review and termination clauses. The processes for the establishment and management of partnerships are articulated in the University Code of Practice: Educational Partnerships and through the use of a standard set of Partnership and Collaboration Agreements.

12 The detailed management of quality and standards is articulated in a framework comprising regulations approved by Senate, and in codes of practice approved by the Academic Board, previously on the advice and recommendation of the Quality and Standards Committee. Regulations and Codes of Practice are published in the Quality Handbook, and each Code of Practice is explicitly designated as mandatory, advisable, desirable or for-information, in terms of its applicability to collaborative provision.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

13 The University has a comprehensive set of procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of both partnerships and programmes, which are set out, together with supporting documentation and templates, in its Quality Handbook. For collaborative partners this is supplemented by the University's Collaborative Handbook. These procedures make an effective contribution to the institutional management of academic standards.

14 The University makes a distinction between the process of approving a new partner and that of approving a programme. The procedure for approving a partner requires that the

University satisfy itself about the financial and academic standing of a potential partner institution and that the educational objectives of the partner are compatible with its own. The process for termination of partnerships includes the need for an exit strategy to protect the interests of students.

15 The University's procedure for approval of new programmes currently comprises three stages and applies to both on-campus and collaborative provision with the exception that, for approval of collaborative programmes, final approval remains at institutional level. The procedure is designed to ensure appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure; there is a requirement for external input and the production of programme specifications to a standard template. Significant support is given to partners by University staff holding the roles of academic contacts and academic consultants during the development of new programmes (see paragraphs 35, 45). Conditions set by approval panels are carefully monitored by means of the University Conditions Register.

16 There are also procedures for approving major and minor amendments to programmes and for the withdrawal of programmes, the latter requiring that satisfactory arrangements remain in place until current students have completed their studies.

17 The University has a small number of programmes with the same award title but which have different entry requirements, module content, assessment or external examiners (or any combination of these) and which may be offered in more than one location, including the main University campus. The audit team formed the view that there was potential for applicants and other stakeholders such as employers to be confused by the different offerings. It also judged that the potential for comparison of standards across the two locations was limited by the fact the external examiners for the programmes were not always part of a common team. The team, therefore, considers it advisable for the University to ensure that awards with the same title have the same content, assessment and external examining team (see also paragraph 48).

18 The University's procedures for annual monitoring of collaborative provision operate at three levels: programme, faculty and partner, and the procedures emphasise both review and enhancement. The annual programme monitoring process mirrors that for on-campus provision, except that reports are completed by the partner institution, with a section of the report allowing comment from the University. Annual Monitoring reports are informed by a range of qualitative and quantitative information including student and external examiner feedback. Action plans are drawn up and reports include updates on previous years' actions, although the audit team did detect a lack of timeliness in the response to actions in some instances (see paragraph 37). Annual Monitoring reports feed into Faculty Quality Enhancement Reports, which provide a faculty-wide perspective of both on-campus and collaborative provision. The process for the production of Partner Quality Enhancement Reports essentially mirrors the Quality Enhancement Report process and allows further education partners to comment on both individual programmes and their entire portfolio, and identify good practice for dissemination and areas for improvement (see also paragraph 60).

19 Periodic reviews of cognate programmes (subjects) are currently conducted on a five-yearly basis. Collaborative provision is generally included in the subject-based periodic review. However, where the amount of collaborative provision within a subject is considered to be substantial, a separate periodic review is undertaken. The periodic review process requires preparation of a self-evaluation document by the department and a process of scrutiny by a review panel, which includes external representation. The process involves meetings with students.

20 Until recently the University has also had a procedure for further education partner audit. This process was set up prior to the advent of Integrated quality and enhancement

review (IQER). In order not to duplicate processes for its further education partners, the University is now considering terminating this process.

21 The audit team was able to see recent examples of these procedures in operation and concluded that, notwithstanding the recommendation relating to award titles (paragraph 17), its reservation relating to timeliness of action (paragraphs 18, 37), and certain variations in reporting (paragraph 38), they are fit for purpose, consistently implemented and well understood by the University's partners.

22 The University makes comprehensive use of relevant components of the Academic Infrastructure in its approval, monitoring and review procedures. Independent external opinion on academic standards forms part of programme approval, and periodic review processes and procedures take account of professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements where appropriate.

23 The expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are communicated to partners through dissemination of the University regulations and procedures. The audit team concluded that the University is making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in assuring the standard of its awards.

24 All collaborative programmes operate under the University Code of Practice: Assessment Procedures. In line with University departments, further education partners are required to develop individual policies in relation to three aspects of assessment: penalties for late submission, penalties for over-length assessments and deadlines for feedback on assessment. For further education partners, boards of examiners are normally held in the partner institution and chaired by a member of partner staff, with attendance by staff from the University. Boards of examiners for all other collaborations are held in the University and chaired by a member of University staff. Training for chairs and secretaries of boards of examiners is mandatory.

25 The University also sets out procedures for the moderation of assessment in collaborative provision. Moderation involves the scrutiny of summative assessment tasks by University staff prior to them being considered by external examiners. The moderation process also confirms that marking processes have been undertaken in accordance with University requirements. Students in partner institutions confirmed consistently that they were clear about assessment requirements, which are communicated through module handbooks or the equivalent (see also paragraph 52). Students also confirmed that they received information about their right of appeal and the right to make a complaint (see paragraph 75).

26 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the assessment of students studying through its collaborative provision are making an effective contribution to the assurance of the academic standards of its awards.

27 The University Code of Practice: External Examining relates to both on-campus and collaborative provision. Faculties are responsible for nominating external examiners following consultation with partner institutions. Induction is offered to newly appointed examiners through both documentary and face-to-face mechanisms. Where the same or similar programmes are offered at the University and one or more partners, the same external examiner would normally be used for these programmes, although there may be exceptions (see paragraph 17).

28 External examiners are required to make an annual written report using the University pro forma, including assurance regarding the standards of awards.

Formal responses are made to external examiners and subsequent actions are monitored. The audit team had some concerns over the timeliness of actions resulting from monitoring processes, including issues raised in external examiners' reports (paragraph 37). Issues of serious concern may be reported directly to the University or partner. A summary of strengths drawn from external examiners' reports relating to collaborative programmes is produced annually by the University.

29 The University expects that external examiners' reports and responses should be shared with students in collaborative partners, although students who met with the audit team were generally unable to confirm that they had seen external examiners' reports.

30 With the exception of the reservations regarding the timeliness of responses and lack of clarity around students having sight of external examiner reports, the audit team concluded that the arrangements for external examining were functioning as described and make an effective contribution to the assurance of the standards of the University's awards.

31 The University devolves responsibility for the production of transcripts or European Diploma Supplements for students on directly-funded programmes in further education partners to those partners. An agreed sample of final-year students' transcripts is seen by the relevant University faculty/department. Transcripts for students on other collaborative programmes are produced by the University. The University produces all award certificates.

32 A key source of statistics in relation to collaborative provision is the programme-level annual monitoring report, which feeds into the Quality Enhancement Report and Partner Quality Enhancement Report processes, enabling data to be considered at the level of each partner and at faculty level. The University is also investigating ways of monitoring more systematically the performance of students who have progressed to programmes at the University from partnership agreements. However, the audit team found no evidence that data was being used systematically at university level to inform strategy and policy relating to collaborative provision or, for example, to compare standards across partnerships. The team considers it advisable for the University to make more systematic use of management information, including statistical information, at University level.

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

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

34 The University seeks to ensure the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students through the processes of approval, review and monitoring set out in the Quality Handbook and related Codes of Practice, which provide clear specifications of the implementation of those processes.

35 Joint Development Boards have terms of reference that include matters relating to learning and teaching, and student support and resources. These boards and the related Joint Boards of Studies at programme level are an integral part of the overall management of the provision and regularly consider matters of approval, monitoring and review of courses, student feedback, staffing and resources. There is a key role exercised by the academic contact or academic consultant, who is required to ensure the suitability of learning opportunities and to support programme staff from the partner institution (see paragraphs 15, 45).

36 Expectations with regard to programme approval are set out in the relevant Code of Practice. They include consideration of resourcing, such as information technology, library resources, accommodation, and staffing.

37 Programme monitoring for collaborative provision operates in the same way as for on-campus provision and is described in paragraph 18. The audit team found that appropriate mechanisms are in place to monitor the way in which programmes are being delivered, the quality of the student learning environment and any issues that emerge. The team came to the conclusion, however, that it was possible for some matters to reoccur in these processes without the University making a timely response. Consequently, the audit team considers it advisable for the University to improve its oversight of, and ensure timely and effective response to, issues and actions raised through monitoring processes (see also paragraphs 51, 60, 73).

38 Arrangements for periodic review are described in paragraph 19. The audit team saw examples of the process, which demonstrated that it was rigorous. It involved external and student input, and included the review of learning resources and other aspects of the student learning environment, making appropriate recommendations. However, the team noted that where the review of collaborative provision was included within a subject there was variation in the extent to which consideration of this provision was reflected in the final report.

39 Procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes in terms of learning opportunities are clearly defined and implemented effectively and consistently across the further education partners. With the reservation noted in paragraph 37, the audit team found that these procedures are effective and are appropriately used by the University.

40 It was clear to the audit team that the University makes use of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* in developing and reviewing its regulations and procedures for collaborative provision. The team found that the University works with its partners to ensure that their own policies and procedures are aligned with the *Code of practice*, and with other external reference points.

41 External examiners have a role in providing independent feedback on the quality of the learning opportunities for students in partner institutions. As part of the process, they are asked to comment on the relevance of the curriculum and the learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

42 The main way in which students comment on their experience and receive feedback in partner institutions is by means of the staff-student committees. Any particular or recurring issues they raise will be considered by Joint Boards of Studies and ultimately, if serious enough, may be considered by the relevant Joint Development Board.

43 Students are represented on Joint Boards of Studies, although their level of involvement is variable. Overall, the University's arrangements for student involvement in quality management processes to maintain and enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities are effective at the level of the partner and within the monitoring and review processes. The audit team found that there is potential for the University to make more structured use of student representation from partner institutions in its own processes.

44 The University template for the production of student handbooks includes detailed guidance on the information to be included on matters related to student support. The audit team saw examples of these handbooks and concluded that the information was both full and useful. This was confirmed in meetings with students during the audit visit (see also paragraph 52).

45 The University has taken measures to support the ongoing development of staff delivering higher education programmes in partners. It has been working with its partners in promoting a culture of scholarly activity and encouraging innovations in curriculum development and teaching methods. The audit team also found evidence of the way in which the University had taken on a developmental role with staff in partner institutions. The team viewed the supportive and developmental role of academic contacts and consultants, particularly in the context of curriculum design, staff development and quality enhancement, as a feature of good practice (see paragraphs 55, 58).

46 Following the Institutional audit report in 2009, a working group was established within the University to consider distance-taught provision. The outcome of the working group was to establish two new categories of provision. These were 'Distance taught plus', where administrative support is provided by a third party, and 'collaboration', where academic support is provided by a third party. The audit team came to the view that this clarified the position, and provided a clear distinction between the University's collaborative and non-collaborative provision.

47 Most further education college partners have devolved admission authority, which is subject to a specific University Code of Practice. Admissions for all other partners are handled by the University. Partners with devolved authority can award accredited prior learning, and any that is awarded is reported at Joint Boards of Study and reviewed in the Partner Quality Enhancement Report. If a partner wishes to admit an applicant who does not meet the entry requirements, the case must be referred to the relevant Dean at the University, and these special cases are reported in Partner Quality Enhancement Reports.

48 Entry requirements for collaborative provision are set at planning permission stage. The audit team found examples of courses with the same title and relatively minor differences in entry requirements, which may be explained on the grounds of widening participation, and other courses with the same title where the entry requirements were very different (see also paragraph 17).

49 It is a requirement that all students receive a formal induction. The students met by the audit team confirmed that this does take place. However, the team found that their experience, particularly with respect to their rights of access to University facilities, was variable.

50 Issues relating to learning resources are considered during institutional validation and course approval processes and are reviewed through the annual monitoring process. External examiners may raise resource issues, which are then followed up in Annual Monitoring reports and Partner Quality Enhancement Reports. The Joint Boards of Study may also consider resource issues and refer them on to the Joint Development Board for action. The audit team saw evidence of this process working effectively.

51 Admissions statistics are reported at Joint Boards of Study and this provides the opportunity to respond to the needs of courses with unexpectedly large cohorts. However, this does not always lead to timely action. Students are able to raise resource issues and these are often dealt with quickly. However, on some occasions the issue persists without resolution or appropriate feedback (see also paragraph 37).

52 The University requires partner institutions to issue Student Handbooks using a template provided in the relevant Code of Practice. These handbooks are widely praised and the audit team noted the clarity of the Code of Practice, which results in consistent and comprehensive information for students (see paragraph 75).

53 The Student Handbooks are a key source of information about student support. Students are generally aware of their right of access to the University's library but generally unaware that they can access the University's Careers Service, despite both being covered in the Handbook. All partner institutions must have a model for implementing Personal Development Planning and issues relating to this are reported to Joint Boards of Study and in Annual Monitoring reports.

54 Partner institutions must have appropriate staff development policies, peer observation and appraisal schemes. These are reported on in Partner Quality Enhancement Reports. Staff must be awarded recognised teacher status by the University before they begin to teach on University awards. Recognised teacher status is a standing agenda item on some Joint Board of Study meetings. The minutes of these meetings usually record that all staff have recognised teacher status. However, on occasions, the minutes note that recognised teacher status is 'in process'. The audit team noted that the University has responded to the recommendation of the previous collaborative audit regarding recognised teacher status by strengthening its procedures. However, despite this, there have still been occasions when the granting of recognised teacher status has been less timely than desirable. Monitoring recognised teacher status often some months after courses have started may not be the most appropriate timing. The team, therefore, considers it desirable that the University improve the timeliness of the approval and monitoring of recognised teacher status.

55 Academic contacts and consultants play a crucial role in the support and development of staff at partner institutions. This ranges from working one-to-one with individual members of staff to running workshops for whole course teams. The role has accurately been described as that of 'critical friend'. As noted in paragraph 45, the audit team viewed the supportive role of academic contacts and consultants in staff development to be a feature of good practice. In addition to the staff development provided by academic contacts and consultants, staff at partner institutions can, and regularly do, access staff development events at the University such as the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference.

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

#### **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision**

57 The University's approach to quality enhancement is articulated in two documents: the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Approach to Quality and Standards. Although the audit team was unable to foresee how the restructuring of the University, including its key committees, would impact on the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the team formed the view that quality enhancement remains embedded in many aspects of the University's structures and procedures.

58 The University appoints an academic contact or an academic consultant for each of its collaborative programmes. This role makes an important contribution to quality enhancement by disseminating good practice in both directions between the University and partner institution (see paragraph 45).

59 Partner Quality Enhancement Reports, as described in paragraph 18, provide an effective means through which to identify and disseminate good practice and to identify improvements that can be made to the quality of partner provision or systems and

processes. These reports include examples of how good practice identified in one department or teaching area has been disseminated to others, and cover recommendations arising from earlier Partner Quality Enhancement Reports so that a picture of activity over time may be established.

60 Completed Partner Quality Enhancement Reports are reviewed by a panel established by the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. Each panel comprises at least one member of University staff nominated by the Chair of the Committee, a member of staff from a partner institution and a member of staff from the University Quality Office. The panel evaluates the report and provides feedback to the partner institution. The purpose of the evaluation is to draw out examples of good practice worthy of dissemination across the University and to other partners and to identify potential areas for development for the college and the University. However, the audit team considered that the length of time taken before the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee receives the Partner Quality Enhancement Reports can be excessive.

61 Copies of reports and the summaries are considered in relevant Joint Development Board meetings. The Joint Boards of Study have input into quality enhancement, by providing routine oversight of collaborative provision at discipline level, including quality enhancement and dissemination of good practice. Further education college partners report that the Partner Quality Enhancement Report process is valued, allowing them the opportunity to reflect on their delivery and to consider areas for improvement.

62 The University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee has a key role in the enhancement of the practice of learning and teaching. In addition to its continuing role in enhancement of practice, its remit has been expanded in the University restructuring to encompass the enhancement of systems and procedures. Given that the restructure is fairly recent, the audit team was unable to express an opinion on the effectiveness of the new systems and procedures.

63 The Collaborative Provision Committee has been replaced by the Collaborative Provision Forum, which retains representation from all further education college partners. While identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and disseminating good practice, are included in the terms of reference of the Collaborative Provision Forum, the new forum has only met once. Consequently, the audit team was not able to express an opinion on the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

64 A Quality Enhancement Forum was held prior to each meeting of the Collaborative Provision Committee. The audit team was informed by senior staff that, following the University restructure and the replacement of the Collaborative Provision Committee with the Collaborative Provision Forum, the University intends to continue to hold a Quality Enhancement Forum in connection with each meeting of the new Collaborative Provision Forum. However, it had not been possible to do so the first time that the Collaborative Provision Forum met. While the Quality Enhancement Forums are open to all partners, only further education college partners have representation on the Collaborative Provision Forum with which the forums are associated. The team concluded that quality enhancement in non-further-education and non-regional partnerships would be strengthened by wider representation on the Collaborative Provision Forum, and this would be particularly important if the University further develops its range of non-further-education partnerships.

65 The University holds an Annual Learning and Teaching Conference. The audit team reviewed publicity material for the 2010 'Research and teaching - Correlated or co-related?' and 2011 'Refreshing the Learning and Teaching Strategy' conferences. Staff from partner institutions met by the team regarded these conferences as helpful in their own development.

66 The University has established University Centres at Doncaster and Grimsby, in acknowledgement of the size and stability of provision in these partners. The status associated with the centres reflects a level of autonomy and maturity. In providing further opportunities for the dissemination of good practice, the potential benefits of these Centres for quality enhancement were noted by the audit team.

67 It was evident to the audit team that quality enhancement is embedded in the systems and processes of the University. The team heard of many individual examples of good enhancement activity being implemented. The team, however, encourages the University to streamline its monitoring system to allow more rapid action, and actively to seek inclusion of non-further-education and non-regional partners to benefit from the quality enhancement opportunities provided by the Collaborative Provision Forum and its associated Quality Enhancement Forums.

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

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

69 The University has no postgraduate research provision delivered through collaborative partners.

## **Section 6: Published information**

70 The University recognises its responsibility for the accuracy of all public information relating to its awards, including publicity and marketing materials produced by partner institutions, and makes its expectations clear in the University Codes of Practice on Production of Handbooks by Partner Institutions and Approval of Collaborative Provision Publicity and Marketing Information.

71 Students generally reported a positive opinion of the published information. However, the audit team was made aware of a number of isolated issues with student expectations of access to facilities, contact hours and additional costs.

72 The accuracy of published material is monitored by academic contacts and through Joint Boards of Studies and Periodic Review. There is an annual audit of publicity and marketing material by the University Quality Office and by way of the Partner Quality Enhancement Report that goes to the relevant Joint Development Board. The audit team was informed by senior staff that there is no requirement for preapproval of publicity or marketing material, leading to the possibility of inaccurate or misleading information entering the public domain and not being noticed until the next annual audit. As a consequence, the team considers it desirable for the University to revise the process for approving the accuracy of marketing information prior to publication.

73 The audit team found that the University had taken action on the desirable recommendation from the previous collaborative provision audit concerning the maintenance of the currency of relevant entries on partner institutions' websites. However, the team noted that the new procedures were not always as prompt or as effective as necessary. This relates to the timeliness of responses to monitoring discussed in paragraph 37.

74 The audit team identified as an instance of good practice the clarity of the Code of Practice: Production of Student Handbooks and associated templates, which result in consistent and comprehensive information for students. Handbooks are checked by University staff and during Periodic Review. Handbooks include clear and accessible module content, learning objectives and assessment information.

75 Students were satisfied with the accuracy of the information that they had seen published both by the University and their respective college, were aware of the University and its role in validating and quality assuring their programmes, and had access to information about the appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints and appeals. As a result, the audit team considered the clarity of the University Code of Practice: Production of Student Handbooks and associated templates, which result in consistent and comprehensive information for students, to be a feature of good practice.

76 The audit team found that, notwithstanding the issue of institutional oversight of publicity material (see paragraph 72), reliance can reasonably be placed on the overall accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students through collaborative provision.

## **Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the supportive and developmental role of academic contacts and consultants, particularly in the context of curriculum design, staff development and quality enhancement (paragraphs 45, 55, 58)
- the clarity of the University Code of Practice: Production of Student Handbooks, and associated templates, which result in consistent and comprehensive information for students (paragraphs 44, 52, 75).

### **Recommendations for action**

78 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure that awards with the same title have the same content, assessment and external examining team (paragraph 17)
- make systematic use of management information, including statistical information, at university level (paragraph 32)
- improve University oversight of, and ensure timely and effective response to, issues and actions raised through monitoring processes (paragraph 37).

79 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- improve the timeliness of the approval and monitoring of recognised teacher status (paragraph 54)
- revise the process for approving the accuracy of marketing information prior to publication (paragraph 72).

## Appendix

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

The University welcomes the audit team's judgement of confidence in the academic standards of our awards made through collaborative arrangements and in our management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students at collaborative partners.

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

- the supportive and developmental role of our academic contacts and consultants, particularly in the context of curriculum design, staff development and quality enhancement.
- the clarity of our Code of Practice: Production of Student Handbooks, and associated templates, which result in consistent and comprehensive information for students.

We are responding positively - with our collaborative partners and in partnership with the Students' Union - to the specific recommendations contained in the report, with oversight and monitoring by the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

In particular, a number of our actions will relate to the refinement of existing policies and procedures and their implementation to ensure we are able to provide a timely and effective response to any issues raised by our monitoring process.

The University also welcomes the identification of a comprehensive range of activities, which constitute a strategic, thorough and effective institutional approach to quality enhancement in relation to collaborative provision.

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