Audit of collaborative provision

University of Derby

May 2011

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

The Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity results in judgements about the institution 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

- 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 Derby (the University) from 16 to 20 May 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 video conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from two further overseas partners.

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

Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Derby 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 University defines enhancement as 'change leading to improvement in the quality of learning opportunities'. The close and mutual sense of partnership in collaborative provision is a key agent of quality enhancement in collaborative provision.

Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The University has no postgraduate research provision through collaborative partnerships.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the development and use of the clear and comprehensive operational manuals which act as significant documents governing the day-to-day operation of the partnerships for the parties involved in the delivery of collaborative programmes (paragraph 10)
- the annual monitoring process undertaken by the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee which culminates in an annual Enhancement Plan and Summary of Good Practice across all collaborative provision (paragraph 56)
- the strong and constructive relationships between the University and its partners as demonstrated through frequent communication and mutual support (paragraph 74)
- the Annual Collaborative Provision and Learning and Teaching Conferences as means of disseminating good practice (paragraph 90)
- the establishment and role of University of Derby Corporate as an interface between the University and its employer partners (paragraph 94).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- review the clarity, completeness and accuracy of information detailed on diploma supplements and transcripts for students studying through collaborative provision arrangements regarding language of study and assessment, the involvement of partners and the location of study (paragraph 51).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- continue to improve the ease and reliability of access to the University's electronic systems and learning resources for students and staff in partner institutions (paragraph 79)
- consider how the current contribution made by the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning as an 'enhancement agent' can best be maintained through the revised structures for supporting collaborative provision following the School's planned closure (paragraph 100)
- ensure that the programme specifications for all programmes delivered through collaborative provision arrangements are made accessible through the University's website (paragraph 106).

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*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

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

Report

1   An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Derby (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 16 May 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 Dr J Clarke, Professor B Hodgkinson, Mr T Phillips, Dr C Vielba and Dr A Walker, auditors, and Ms E Smith, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms M A McLaughlin, assistant director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University traces its origins back to 1851, with the establishment of the Diocesan Institution for the Training of School Mistresses. It continued to grow through the creation of the Derbyshire College of Higher Education in 1983, which followed the merger of Derby College of Art and Technology with Bishop Lonsdale College of Education and the previous merger (in 1977) with Matlock College of Higher Education. The College of Higher Education was granted university status in 1993. In 1998 the University merged with High Peak College of Further Education, creating the framework for the present University, which now operates from three main sites within Derby, and a campus in Buxton.

4   The University's collaborative provision currently covers 2,333 students with a target intake (including continuing students) of 3,182 for 2011-12. The majority of these students (72 per cent) are enrolled on programmes located overseas, and the University anticipates that this proportion will increase to 88 per cent in 2011-12.

5   The profile of the University's collaborative provision within the UK has changed since the previous QAA Collaborative provision audit in 2006, resulting in a reduction in the number of further education college partners to four by the end of 2010-11. There have also been significant changes to overseas collaborative provision arrangements resulting in the strengthened economic and academic viability of partnerships. This is reflected by the rise (over the five-year period) in the number of students per programme (from 30.5 to 34) and in the average number of University of Derby programmes delivered in or by a partner organisation (from 1.8 to 2.5).

6   The previous QAA audit of the University's collaborative provision took place in December 2006. This audit resulted in an overall judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of its responsibilities for the quality of academic standards and learning opportunities. The audit report made four 'desirable' recommendations for action. In response to these the University developed an action plan which was implemented, the progress noted and signed off at the meeting of the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee in April 2008. The current audit team consider that the University had responded appropriately to the 2006 QAA Collaborative provision audit report.

7   The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning had been created shortly before the Collaborative provision audit in 2006. The audit team saw evidence at the visit that the School had achieved many of its designated aims and objectives in relation to the management of collaborative provision. The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning plays an active part in the management of partnerships. At the audit visit the team was informed that the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning was being disbanded and that its functions were to be redistributed. The International department is to take principal responsibility for international collaborations. The Learning Enhancement and Innovation

department will take over the central functions in relation to quality and UK/home partnerships, and operational matters for home-based partners will become the responsibility of faculties. The University of Derby Corporate will take a strategic oversight of employer-based programmes. It was unclear how the School's contribution to the institution as an 'enhancement agent' would be continued in the new structure (see paragraph 100).

8   The University's Corporate Plan 2009-2014 identifies key target areas for the University, two of which are underpinned by the Collaborative Strategy, namely internationalisation and employer engagement. The audit team heard that the Collaborative Strategy is still in 'draft' form although it has been implemented since 2010. Given the University's own acknowledgement of the significant changes in the external environment, it may be timely for the University to formalise this Strategy for future enhancement of its collaborative provision.

9   A Pro Vice-Chancellor has executive responsibility for collaborative provision, with the Director of the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning also having responsibility for operational aspects of collaborative provision. The Quality Enhancement Committee has overarching responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of student learning opportunities, and is supported by the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee. The Academic Development Committee ensures consistency of all programme proposals. The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning keeps a record of the University's collaborative provision, as well as details of courses accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies in accordance with the expectations of transparency in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), *Section 2*: *Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).*

10   Operational management of collaborative programmes and the appointment of programme leaders rests with the faculties, together with the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning. The latter will also appoint a key partnership manager where the partnership is a large one, or where a number of faculties are involved with a partner. In 2008, the University established its 'business-to-business' division, the University of Derby Corporate, which manages all aspects of the interface between the business communities and the faculties/School of Flexible and Partnership Learning. However, the faculties maintain responsibility for the delivery and quality assurance of the range of programmes offered through this arrangement. A key feature of operational management is the preparation of the operational manuals for a particular programme. These significant documents govern the day-to-day operation of partnerships and collaborative programmes, and both the University and its partners find them effective and useful (see paragraph 108). The audit team found the development and use of the clear and comprehensive operational manuals to be a feature of good practice.

11   The University's approach to the selection of collaborative partners has changed significantly since the last collaborative audit in relation to the character of its portfolio of partners as reflected in the University's Collaborative Strategy. The establishment of University of Derby Corporate also provides a route by which the University selects and approves employer/industry-based partners. The University adopts a 'risk-based approach' to its selection and approval of partners, and takes appropriate account of the key principles of the *Code of practice, Section 2,* published by QAA, when engaging in collaborative provision. The Collaborative Provision Handbook, together with the Validation and Approval of Taught Programmes Handbook, set out in detail the procedures for approval of partners and programmes. There are some differences between the level of risk applied depending on whether the partner is existing or new to the University. All proposals are considered by the Academic Development Committee for alignment with the University's core strategies and policies. The development approval document is central to the proposal process and

includes the preparation of a business plan and an assessment of risk. The audit team was able to review a range of development approval documents and reports of partnership approval events. Although the University acknowledges the possibility of different processes being put in place for different risk-based projects in its review of risk assessments, the audit team did not identify a significant degree of variability in the risk assessment of the different processes.

12   The selection of partners by University of Derby Corporate follows a slightly different process. For example, the University allows potential employer partners to make contact with the unit through its website, inviting companies or other organisations to come forward with their programmes for accreditation by the University. However, once identified, these programmes are approved through the standard University quality assurance processes, including consideration by Academic Development Committee and a mapping of academic standards against the QAA Academic Infrastructure using the Accreditation Toolkit (see paragraphs 37 and 74).

13   The University requires that all collaborative provision is covered by a formal written agreement. The Partnership Office, in collaboration with the Business Development Unit, is responsible for drawing up formal contracts. Agreements are normally signed by the Vice-Chancellor or a pro vice-chancellor, the Finance Director, and by their equivalents at the partner organisations. In the case of University of Derby Corporate programmes, these can be signed by the Head of University of Derby Corporate. The agreements refer to the operational manuals and designate the language of instruction as appropriate, and include formal procedures for termination. The audit team saw comprehensive documentation relating to the closure of programmes, which involved the preparation of an action plan to ensure clear designation of responsibilities for each phase of closure.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

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

15   Programme approval, monitoring and periodic review contribute to the setting and management of standards in the University's collaborative provision through the scrutiny of curriculum design and delivery, assessment, and student performance. The key processes involved are programme validation and amendment; production of programme specifications; annual monitoring and visits; external examiners; and periodic review. Common to these processes is the use of management information and externally informed judgements.

16   At the University these processes are part of a wider quality assurance system which is currently undergoing change in response to both internal and external factors. A review of key processes is currently under way, with changes expected to be implemented in the next academic session.

17   The University's programme approval processes apply to both university-based and collaborative provision. In 2010, franchise arrangements accounted for the majority of the University's collaborative programmes (60 per cent), with the remainder being a mixture of validation, accreditation, articulation, or a blend of these arrangements. In franchise arrangements, the approval process is often confined to the approval of the collaborative

arrangements, as the programme to be delivered will have already been approved by the University. Where a new programme is proposed, or a programme designed by a partner is to be validated or accredited, the University's full programme approval processes apply. These are distinct from, though may occur in parallel with, partner institutional approval and the approval of collaborative arrangements.

18   Programme validation is part of a multi-stage process through which new programmes in collaborative provision move from initial idea to full approval for delivery at a partner institution. In the initial stages of development approval, the University considers the risks associated with the programme that could impact its viability, quality and standards. These are contained in development approval documents which are prepared by faculties and considered and approved by the Academic Development Committee.

19   Development approval is then followed by programme validation or accreditation which considers in detail the design, content, delivery and assessment of a proposed programme. Approval panels include at least one external academic with relevant subject expertise and, where appropriate, familiarity with the requirements of any professional, statutory or regulatory body operating in the discipline area.

20   Approval events are structured around themes, including the design, content, assessment and delivery of the curriculum, and the appropriateness of the proposed standards and their match with the award title. In relation to standards, panels are required to evaluate the aims and intended learning outcomes of the proposed programme; their match with the Academic Infrastructure, professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements and the University's regulatory framework; and the depth, breadth and balance of material included. Partner institutions are involved in the development of collaborative proposals and co-present the proposals with University staff at formal approval events.

21   The Validations Sub-Committee and the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee both receive the reports of approval panels. The audit team saw evidence that the processes operated as required and that proposals were discussed thoroughly at panel events and subsequently at committee stage. Appropriate attention was given to defining the standards of the proposed awards and ensuring that the proposed delivery of the programmes supports their achievement.

22   Collaborative provision is subject to the same annual monitoring review process as university-based provision with minor variations that take account of the circumstances of collaborative provision. All collaborative programmes prepare an annual review report, known as the collaborative report, which draws upon programme committee minutes; external examiners' reports; assessment board reports; student statistics; visit reports; and student feedback. The partners prepare reports using a University template which requires providers to reflect on the continuing appropriateness of curriculum, teaching and assessment to achieve the expected standards of the award. A stated purpose of collaborative reports is to allow the University to satisfy itself that the standards of its collaborative programmes are equivalent to its home-based provision.

23   Collaborative reports for franchised provision are discussed at the relevant programme committee for the university-based programme and feed into the annual monitoring report for the award as a whole. Other reports are presented to School of Flexible and Partnership Learning Quality Committee, and all collaborative reports are discussed by the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee. Collaborative reports contain action plans, the implementation of which is reviewed in the following cycle.

24   The University has identified that there is a lack of critical reflection in some of the annual monitoring reports and the collaborative reports produced by some partners.

For university-based provision, the University proposes to replace reports with minutes of programme committees produced at annual monitoring meetings. For collaborative provision reports, it is intended to approach annual monitoring as a shared production between staff from University and from the partner institution (see paragraph 96).

25   Annual monitoring reports feed into School and subsequently into faculty annual reports. However, the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee also receives all annual reports relating to collaborative provision and uses the reports as a basis for the identification of good practice and the production of an Enhancement Plan. Further discussion of this process can be found at paragraph 56.

26   The University recently revised its validation processes to replace the system of five-year validation followed by a revalidation process with indefinite approval. Revalidation involved the application of the same processes used for programme approval on a five-year basis. In July 2010 the Academic Board granted indefinite approval to all existing programmes.

27   Periodic review covers both collaborative and university-based undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision, as well as professional research degrees in a specific cognate subject area. The process is intended to provide the University with assurance about the academic standards and quality of its provision. It is also intended to be forward-looking and developmental, focusing on the strategy and plans for the subject area in the light of the internal and external environment.

28   The review involves the preparation of an evidence-based, evaluative briefing paper. The panel that undertakes the review itself includes two or more external members and is chaired by a senior academic from a different faculty. Panels include student representatives and other internal members. The review itself is a two-day event which includes meetings with staff and students. The report of the review is sent to the relevant faculty which then develops an enhancement plan that is sent together with the review report to the Quality Enhancement Committee.

29   The University appoints external examiners to all collaborative programmes which lead to University awards, following the University's regulations and procedures. However, in recognition of the particular nature of collaborative provision, the University has made some amendments and additions to the standard procedures. For example, the University has developed the role of external moderator to work under the direction of an external examiner and bring expertise in specific areas, or where the provision is not in English. Faculties submit nominations for the appointment of external examiners and external moderators to the External Examining Sub-Committee of the Quality Enhancement Committee. Appointments are for four years with the possibility of a one-year extension.

30   In the case of franchised provision, where practicable, the same external examiner is appointed for both the university-based and the collaborative provision. Where the collaborative provision is not delivered in English, it is University policy to mark and moderate work as far as possible in the language in which it was written. If this is not possible then a translation is used. Language competence is a key criterion for appointment as an external examiner for such provision. External examiner appointments to new and potentially high-risk partnerships require nominees to have had previous experience of collaborative provision.

31   The role of the external examiner in relation to collaborative provision is the same as that for university-based provision, but with certain additional duties. Visits are required to all franchised, validated and accredited provision that leads to an award of 60 credits or more. The frequency of visits varies with the type of provision. The University's regulations

allow for the appointment of external moderators in areas where assessment is conducted in a language other than English, where curriculum areas have been recently introduced to higher education, or where there are few institutions working in the field and/or few individuals in the sector who meet the criteria for appointment as external examiners. The moderators advise and work in support of external examiners to discharge the responsibilities set out in the University's regulations.

32   External moderators' reports are sent to both the University and the external examiner with whom they work. External examiners report annually using a standard form. They are required to comment explicitly on the design of the programme in relation to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), external benchmarks, standards achieved by students, assessment, and assessment processes. For franchised programmes and programmes delivered across multiple locations, they are asked to comment on the comparability of academic standards and the security of assessment arrangements across the different locations. The audit team saw a number of external examiners' reports and found them to be varied in the extent to which they included discrete comments on work of students in partner institutions. However, the external examiners' reports considered by the audit team included distinct comments on the work of students in partner institutions where this has differed from the performance of home students.

33   External examiners' reports are received centrally and circulated to schools and faculties, and subsequently to programme leaders and partner institutions. The reports feed into annual monitoring processes. The External Examiners' Sub-Committee discusses all external examiners' reports and provides an overview which is discussed by the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee, the Quality Enhancement Committee and the External Examiners' Forum. Programme leaders, assisted by programme committees, are responsible for responding to the external examiner regarding any issues raised in their report. These committees include student representation and are the primary means by which external examiners' reports are shared with students.

34   On the basis of the documents viewed and discussions with staff in both the University and partner institutions, the audit team concluded that the University makes strong and scrupulous use of external examiners.

35   The Regulatory Framework Committee is responsible for ensuring that the University's academic standards are consistent with those set out in the FHEQ; the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*; credit frameworks and relevant guidelines; benchmarks; and professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements. The Regulatory Framework Committee is responsible for considering both national and European developments and their implications for the University. The Regulatory Framework Committee reports to the Academic Board.

36   In 2009 the Quality Enhancement Committee approved a schedule of responsibilities and reporting arrangements related to the different sections of the *Code of practice*. The process is designed to provide assurance that the University's practices align with the *Code of practice*. The most recent annual review of the University's alignment with the *Code of practice* confirmed that University processes in relation to sections of the *Code of practice* most relevant to academic standards were appropriate.

37   The FHEQ informs the award and level descriptors used by the University. These apply equally to university-based and collaborative partner-based students. Alignment with the FHEQ is considered at validation and periodic review. In order to facilitate the mapping of programmes delivered in employer partners, University of Derby Corporate has developed an Accreditation Toolkit (see paragraphs 12 and 74) which is designed to

assist specification of the proposed level and amount of learning involved in a programme during the process of validation.

38   Alignment with subject benchmark statements is considered at validation and programme review of all programmes. Assistant deans are notified of changes in subject benchmarks, and responses to these changes are expected to be reflected in subsequent annual and periodic reviews. External examiners are asked to comment on the extent to which programmes continue to reflect subject benchmark statements. Programme specifications detail the benchmarks relevant to the award.

39   Following the 2009 Institutional audit the University accelerated its completion of programme specifications for all existing degrees and their posting on the University's website. Programme specifications form part of the documentation presented to approval panels. A template for programme specifications has been developed. However, the audit team noted examples where programme specifications for collaborative programmes did not closely follow the University template or were not readily accessible (see paragraph 106).

40   The University's processes for development, approval and review of collaborative provision make effective use of external academic and professional expertise. Professional bodies accredit a number of degrees delivered through collaborative provision and this is made clear in information published about the programmes. The audit team saw some examples of the University taking account of both UK and international professional body requirements for the development of programmes.

41   The audit team concluded that the University makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards in collaborative provision. While more could usefully be done to develop and promulgate collaborative programme specifications, the team noted the innovative work in relation to mapping and defining learning levels in employer-based collaborative provision.

42   The University's assessment regulations apply to all students, including those studying on collaborative provision. Assessment regulations and policies are made directly available to staff at the University and in partner institutions, and are the subject of staff briefings and development activities. Students are made aware of the assessment regulations covering their studies through their programme handbooks and during induction.

43   Assessment arrangements for collaborative programmes are discussed and agreed at an early stage of programme approval by the Academic Development Committee and set out in the operational manual. The manual sets out the details of who is responsible for different assessment-related tasks. The distribution of responsibilities between the University and the partner varies according to the nature of the partnership and the maturity and experience of the partner.

44   The University maintains oversight of reliability and validity of assessment and levels of student performance on collaborative provision through assessment boards, internal moderation and the work of external examiners. Internal moderation by the University of assessment undertaken by staff in partner institutions is mandatory. Cross-moderation is undertaken on some collaborative programmes where the same programme is offered by multiple partners.

45   Partner staff are involved in assessment boards, which are normally chaired by senior academic staff at the University, though in some cases chairing may be shared with partners or devolved entirely, as noted in paragraph 43. All boards are conducted in English. Where a language other than English is used for assessment, the University requires

samples of assessments to be translated for moderation purposes. The University operates a system of independent checks on the quality and accuracy of translations.

46   The University's procedures governing extenuating circumstances, plagiarism, and academic misconduct and appeals apply to most collaborative provision. The exception to these arrangements is validated provision at a long-standing higher education partner where the regulations for handling such matters are secured in the partner regulations which have been approved by the University.

47   On the basis of the documents seen and discussions with staff and students at both the University and partner institutions, the audit team concluded that the arrangements in place for assessing students were effective in maintaining the academic standards set for its degrees.

48   The University's central student records system covers all students including those studying in collaborative provision. It supports the University's registration, assessment, fees collection, award processes, and the production of statistical information. The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning plays a central role in data entry for students in collaborative provision, though depending on the nature of the partnership, student grades may be entered by programme and module leaders. Processes are in place to check the accuracy of student data for collaborative students uploaded onto the system: these are undertaken by the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning.

49   The University has recently implemented a new IT application which supports the production of standard reports designed for programme management and monitoring. The reports contain both figures and graphs, cover a number of years, and distinguish between students studying at different locations or partners where this applies. These reports feed directly into annual monitoring.

50   An annual monitoring report on student performance indicators is produced for the Quality Enhancement Committee; this allows comparison of student profile, enrolment, retention, and achievement between students in university-based and collaborative provision. The report feeds into the Quality Enhancement Committee's overall review and enhancement planning processes. The audit team concluded that the University makes effective use of statistical and management information in the management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision.

51   The University has sole responsibility for the issue of certificates and transcripts relating to University of Derby awards and credit. Award certificates state that reference should be made to a transcript or diploma supplement for details of the language of tuition and assessment and the name and location of partners. The audit team noted that the information on some sample transcripts was ambiguous in that transcripts do not consistently indicate how much of a degree has been taught or assessed in English; nor do they state the location of study and the name of the collaborative partner. In order to avoid such ambiguity the team considers it advisable for the University to review the clarity, completeness and accuracy of information provided on diploma supplements and transcripts for students studying through collaborative arrangements, particularly regarding the language of study and assessment, the involvement of partners and the location of study (see paragraph 106).

52   The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

53   The University seeks to ensure the availability of appropriate learning opportunities provided for students studying in collaborative partners through the processes of programme approval, annual monitoring and through periodic review. These are clearly described and communicated to those involved with them, including staff, students and external advisors through documents such as the Collaborative Provision Handbook.

54   With regard to programme approvals, the institution ensures that the programme approval decisions are independent of the academic department offering the programme. Reports of programme approvals involving collaborative partners indicate effective use of external panel members and internal staff from other departments of the University in such events.

55   The University employs a variety of ways of routinely monitoring the operation of its collaborative provision. In addition to the process of annual monitoring and the production of annual monitoring reports, other formal mechanisms include an annual staff visit and visit reports, and external examiners' reports.

56   Annual monitoring reports are considered by the relevant University programme committee and, where appropriate, the annual monitoring report produced by the collaborative partner is considered in the production of the 'home' programme report. The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning Quality Enhancement Committee, and the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee consider the reports. Following the meeting of the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee, a detailed report is considered by the University's Quality Enhancement Committee. Institutional-level oversight of the annual monitoring of collaborative provision culminates in the production of an annual Enhancement Plan and Summary of Good Practice, which the audit team considers to be an instance of good practice (see paragraphs 94 and 96).

57   The University conducts quinquennial reviews of its academic portfolio, including its collaborative provision. The procedures relating to this are comprehensively specified in the University Handbook, section 6, 'Periodic Review'. As part of the review process, the institution seeks to ensure the continuing validity and relevance of the programmes offered. The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning's Quality Enhancement Committee receives reports of periodic reviews relevant to collaborative partners, whereas the University's Quality Enhancement Committee has oversight of the outcomes of the entire periodic review process.

58   The audit team found that the institution's arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review were effective in maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities.

59   An annual report is produced by the University Quality Manager relating to the *Code of practice* published by QAA that indicates which committees and postholders have responsibility for reviewing the various sections of the *Code of practice*. The report is considered by the University's Quality Enhancement Committee.

60   The operational manual, produced for each programme delivered at a collaborative partner organisation, is informed by the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).*

61   The design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes at collaborative partner organisations are all undertaken according to the procedures published in the

University's handbooks, which draw upon the relevant precepts identified in the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* published by QAA. The audit team concluded that the University uses the *Code of practice* effectively with regard to the management of its collaborative provision.

62   The University's expectations concerning the collection of student feedback are made clear in the operational manual template, which details the relationship between the institution and its collaborative partners. Specific sections of the manual are dedicated to detailing the way in which student feedback is sought.

63   A key part of the annual staff visit to partner organisations, which is noted in the formal visit report, is the interviewing of student representatives. This is the principal means by which direct student feedback is obtained by the University from those studying on programmes delivered at partner organisations. The audit team heard from both staff and students and saw from the minutes of these meetings that these were an effective means of eliciting feedback.

64   Student feedback is routinely reported within annual reports and this is drawn from student questionnaires, student-staff committees and programme committees, and actions identified. However, while the audit team has confidence in the University's commitment to maintaining the overall quality of students' learning opportunities, the team found inconsistency in the ways in which student feedback is obtained and that the levels of student engagement and involvement in the process are variable.

65   There is provision for student representation on all University committees involved in the quality management of collaborative provision, except the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee. The audit team found that, at present, there is limited provision of briefing and training for student representatives operating at partner organisations, and varied degrees of partner-student engagement in committees at all levels of the University's committee structure.

66   Programme committees provide opportunities for students to be involved in the work of the University and the collaborative partner. However, programme committee minutes show variable student attendance and participation. Furthermore, the audit team found inconsistencies in the ways in which programme committees fed information up to school quality committees and on to faculty quality enhancement committees. However, the team found effective examples of different mechanisms by which students could feed information into the University quality management structures.

67   Operational manuals build on information produced within development approval documents to identify responsibility for student involvement in quality assurance from the point of approval onwards.

68   Visit reports consistently comment on issues raised in meetings held with students. University staff visits to collaborative partners provide students with a direct line by which they can feed information into the University as well as to the collaborative partner. The audit team found such meetings with students to be both the primary and an effective mechanism of involving students in quality management. Although the visit reports reviewed by the team reflected issues raised in meetings with students, the reports themselves were not consistently appended to annual monitoring reports. The team concluded that the University's partner review process involved students on a regular basis. Moreover, students met throughout the audit confirmed they were happy with their opportunities to provide feedback.

69   The audit team found the overall arrangements for student involvement in quality management processes to be broadly effective, but would encourage further and more systematic development of mechanisms to involve collaborative provision students in the University's quality management processes and structures.

70   The University assures itself that staff teaching on collaborative programmes meet professional expectations to deliver higher education provision via the application of the accredited lecturer policy as part of the approval procedures. The approval of an individual as an accredited lecturer grants access to and use of the University's learning centres. Accredited lecturers are invited to staff development events and are encouraged to undertake further professional development.

71   The audit team found several examples of engagement in research and scholarly activity by collaborative provision delivery staff. However, the team did not find that such activities were systematically embedded across the University's entire portfolio of collaborative provision.

72   The audit team found that links between research or scholarly activity and teaching and students' learning opportunities in collaborative provision had recently been strengthened and the University has encouraged partner staff to engage in research. The team found that in relation to franchised provision the scope for partners to embed research and scholarly activity was relatively limited: although in relation to validated provision, the team saw evidence of effective examples of partners engaging in these research and scholarly activities through the partner link visits. The University has no postgraduate research within its collaborative provision and its primary strategic focus is 'education for application'. The team concluded that the current arrangements for links between research or scholarly activity and teaching and students' learning opportunities were appropriate in relation to their collaborative provision.

73   The Collaborative Provision Strategy, which was in draft form at the time of the audit, indicates that work-based learning and online distance learning will be an area of growth in the future for the University.

74   Work-based learning provision is overseen by the University of Derby Corporate, which is the University's employer engagement and business-to-business division. The University of Derby Corporate has contributed to this in several ways which are explored in other areas of this report: the development and use of the Accreditation Toolkit; a 30-credit module in Supporting Work-Based Learning; employer-focused workshops; and the role of the workforce development fellow (see paragraph 85). The audit team found that the University has fostered the development of strong and constructive relationships between itself and its partners, as demonstrated through frequent communication and mutual support, which it considered to be a feature of good practice (see paragraph 94).

75   The audit team found that at present there was only one programme with some technology-enhanced learning components across the University's entire collaborative provision portfolio. The audit team found mapping to the *Code of practice* was overseen by the University Quality Enhancement Committee. The team heard that although an update on practice in relation to the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* had been due to take place by the Committee in October 2010, this had not yet taken place as intended. However, the audit team found that overall, the maintenance of the quality of students' learning opportunities is effectively achieved within the University's work-based learning and small technology-enhanced collaborative provision.

76   The University considers learning resources for its collaborative programmes at the point of approval as stated in the Validation and Approval Handbook. The audit team found

consideration of learning resources to be a consistent focus throughout both partner and programme approval processes. The team confirmed that operational manuals documented the responsibilities in relation to learning resources effectively, and found evidence that they built on information contained within the development approval documents.

77   Following approval, the University maintains oversight of learning resources within its collaborative provision through visit reports conducted by its own staff, in line with the University's visit policy, and the University's annual monitoring process. The audit team found the University's review processes allowed effective oversight of learning resources for its collaborative provision.

78   Students and staff in collaborative partners have full access to electronic learning resources within the permissions of the University's licences. This is provided through the University's virtual leaning environment, called UDo, and an Athens account. The audit team found evidence highlighting the challenges faced by partner students and staff in relation to the ease and reliability of access to University electronic systems and learning resources. Notwithstanding progress in this area, the team considered that further improvements were desirable. Moreover, the team was informed that external examiners' reports would be shared with students using UDo, further emphasising the importance of reliable access to electronic learning resources.

79   The audit team found that, although the University has appropriate oversight of learning resources throughout its collaborative provision, it is desirable for the University to continue to improve the ease and reliability of access to the University's electronic systems and learning resources for students and staff in partner institutions.

80   The University's admissions policy covers all of its programmes, including collaborative provision, and is included in the University's 'Rights, Responsibilities and Regulations' document. There is detailed information on accreditation of prior learning and progression agreements. In addition, the distinction between progression, articulation and accreditation of prior learning has recently been clarified by the University.

81   The audit team found oversight of admissions was provided through approval and review processes. Operational manuals set out the responsibilities of the University and its collaborative partners in relation to admissions. The Programme Leaders' Handbook sets out the admissions procedures and highlights information specifically relevant to collaborative partners. The team found that the annual monitoring reports did not consistently include information on admissions, although this is prompted by the report template.

82   The audit team found an example where students studying at a particular collaborative partner had been prepared for their programme through a bridging course before beginning their degree course. The team concluded that this was a positive mechanism for preparing students for UK-based higher education.

83   The maturity of the relationship of a collaborative partner and the risk associated with managing admissions to University programmes are two factors affecting the mechanism used to maintain oversight of admissions. As a collaborative relationship matures, risk is deemed to decrease and the University moves from reviewing all admissions, to approving non-standard admissions, and in some cases to conducting admissions audits which have been undertaken by the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning. The audit team noted the effectiveness of the audit process when undertaken, although it found no evidence to suggest this approach was systematically implemented. The team concluded, however, that the University's oversight of admissions practice is broadly effective and consistent across its portfolio of collaborative provision.

84 The University considers support and guidance for students as part of its approval procedures. The audit team saw evidence that approval panels contain a member from the Centre for Learner Support, which is part of the Learning Enhancement and Innovation department and includes the University's library service. Furthermore, partner review panels should include a member from the Centre for Learner Support in accordance with requirements of the Collaborative Provision Handbook. However, the team identified some inconsistencies in partner review panel memberships. Operational manuals effectively document the responsibilities of the University and collaborative partners for student support and guidance.

85 Visit reports enable the University to maintain oversight of student support and guidance across its collaborative provision. In relation to employer engagement or business-to-business collaborative provision, such visits are carried out by workforce development fellows (see paragraph 74). The audit team heard that the University is aiming to tailor support to work-based learning students by establishing an accreditation forum and by holding regular client meetings. Furthermore, the team concluded that the University's annual monitoring process covered student support and guidance issues consistently. The team also saw evidence that support and guidance issues in relation to disabled students were identified through the monitoring and review processes.

86 The audit team found some variations in the way in which students participated in the programme committees throughout the University's collaborative provision portfolio. Nevertheless, the team noted that student membership of programme committees provided opportunities to raise any issues relating to their support if needed.

87 Programme handbooks provide information on both academic and personal support to students. The audit team found inaccurate information in some handbooks, specifically in relation to academic appeals. The team recognised that the University was aware of this issue, as the Quality Managers' Advisory Group had commented on inconsistencies that can occur in programme handbooks in relation to appeals and complaints. In addition, that team saw evidence to suggest that local contextualisation of programme handbooks was not always sufficiently documented.

88 Collaborative provision students met during the course of the audit expressed general satisfaction with the level of support they received as University students. The audit team found the University's oversight of student support and guidance in relation to maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities to be effective, although it recognised that improvements could be made to ensure the accuracy of information on appeals and complaints throughout programme handbooks.

89 The University provides substantial support mechanisms for academic staff delivering the University's programmes at partner organisations. Staff at partner organisations deemed to have appropriate experience and qualifications are awarded accredited lecturer status. Where it is determined that staff are not sufficiently qualified to obtain this, the University has recently devised a 30-credit module entitled 'Supporting Work-Based Learning' for staff supporting learning in the workplace. The first cohort of students will complete this module in 2010-11. The audit team heard positive feedback from a member of the first student cohort on the benefits of undertaking the programme.

90 The audit team saw evidence indicating that staff at partner organisations had been provided with the opportunity to undertake staff support and development events tailored to the particular needs of partners and subject teams. Staff from partner organisations are invited to two annual conferences: a university-wide Learning and Teaching Conference and a Collaborative Provision Conference. The former is led by the Learning Enhancement and Innovation department, and the latter by the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning as

a means of disseminating good practice. High levels of attendance by staff from partner organisations are regularly attained, and the team highlights these conferences as a feature of good practice. Overall, the team found the institution's arrangements for staff support and development in relation to academic staff engaged in teaching to be effective.

91   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 through collaborative provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

92   The University defines enhancement as 'change leading to improvement in the quality of learning opportunities' and it states that it omits specific reference to students or the student experience. The emphasis on staff development and academic practice is present in the University's enhancement policy, which sets out four types of activity relevant to enhancement. These are: the recognition and reward of 'good practice' at an individual level; improvements in learning, teaching and assessment by ensuring effective action on annual monitoring and periodic review outcomes; through staff development and the creation of dedicated appointments to promote improved academic practice; the promotion through investment, special projects and staff appointments of innovative practice and transformational change; and interventions to develop institutional climates, structures, systems and procedures that are conducive to learning and good teaching and which encourage and promote innovative practice.

93   The 2009 QAA Institutional audit found 'the University's commitment to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities evident in the structures and processes of management and embedded in the inclusive, open and reflective culture of the institution'. Although the audit team recognised that there have been challenges in achieving and managing this approach across collaborative provision, it found evidence that the University is committed to creating the same culture, particularly for staff, across its collaborative provision.

94   The audit team found that the University has been successful in developing an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities through the strong and constructive relationships with its partners (see paragraph 74). The University also facilitates some opportunities for joint working between campus-based students and students studying at partner institutions. The audit team found that the establishment and role of University of Derby Corporate as an interface between the University and its employer partners is a feature of good practice because it provides an effective mechanism for facilitating a collaborative approach to programme delivery with its employer partners.

95   Enhancement is explicit in the documentation for both approval and review of collaborative provision. Once collaborations are established, the University uses management information collected through annual monitoring and through the quinquennial periodic and partnership reviews to support quality enhancement. The emphasis on staff development as a focus for enhancement is made explicit in the operational manuals.

96   As noted in paragraph 56, an annual enhancement plan for each collaborative arrangement, including a summary of good practice, is created on the basis of the annual collaborative report. A recurring theme of the good practice identified in the enhancement plans is the strong partnership with the University. The audit team saw evidence that partner institutions use the annual collaborative reports to comment positively on the strong sense of

community and sharing of expertise and good practice between themselves and
the University.

97   From meetings with staff and review of enhancement plans, it seems that the
institutional understanding of quality enhancement is closely aligned to its own definition and
so is often described and exampled with reference to continuous improvement. The move to
joint authorship of these plans by the University and its partners may be an opportunity for
the University and its partners to be more ambitious in their conceptualisation of
enhancement with reference to innovation (see paragraph 24).

98   The Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee carries out an annual review of the visit
report, annual monitoring reports and external examiners' reports for all partner
organisations, and also annual monitoring reports from those University programme teams
that have responsibility for managing collaborative provision. As noted in paragraph 56, it is
from this review that the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee produces an annual
Enhancement Plan and Summary of Good Practice across all collaborative provision which
is reported to the University Quality Enhancement Committee. The audit team identified this
process as an effective means of collecting and actively considering enhancement data at
institutional level.

99   Outside the formal committee structure three advisory groups contribute to
enhancement: the Technology Enhanced Learning Advisory Group; the Quality Managers'
Advisory Group; and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Advisory
Group. In addition, the Collaborative Working Group was established by the University
in 2010 to provide a forum for sharing knowledge and experience of working with
collaborative partners.

100   The briefing paper notes that the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning 'has
emerged as a significant "enhancement agent",' and the audit team heard and saw sound
evidence of this role, noting that staff from partner institutions were highly appreciative of the
support they received from the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning. The team
concluded that it is desirable for the University to consider how the current contribution
made by School as an 'enhancement agent' can best be maintained through the revised
structures for supporting collaborative provision following the School's planned closure
(see paragraph 7).

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

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

Section 6: Published information

102   Since the Collaborative provision audit in 2006, the University has developed a
clear and comprehensive marketing protocol specifically for collaborative partner
arrangements. This protocol sets out who is responsible for oversight of the publication of
materials by both the partner and the University, and the process by which marketing
materials are approved. It is the responsibility of a designated lead member of staff at each
partner institution to ensure that this protocol is followed fully. A member of staff in the
School of Flexible and Partnership Learning is currently the named contact for coordinating
appropriate monitoring and support by the University. Partners' web pages must always
include a link to the University's website and rules for the use of the University's logo are
clearly set out. When materials are developed they are sent to the Web and Publications

Team at the University for approval and to the academic lead at the University to verify accuracy of content.

103   The handling of media relations is also outlined so that the University and the partner have transparent and mutual expectations of what is expected of one another in this regard.

104   The University's translation policy also requires that, if publicity or marketing materials are to be produced in a foreign language, they must be translated for operational and quality assurance purposes and tested routinely for accuracy.

105   Programme handbooks are developed and approved by the University programme leader with the partner in accordance with the guidance given in the Programmes Leaders' Handbook. Individual programme handbooks are given out at induction and are also made available through the University's virtual learning environment, known as UDo. A 'Student Guide to UDo' has been produced which is tailored to meet the needs of collaborative provision students. The audit team met with students who were positive about the information they received and found it to be comprehensive and useful. The team reviewed examples of student handbooks and found some variation in the information provided by different partners in relation to student support, especially in relation to extenuating circumstances and extensions. The team found that it was always clear to whom the student should refer an application for extension or extenuating circumstances at a local level.

106   The QAA Institutional audit report of 2009 recommended that the University 'accelerate implementation of its decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications'. For prospective students and students on programmes at collaborative partners, this facility through the University's website is a valuable source of information. However, the audit team noted that programme specifications were not always available by this mode of communication, and considered it desirable that further work is undertaken to ensure that programme specifications for all collaborative provision are made accessible through the University's website.

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

Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the development and use of the clear and comprehensive operational manuals which act as significant documents governing the day-to-day operation of the partnerships for the parties involved in the delivery of collaborative programmes (paragraph 10)
- the annual monitoring process undertaken by the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee, which culminates in an annual Enhancement Plan and Summary of Good Practice across all collaborative provision (paragraph 56)
- the strong and constructive relationships between the University and its partners as demonstrated through frequent communication and mutual support (paragraph 74)

- the Annual Collaborative Provision and Learning and Teaching Conferences as means of disseminating good practice (paragraph 90)
- the establishment and role of University of Derby Corporate as an interface between the University and its employer partners (paragraph 94).

Recommendations for action

109   Recommendation for action that is advisable:

- to review the clarity, completeness and accuracy of information detailed on diploma supplements and transcripts for students studying through collaborative provision arrangements regarding language of study and assessment, the involvement of partners and the location of study (paragraph 51).

110   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to continue to improve the ease and reliability of access to the University's electronic systems and learning resources for students and staff in partner institutions (paragraph 79)
- to consider how the current contribution made by the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning as an 'enhancement agent' can best be maintained through the revised structures for supporting collaborative provision following the School's planned closure (paragraph 100)
- to ensure that the programme specifications for all programmes delivered through collaborative provision arrangements are made accessible through the University's website (paragraph 106).

Appendix

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

The University of Derby welcomes the findings of broad confidence in the present and future management of the academic standards of awards and quality of student learning opportunities in respect of its collaborative provision.

The University appreciates the recognition of the strengths identified as features of good practice, and the acknowledgement of the strong and constructive relationships between the University and its collaborative partners. We are particularly proud of the establishment of University Derby Corporate and the very positive impact that this has had on our work with employer partners.

The University has fully scrutinised the recommendations contained within the report and an action plan is in place with some activities completed. We are confident that we will continue to develop and enhance our collaborative provision within our revised structure.